

Introduction.

Democracy means rule by the people. In the United States we have a democracy, but where did it come from? There are lots of civilizations and great thinkers that influenced our Founding Fathers as they developed American democracy. One of these, Ancient Greece, was a very important civilization that existed from around 2200 BCE to 130 BCE. In this lesson, we will study five principles of American democracy and find out where these ideas came from.

Sum it up. Democracy is:

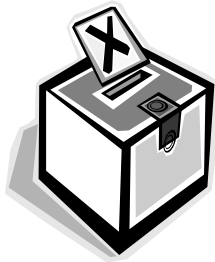
Take a Guess! Before we explore where our democracy came from, let's look at the five principles of American democracy. Using what you already know about words, can you guess the meaning of the following terms?

Consent of the Governed:	Representative Government:	Rule of Law:	Individual Rights:	Checks and Balances:

Consent of the Governed.

Consent means to give permission for something. *Consent of the governed* means that the citizens of a country give their permission for the government to operate. This is a key feature of government in a democracy, where citizens have the right to vote.

In the United States, our Declaration of Independence says that governments should get their power from the consent of the governed. This idea can be traced back to 510 BCE, when parts of Greece became democratic.



In a part of Ancient Greece called Athens, democracy required participation of the people. It came with certain responsibilities, much like our democracy today. The Greeks established the *Assembly*, a body of citizens that made decisions and voted on issues that affected everyone. All citizens could participate! Decisions made in the Assembly had to be approved by another group of citizens called the *Council*. By participating in government, all these citizens were giving their permission, or consent, for that government to operate.

Sum it up. Consent of the governed is:

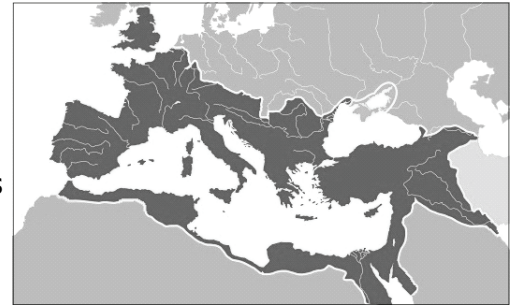
ROOTS OF DEMOCRACY



Representative Government.

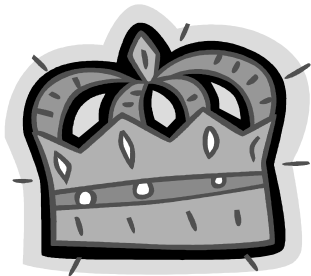
In a *representative government*, the citizens elect representatives that make decisions for the people and are responsible to the people. In the United States, we elect the people who represent us in Congress and we elect our President. Even many judges are elected (but not our U.S. Supreme Court Justices).

The beginnings of representative government could be seen in the ancient Roman empire. This civilization lasted from about 500 BCE to 476 CE. By about 150 CE, the Roman empire was at its height and stretched almost 2.5 million square miles! Rome was originally ruled by kings, but eventually it changed into a form of democracy. It was not a true representative democracy, because not all of its important officials were elected. However, citizens were allowed to vote for some of their representatives, and if these representatives did not please the people, they could be voted out and replaced!



Sum it up. Representative government is:

Rule of Law.



Rule of law means that no person is above the law—not even government officials. In the United States, nobody is above the law. This concept can trace its beginnings to a document called the Magna Carta. What's so great about the Magna Carta? For thousands of years, laws had applied to the people but not to kings or governments. Then, in 1215, the English wrote the Magna Carta and included a very important section: The King was no longer allowed to do whatever he wanted. Instead, the King had to follow the "law of the land" when dealing with his subjects.

The Magna Carta had a great deal of influence on the United States Constitution and on other constitutions and charters around the world. It was one of the first formal documents that made a king subject to the law. The Magna Carta set the stage for the idea that even governments should be accountable to the law.



Sum it up. Rule of law is:

ROOTS OF DEMOCRACY

Individual Rights.

A *right* is a claim or privilege to something. *Individual rights* are things every person has a claim or privilege to have for themselves. Even though our United States democracy operates by majority rule, we consider individual rights to be very important. In fact, our Founding Fathers were very concerned that the majority might take advantage of the minority. In order to protect all individuals, they created the Bill of Rights and attached it to the end of the Constitution. The Bill of Rights lays out the rights of all citizens in the United States.

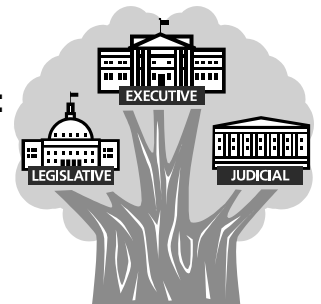


Individual rights is a concept that comes from many different thinkers in many different cultures. John Locke was an English philosopher. In 1689 CE, he published a book about the natural rights held by every human being. Locke's ideas about natural rights helped to form the way we think about individual rights today.

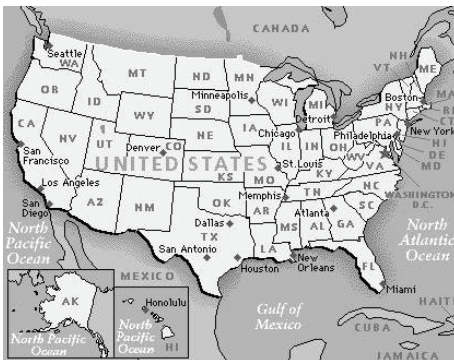
Sum it up. Individual rights are:

Checks and Balances.

Checks and balances are limits that keep the government's power under control. The United States has two systems of checks and balances: our three branches of government and our federal system.



The United States government is divided into three branches: the Executive (President), the Legislative (Congress), and the Judicial (courts). The first person to describe this kind of system in detail was a French thinker named Montesquieu. In 1748, Montesquieu wrote that power must be divided in government to prevent one part from becoming too powerful. Our Founding Fathers were influenced by Montesquieu when they designed our government.



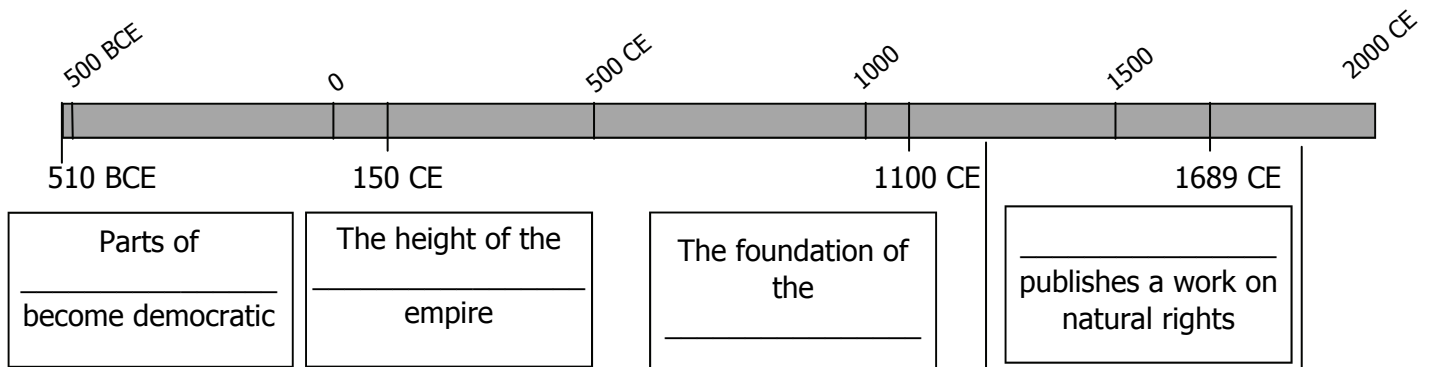
The Founding Fathers also created a *federal system* that divides power between the states and the national government. Each state has its own constitution and makes its own laws. However, each state must follow the United States Constitution and all the national laws. The U.S. was not the first to do this. Around 1100 CE, the Iroquois—a group of Native American tribes—also formed an alliance to work together toward a common goal.

Sum it up. Checks and balances are:

ROOTS OF DEMOCRACY

NAME: _____

Mark it up. Go back to the reading pages. Underline every person or group who influenced our Founding Fathers. Then, use the information you underlined to complete the timeline below:



Your Opinion. Which features do you think are most important? Rank them from 1 (most) to 5 (least).


_____ Consent of the Governed

_____ Checks and Balances

_____ Individual Rights

_____ Representative Government

_____ Rule of Law



Identify. Match the examples with the five features of American democracy:

- | | |
|--|------------------------------|
| _____ 1. When the President of the United States wants to create a law he must go to Congress with the idea. | |
| _____ 2. People elect representatives on both the state and national level to speak for them in government. | A. Consent of the Governed |
| _____ 3. By electing officials in or voting them out, people give their approval to the government. | B. Checks and Balances |
| _____ 4. The people are the source of all government authority. | C. Individual Rights |
| _____ 5. Our Bill of Rights protects the rights of all U.S. citizens. | D. Rule of Law |
| _____ 6. The national government and states' governments have divided up certain responsibilities of government. | E. Representative Government |
| _____ 7. The President of the United States must follow the Constitution and the laws of the country. | |
| _____ 8. The law protects all people, even those in the minority. | |
| _____ 9. Citizens vote for President every four years. | |