

SS.7.C.1.2

Trace the impact that the Magna Carta, English Bill of Rights, Mayflower Compact, and Thomas Paine's Common Sense had on colonists' views of government.

SS.7.C.1.2 Benchmark Clarification 2: Students will evaluate the impact that the Magna Carta, English Bill of Rights, Mayflower Compact, and *Common Sense* had on the purposes of government.

The **Magna Carta** influenced the colonists' views on the purpose of government in three main ways. First, it helped to establish **limited government** in the United States through the three branches outlined in the U.S. Constitution. Each branch has the power to check or limit the power of the other two. The system of **checks and balances** keeps any one branch from getting too powerful. Second, the Magna Carta established the idea of **habeas corpus**. Third, like the Magna Carta, the U.S. Constitution is the law of the land and no one is above it.

The **English Bill of Rights** influenced the colonists' views about the purposes of government because ideas from it were included in two founding documents: the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights. First, in the Declaration of Independence, the colonists wrote that they "held certain truths to be self-evident," (obvious), "that all men are created equal and they have certain unalienable rights that include life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Also, government gets its power from the consent of the governed. Second, in the U.S. Constitution, the influence of the English Bill of Rights can be seen in the Bill of Rights which includes the right to petition the government, freedom of speech, peaceable (peaceful) assembly, freedom of the press and the right to bear arms. The Second Amendment protects the right to bear arms.

The **Mayflower Compact** also influenced the colonists' ideas about the purpose of government through ideas that have been included in the U.S. Constitution. Most importantly, the idea of **self-government** is central to the U.S. Constitution. By beginning the U.S. Constitution with the words "We the People," the Founders made it clear that the people establish (create) the government. Influences from the Mayflower Compact are also found in the Fourteenth Amendment, which states: "*No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.*" This amendment reflects the colonists' goal of having fair and equal laws for all.

Common Sense influenced many colonists to support the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration of Independence argued that the people must alter (change) or abolish (remove from power) a destructive government and replace it with one that meets the needs of the people. *Common Sense* also influenced the government that was later established in the United States. It supported the idea that the U.S. Constitution is the law of the land and the system of government where none of the three branches of government can become too powerful.

checks and balances - a principle of the federal government, according to the U.S. Constitution, that allows each branch of government to limit the power of the other branches

Common Sense - a pamphlet published by Thomas Paine in 1776 to convince the American colonists to support becoming independent from England

English Bill of Rights - a government document that expanded the powers of the English Parliament and expanded the rights of the people, as well as further limited the rights of the king; written by the members of the English Parliament in 1689

habeas corpus - the principle that the government has to provide a cause or reason for holding a person in jail

limited government - a government that has been limited in power by a constitution, or written agreement

Magna Carta - a government document that limited the power of the king of England and protected the rights of the nobility; written by the English nobles in 1215

Mayflower Compact - an agreement between individuals that created a government that would provide order and protect the rights of the colonists; written by a group of English Puritans in Massachusetts in 1620

self-government - popular or representative system where the people create and run their own government

