

The Enlightenment and Democratic Revolutions

MAIN IDEA

REVOLUTION Enlightenment ideas helped bring about the American and French revolutions.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

These revolutions and the documents they produced have inspired other democratic movements.

TERMS & NAMES

- Enlightenment
- social contract
- natural rights
- separation of powers
- representative government
- federal system
- United Nations

SETTING THE STAGE The Renaissance continued to affect European thinking throughout the 17th century. The Renaissance emphasis on the individual and on expanding human potential were especially influential. At the same time, Europeans began to explore their physical world. They extended the boundaries of the known world in what came to be called the Age of Exploration. New ideas and discoveries had a great impact on Europeans' understanding of themselves and the world.

TAKING NOTES

Outlining Use an outline to organize the main ideas and details.

I. Enlightenment Thinkers and Ideas

- A.
- B.

II. The Beginnings of Democracy in America

- A.
- B.

III. The French Revolution

Enlightenment Thinkers and Ideas

During the 17th and 18th centuries, an intellectual movement called the **Enlightenment** developed. Enlightenment thinkers tried to apply the principles of reason and the methods of science to all aspects of society. They built upon the long history of Western thought.

The philosophers of ancient Greece had established the idea of natural laws that could be discovered by careful observation and reasoned inquiry. Christianity contributed the belief in the equality of all human beings. (This belief would later lead to the principle of equal rights in society.) During the Renaissance, thinkers had focused on worldly concerns. They criticized medieval philosophy for concentrating on questions that seemed unrelated to human conditions.

The Scientific Revolution of the 1500s and 1600s was an even more immediate source of Enlightenment thought. It stimulated new ideas about society and government. The Scientific Revolution caused thinkers to rely on rational thought rather than just accept traditional beliefs. Enlightenment thinkers praised both Isaac Newton's discovery of the mechanical laws that govern the universe and the scientific method that made such a discovery possible. These thinkers wanted to apply the scientific method, which relied on observation and testing of theories, to human affairs. They hoped to use reason to discover natural laws that governed society just as scientists had used it to discover physical laws.

Hobbes and Locke The English philosophers Thomas Hobbes and John Locke were important Enlightenment thinkers. Both considered human nature and the role of government. In his masterpiece of political theory, *Leviathan* (1651), Hobbes stated that people were by nature selfish and ambitious. He thought the type of government needed to control selfish ambitions was absolute monarchy.

In a kind of **social contract**, or agreement among members of society, people submitted to an authoritarian ruler to prevent disorder. Although Hobbes was a monarchist, his idea of a social contract was important for the development of democracy.

Locke held a more positive view of human nature. His book *Two Treatises of Government* was published in 1690, the year after the Glorious Revolution. Locke argued that the English people had been justified in overthrowing James II. The government had failed under James to perform its most fundamental duty—protecting the rights of the people. Locke said that all human beings had, by nature, the right to life, liberty, and property. In order to protect these **natural rights**, they formed governments. The people had an absolute right, he said, to rebel against a government that violated or failed to protect their rights.

Locke believed that a government's power comes from the people, not from God. Thus, Locke provided a strong argument against the divine right of kings. Locke's ideas about self-government inspired people and became cornerstones of modern democratic thought.

Voltaire and Rousseau Other thinkers of the Enlightenment admired the democratic nature of English institutions. They themselves, however, lived under absolute monarchs. Voltaire was a brilliant 18th-century French historian. He argued in favor of tolerance, freedom of religion, and free speech. The French government and Christianity were often targets of his criticism.

Perhaps the most freethinking of all Enlightenment philosophers was Jean-Jacques Rousseau. His most famous work was *The Social Contract* (1762). In it, Rousseau advocated democracy. Unlike Hobbes, he called the social contract an agreement among free individuals to create a government that would respond to the people's will:

PRIMARY SOURCE

The problem is to find a form of association which will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each associate, and in which each, while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before.

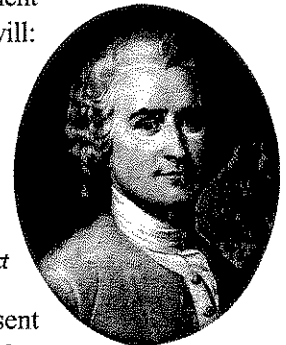
JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU, *The Social Contract*

For Rousseau, the only legitimate, or authentic, government came from the consent of the governed. The people, he hoped, would follow their consciences to vote for, or choose, what was best for the community as a whole.

Montesquieu Another French philosopher, Baron de Montesquieu, also recognized liberty as a natural right. In *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), Montesquieu pointed out that any person or group in power will try to increase its power. Like Aristotle, Montesquieu searched for a way to control government. He concluded that liberty could best be safeguarded by a **separation of powers**, that is, by dividing government into three separate branches. These branches were (1) a legislature to make laws, (2) an executive to enforce them, and (3) courts to interpret them. The United States and many other democratic countries use this basic plan.

The Beginnings of Democracy in America

The ideas of the Enlightenment had a strong impact on Britain's North American colonies. By the mid-1700s, 13 British colonies had been established in North America. They were administered by the British government. To the north and west of Britain's colonies was New France, a French colony. In 1754, Britain and France went to war for control of North America. The war was called the French and Indian War. France and England also fought in Europe. There the conflict was known as the Seven Years' War.



MAIN IDEA

Summarizing

What was John Locke's argument against the divine right of kings?

Vocabulary

A *freethinker* is one who rejects dogma and authority.

Americans Protest British Policies The American colonists helped Britain defeat France in the French and Indian War, which ended in 1763. The war had been very costly, however, and further expenses lay ahead. Britain believed its colonies should pay some of the cost because they shared some of the benefits. To protect the newly acquired territory, the British needed to keep even more soldiers in America. To raise money, Britain sought to tax the colonists. The British Parliament passed the Stamp Act in 1765. It was the first in a series of such tax measures.

The colonists, who were not represented in Parliament, protested what they viewed as a violation of their rights as British citizens—there should be no taxation without representation. The colonists also resented the British for preventing them from settling on land west of the Appalachian Mountains. They felt that the French and Indian War had been fought to allow westward expansion.

Americans Win Independence The colonists opposed each tax measure Parliament imposed. Eventually, to protect their economic and political rights, the colonists united and began to arm themselves against what they called British oppression. The colonists' fight for independence from Great Britain, the American Revolution, began with the Battle of Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775. The Americans issued a Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. In it, they declared to King George III of England and to the world why they should be free of British rule. The ideas of the Enlightenment—especially Locke's ideas that governments are created by the people to protect their rights—strongly influenced the writers of the Declaration. After five more years of war, the British army surrendered in 1781. The Americans had won their independence.

For several years, the new nation existed as a loose federation, or union, of states under a plan of government called the Articles of Confederation. Americans had wanted a weak central government. They feared that a strong government would lead to the kind of tyranny they had rebelled against. The Articles established one body, the Congress. But it was too weak. It did not have the power to collect taxes to pay war debt or to finance the government.

Enlightenment Ideas Shape the Constitution In the summer of 1787, a group of American leaders met in Philadelphia. They had been chosen by their state legislatures to frame, or work out, a better plan of government. The result of their efforts was the Constitution of the United States. This document has served as an inspiration and a model for new democracies around the world for more than 200

▼ Delegates sign the new U.S. Constitution in Philadelphia in 1787.



years. Creating the Constitution was not an easy task, however. There was great debate over a very basic question: Is it possible to establish a government that is strong and stable but not tyrannical? The answer that the framers reached was yes—such a government was possible if they created a system in which power and responsibility were shared in a balanced way.

First, the framers agreed to set up a **representative government**, one in which citizens elect representatives to make laws and policies for them. This was to ensure that the power to govern ultimately rested with the people, as advocated by Rousseau. Yet, unlike Rousseau, they selected an indirect form of government over direct democracy. The Romans, too, had chosen an indirect democracy when they established a republic.

Second, the framers created a **federal system**. The powers of government were to be divided between the federal, or central, government and the states, or local, governments.

Third, within the federal government, the framers set up a separation of powers based on the writings of Montesquieu. Power was divided among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. This provided a system of checks and balances to prevent any branch from having too much power. James Madison played an important role in the constitutional debates. (See History Makers on this page.) **B**

MAIN IDEA

Recognizing Effects

B What Enlightenment ideas influenced the U.S. Constitution?

The French Revolution

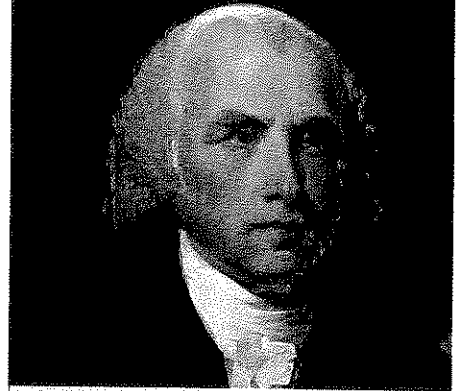
During the 1700s, the impulse toward democracy had also been stirring in France. Under Louis XIV, who ruled from 1643 to 1715, France experienced the excesses of absolute monarchy. He left unresolved problems, massive debts, and growing unrest for his heirs—Louis XV and Louis XVI.

Causes of the Revolution Louis XVI came to the throne at the age of 19 in 1774. He was a well-intentioned but weak leader often dominated by his wife, Marie Antoinette. She was Austrian by birth and unpopular with the French people. France's problems, however, went deeper than the monarchy. The clergy and the nobility enjoyed many privileges. Even though the monarchy was deeply in debt, only commoners paid taxes. Many historians say that the French Revolution was fought to balance the inequalities in French society.

During the 18th century, Enlightenment ideas caused people to rethink the structure of society. The French middle class and some nobles were strongly impressed with ideas such as the social contract and freedom of speech. They were also inspired by the example of the American people throwing off an oppressive government in the 1770s. French peasants, too, were dissatisfied and restless. There had been poor harvests in the late 1780s. The people were hungry and felt that neither the king nor the nobility cared about their plight.

Early Reforms of the Revolution In 1789, Louis XVI's government was about to go bankrupt. In desperation, Louis sought to raise taxes. He called the Estates-General into session. This representative assembly had not been called to meet since 1614. The commoners in the Estates-General, however, felt their class was not fairly represented. They left in protest and formed the National Assembly.

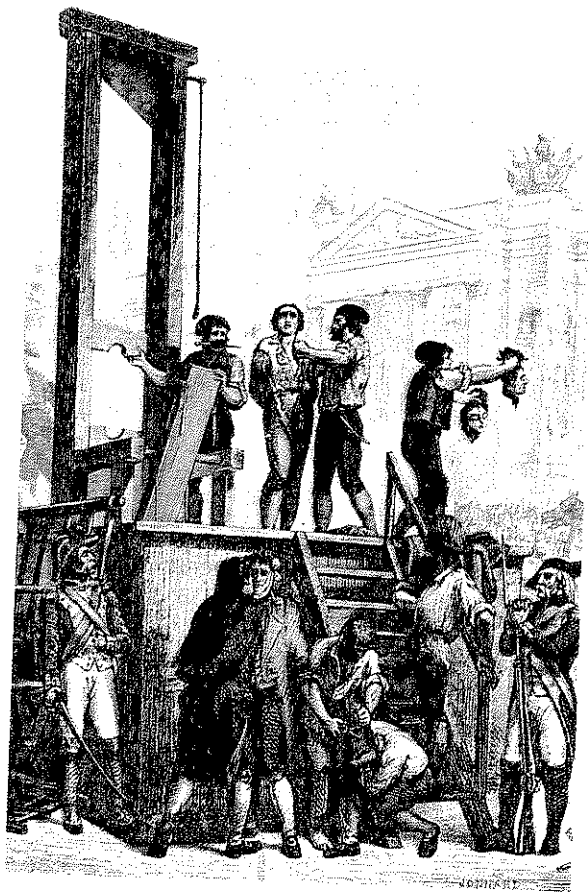
History Makers



James Madison
1751–1836

As a young man, James Madison was strongly influenced by the Enlightenment. When the Constitutional Convention was called, he spent a year preparing by reading the works of Locke, Montesquieu, Voltaire, and other Enlightenment philosophers.

Madison is known as the Father of the Constitution. He designed the plan that included the three branches of government. He also helped to create the federal system. Madison kept careful records of the debates at the convention so that future Americans could know how the delegates made their decisions. Later, he served as the fourth president of the United States.



▲ During the Reign of Terror, thousands of people suspected of not supporting the French Revolution were beheaded.

of democratic ideas. They went to war with France, hoping to undo the new French republic. The country was in a state of crisis. In 1792, the royal family was imprisoned. A new legislature, even more radical, took charge. A period called the Reign of Terror followed. People thought to be opponents of the revolution were killed for their beliefs. Included among them were the king and queen. Finally, in 1799, a military leader, Napoleon Bonaparte, took control of France and created a dictatorship. ©

Not until the mid-1800s did democracy develop in France. The French Revolution illustrates why democracy is hard to achieve. It is not enough to promise equality and freedom or to have representative government. For democracy to work, a society must have rule by law, protections for both civil rights and civil liberties, tolerance of dissent, and acceptance of majority decisions by the minority.

The Struggle for Democracy Continues

It took centuries for the ideas of democracy to develop and take hold in the world. Today, most people view democracy as the preferred form of government. Even some authoritarian governments voice agreement with the idea of democracy. Generally, however, they do not follow through with democratic actions.

The United Nations Promotes Democracy Before the end of World War II in 1945, a new international organization called the **United Nations** was established. Its goal was to work for world peace and the betterment of humanity. One branch of the UN, the General Assembly, is a kind of democracy. There, nations discuss problems, hoping to settle conflicts peacefully. Each nation has equal representation. The UN's charter is based on the traditions of democracy. The UN's authority comes from the nations of the world. The charter reaffirms basic human rights, the need for justice and the rule of law, and the desire for social progress.

Eventually, members of other classes joined them. In the meantime, on July 14, 1789, the people of Paris stormed the Bastille, a much-hated prison in Paris that symbolized autocratic rule. Peasant uprisings then spread from Paris throughout the country. The fight to win democratic freedoms for the people, the French Revolution, had begun.

The National Assembly made many reforms. It adopted the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. This document was influenced by Enlightenment ideas and the American Declaration of Independence. It guaranteed the rights of "liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression" to all people. The National Assembly also drafted a constitution that made France a limited monarchy. It reorganized the Catholic Church in France and redistributed its land. It reformed the court system. Believing its work done, it disbanded in 1791 so that a newly elected Legislative Assembly could take over.

Democratic Reforms Undone The new French assembly was not accepted by the king, the aristocracy, or many Catholics. Also, European countries that had absolute monarchs feared the spread

MAIN IDEA

Recognizing Effects

© What factors brought an end to the French Republic?

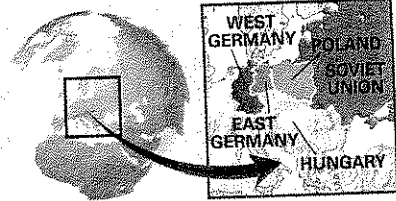
One of the UN's most important contributions is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The General Assembly adopted the Declaration in 1948. This document draws on democratic ideas. It sets a worldwide standard for basic social, political, and economic rights. Included are the right to life, liberty, and security. Also stated are the rights to equal protection under the law, free movement, and free association and assembly with other people. To these rights were added social and economic rights: the rights to work, to rest and leisure, and to education. The declaration's purpose is to serve as an international code of conduct.

New Movements Toward Democracy In many places in the world, the ideals of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights have yet to be wholly achieved. Nations are struggling to move toward more democratic government. But it is not easy to establish democratic policies where, for example, dictatorship has been the rule. Still, beginnings have been made in a number of countries.

In the early 1990s, the breakup of the Soviet Union enabled 15 new republics to assert their people's national identity and interests. In South Africa, after many years of apartheid, or racial segregation, a democratic, all-race government was established. In 2002, East Timor regained its independence following a UN-sponsored referendum. It had been seized nearly 30 years earlier by Indonesia.

There is no guarantee democracy can be achieved in any particular time and place. Nor is it guaranteed that once achieved, democracy will not be lost if people are not constantly watchful. Yet, as you read the history that follows, you will see that the idea of democracy has survived wars and oppression. It is an idea whose strength comes from the people. **D**

Global Impact



Revolutions of 1989

Democratic revolutions swept Eastern Europe in 1989. Reforms in the Soviet Union opened the door for more freedoms throughout Communist-controlled Eastern Europe. In April 1989, Poland held its first free election since the Communists seized control during World War II.

Hungary also launched a sweeping reform program. It then began to admit East Germans who claimed to be tourists but actually planned to escape to freedom. Soon, demonstrations began in East Germany, leading to the tearing down of the Berlin Wall. Eventually, the Communists fell from power, and East and West Germany voted to reunite.

MAIN IDEA

Forming and Supporting Opinions

D Why do you think people and nations continue to struggle toward more democratic government? Explain.

SECTION

4

ASSESSMENT

TERMS & NAMES 1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.
 • Enlightenment • social contract • natural rights • separation of powers • representative government • federal system • United Nations

USING YOUR NOTES

2. Which Enlightenment idea do you think contributed most to the democratic revolutions in America and France? Why?

- I. Enlightenment Thinkers and Ideas
 - A.
 - B.
- II. The Beginnings of Democracy in America
 - A.
 - B.
- III. The French Revolution
 - A.
 - B.

MAIN IDEAS

3. What were natural rights?
4. What was Rousseau's idea of government?
5. What political rights are set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?

CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING

6. **RECOGNIZING EFFECTS** How did the writers of the U.S. Constitution adapt the political theories of the Enlightenment?
7. **COMPARING AND CONTRASTING** In what ways was the French Revolution similar to and different from the American Revolution?
8. **DEVELOPING HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE** Why has the idea of democracy survived wars and oppression?
9. **WRITING ACTIVITY** **REVOLUTION** Prepare a series of slogans that could be displayed at a pro-democracy rally during either the American or the French revolutions.

INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY

INTERNET ACTIVITY

Use the Internet to research new members of the United Nations since 1990. Prepare a **chart** showing the name of the nation, the date of its admission into the UN, and its form of government.

INTERNET KEYWORD

United Nations members