Our Political Beginnings

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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

- 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
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.