

# Republican Government

Standard: 12.1.3 Explain how the U.S. Constitution reflects a balance between the classical republican concern with promotion of the public good and the classical liberal concern with protecting individual rights; and discuss how the basic premises of liberal constitutionalism and democracy are joined in the Declaration of Independence as "self-evident truths".

# Classical Republicanism

- The Founders had studied the history of the classical periods of ancient Greece and Rome.
- The Roman Republic promoted the common good
  - What was best for the entire society, this was known as classical republicanism

# Classical Republicanism

- If a government was to promote the common good, society had to share the following characteristics
  - Civic Virtue
    - One who set aside personal interests to promote the common good
    - Citizens were expected to participate fully in their government
    - They were not to be left free to devote themselves only to their personal interests such as making money or caring for their families
    - They were discouraged from traveling or reading and thinking about things that had nothing to do with their government
    - If citizens had the freedom to do such things, it was feared, they might stop being reliable and fully dedicated to the common good
    - To make sure citizens participated in their government, the classical republics often drastically limited individual rights
      - Certain political rights were necessary: Right to vote, express ideas and opinions about government, Serve in public office

# Classic Republicanism

- Citizens must be taught to be virtuous by moral education based on a civic religion consisting of gods, goddesses, and their rituals
  - Citizens should practice virtues such as:
    - Generosity
    - Courage
    - Self-control
    - Fairness
    - Importance of taking part in political debate
    - Performing Military service
  - The community must closely supervise the upbringing of the next generation of citizens

# Problems Transferring Classical Republicanism to 18<sup>th</sup> century America

- The classical republicanism of the ancient world only flourished in small, uniform communities.
  - The young United States was large and represented people of different cultural backgrounds, economic conditions, and religious beliefs.
- The classical republican idea of civic virtue conflicted with the Founders' belief in natural rights and with their understanding of human nature as defined by Locke and the other natural rights philosophers.

# James Madison and Classic Republicanism

- James Madison was one of the most important Founders responsible for creating the U.S. Constitution
  - He has been called “the Father of the Constitution”
  - He translated the ideas of classical republicanism in such a way as to make them practical in the new American republic
  - Madison defined the difference between democracies and republics
    - In a democracy, the people administer the government themselves. These “direct democracies” must be confined to small communities like the ancient city-states of Greece
    - In a republic, the people’s representatives administer the government, allowing it to be extended over a much larger area
  - He believed that America could and should have a republican form of government
    - Laws would be made and administered by representatives elected by the people
    - He insisted that members of government should be elected by a large number of the people, rather than by a small number or a specially favored group
    - His government was defined as a representative democracy

# American Republic and Civic Virtue

- Madison believed that people were motivated primarily by self-interest
  - The pursuit of self-interest could in its own way further the common good
    - example: A statesman's desire for fame and admiration from others would lead him to practice civic virtue
  - The common good could be served by each individual pursuing his economic self-interest
  - Each would contribute to the general prosperity
- He also believed that that people may act against the interests of others and against the common good
  - Any sound government had to make allowances for this
  - "If all people were angels, there would be no need for government."
  - He argued for a government that would encourage people to act as good republican citizens possessing the quality of civic virtue
- He favored a constitution that limited government by
  - Separation of powers
  - A system of checks and balances

# Separation of Powers

**G**overnment power is not only limited; it is also divided. The Constitution assigns specific powers to each of the three branches:

- the legislative (Congress),
- the executive (President),
- and the judicial (federal courts).

This separation of powers is intended to prevent misuse of power by one branch of government.

# Separation of Powers

POWER BAKE OFF



ARTIST

# Separation of Powers

## Origins of the Separation of Powers

As this table shows, the theory of the separation of powers did not originate with the U.S. Constitution.

Theorist(s)	Country	Date	Theory
Aristotle	Ancient Greece	300s B.C.	Supported the idea of a mixed government composed of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy.
James Harrington	England	1656	In his <i>Oceana</i> , updated Aristotle's ideas and proposed systems of government based on separation of powers.
John Locke	England	1690	In his <i>Two Treatises of Government</i> , separated the powers of government into an executive and a legislature (king and Parliament).
Baron de Montesquieu	France	1748	In his <i>Spirit of the Laws</i> , added the judicial branch to Locke's executive and legislative branches.
Framers	United States	1787	In the United States Constitution, converted Locke and Montesquieu's ideas to practical application.



John Locke



Baron de Montesquieu

SOURCES: Bradford P. Wilson, Peter W. Schramm, eds. *Separation of Powers and Good Government*; George J. Graham, Jr., Scarlett G. Graham, *Founding Principles of American Government: Two Hundred Years of Democracy on Trial*

# Government Today

How to balance between individual rights and the common good

