

How the Enlightenment causes the American Revolution

The Enlightenment was crucial in determining almost every aspect of colonial America, most importantly in terms of politics, government, and religion. Enlightenment ideas were the basis for monumental documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Concepts such as freedom from oppression, natural rights, and new ways of thinking about government structure (no kings) came straight from Enlightenment philosophers such as John Locke. Thomas Jefferson was greatly influenced by the movement, which helped spread it to America.

The Revolution came about after a series of unfair taxes upon the colonists by the British government who needed this extra income to help them recover from their wars overseas. Until this point, the colonists were only paying taxes that would go to support localized projects and these taxes, most notably the Stamp Tax and the taxes on tea, were seen as completely unfair. Using the Enlightenment principles of freedom and reason, the colonists declared these taxes unfair and stood up against oppression. These early Americans wished to have their own government that was based on Enlightenment principles and thus the Revolution occurred. Locke's conception of natural rights for all of mankind was being violated by British oppression and it became necessary to draft a government and code that was conducive to guaranteeing everyone natural rights under law.

One of the first steps in the formation of the US was the creation of the Declaration of Independence. This sought personal freedom to all citizens and this was to be guaranteed by means of a new form of government, one that was based on the people's right to have a say in their government (democracy). As the country moved toward the drafting of the Constitution, the ideas of several Enlightenment philosophers shaped the direction American political leaders took. For instance, Montesquieu's idea about the balance of power between three branches of government was explicitly used just as Rousseau's ideas about the power of democracy and consent of the people were in the formation of the new government. Another way that the Enlightenment helped to shape the colonies was in terms of religion. With the Great Awakening came a new understanding of [America's early relationship to God and the Church](#). Instead of one all-

powerful church that almost required membership, Protestant ideals based on Enlightenment principles of free will and freedom from institutions allowed people to choose membership in a church rather than be forced into one. Although during the European Enlightenment there was a very non-religious focus, in America this was not the case. The colonies were still very religious, but they used the ideas of their freedom to choose that were based on the Enlightenment. Instead of being tied to one religious authority, there were many choices in the colonies and people had a right to choose how to establish and maintain their connection to God.

Without the Enlightenment as the philosophical basis of this country, one can only imagine how different would be today. Important guarantees of human and natural rights, expressions of freedom and the rights of citizens to have free choice and practice religious freedom are all vital aspects in America still. Locke, Newton, and other Enlightenment thinkers put forth ideas about liberty and personal will that went on to be key aspects in the most important documents in America such as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution

Answer the following in 2-4 complete sentences either on paper or submit on Edmodo in comments section.

1. What types of ideas about people and government are new during the Enlightenment that did not widely exist before this time period?
2. What are some reasons the colonists felt that they had to rebel from Britain's rule in the New World?
3. What types of ideas are present in the Declaration and Constitution that Jefferson may have gotten his ideas from?
4. What was the Enlightenment primarily like in Europe? How was it so different in America?