

Our Political Beginnings

Carl Johnson

Government

Jenks High School

Basic Concepts of Government

- The beginnings of American government began as early as the mid sixteenth century
 - French, Dutch, Spanish, Swedes and others contributed to the domination of this continent – and the Native Americans who had already been here for centuries
 - The English settlers came in the largest numbers and soon controlled the 13 colonies

Basic Concepts of Government

- The early English brought with them knowledge of a political system
 - Established laws
 - Customs
 - Practices
 - Institutions
- These have been developing for centuries

Basic Concepts of Government

- Roots of English law
 - Early river civilizations of Africa and Asia
 - Ancient Rome
- English colonists brought three ideas to North America that shaped American government
 - Ordered Government
 - Limited Government
 - Representative Government

Ordered Government

- Ordered Government
 - Local governments were created based on those they had in England
 - Many of the governmental offices and units we have today had their origins in England
 - Sheriff
 - Coroner
 - Assessor
 - Justice of the Peace
 - Grand Juries
 - Counties

Limited Government

- Colonists brought with them the idea that government is not all-powerful
 - Government is restricted in what it can do
 - Concept of Limited Government
 - Deeply rooted in English beliefs and practiced since before Jamestown (1607)

Representative Government

- Belief that government should serve the will of the people
- There was also a growing insistence that people should have a voice in deciding what government should and should not do
- “Government of, by and for the people”

Landmark English Documents

- The concepts of ordered government, of limited government, and of representative government can be traced to several landmark English documents
 - The Magna Carta
 - The Petition of Rights
 - The Bill of Rights (English)

The Magna Carta

- King John was forced to sign the Magna Carta in 1215
 - English citizens were weary of King John's heavy-handed and arbitrary acts
- The Magna Carta included fundamental rights such as:
 - Trial by jury
 - Due Process of law

The Magna Carta

- Originally intended for only the privileged classes, these rights eventually became the rights of all English
- Established the principle that power of the monarchy was not absolute

The Petition of Right

- In 1628, Charles asked Parliament for more money in taxes
 - Parliament refused until he signed the Petition of Right
- The Petition of Right limited the King's power in several ways
 - The king could no longer imprison people except by law of the land
 - The king could not impose martial law in time of peace or require homeowners to shelter the King's troops

The Petition of Right

- Most importantly, the Petition challenged the idea of the divine right of Kings, declaring that even the monarch must obey the law of the land

The Bill of Rights (English)

- After the Glorious Revolution, Parliament drew up the English Bill of Rights in order to prevent the abuse of power by all future monarchs
- The Bill of Rights also guaranteed the right to a fair trial, freedom from excessive bail and from cruel and unusual punishments

The English Colonies

- The 13 colonies were established separately over a span of 125 years
- Outlying trading posts and isolated farm settlements developed into organized communities
- The first colony was established with the first permanent English settlement in North America at Jamestown in 1607

The English Colonies

- Each colony was born out of a particular set of circumstances
 - Virginia was established as a commercial venture
 - Massachusetts was established as a haven for those who were searching for greater personal and religious freedom
 - Georgia was established as a haven for debtors
- The common bond was that all were shaped by English origins

The English Colonies

- The similarities between the colonies outweighed the differences
- Each colony was established on the basis of a charter
 - A written grant from the King
- This led to the development of three different kinds of colonies
 - Royal
 - Proprietary
 - Charter

Royal Colonies

- Royal colonies were under the direct control of the crown
- There were eight royal colonies:
 - New Hampshire
 - Massachusetts
 - New York
 - New Jersey
 - Virginia
 - North Carolina
 - South Carolina
 - Georgia

Royal Colonies

- In a royal colony, the king named a governor to be the colony's chief executive
- There was also a council, named by the king, to serve as an advisory board to the royal governor

Royal Colonies

- Royal colonies had a bicameral legislature
 - This advisory board also became the upper house of the colonial legislature
 - The lower house was elected by property owners who were eligible to vote

Royal Colonies

- Laws passed by the legislature had to be approved by the governor and the King
- Royal governors ruled with a stern hand, following instructions from London
- Much resentment was fanned by their actions, eventually leading to the Revolution

Proprietary Colonies

- By 1775, there were three proprietary colonies
 - Maryland
 - Pennsylvania
 - Delaware
- The colonies were organized by a proprietor, whom the king had made a grant of land

Proprietary Colonies

- The charter stated that land could be settled and governed much as the proprietor chose
- The governor was appointed by the proprietor
- Maryland and Delaware had bicameral legislatures, while Pennsylvania was unicameral

Charter Colonies

- Connecticut and Rhode Island were charter colonies
- These colonies were based on charters granted to the colonies themselves and were largely self-governing
- Laws made by the bicameral legislatures were not subject to governor, nor royal approval