

American Government In-Class Activity

Name:

European Thinkers' Influence on American Government: Readings

Directions: Read the informational paragraphs about three of the contributing enlightenment thinkers to the creation of the US Government and complete the questions on the following page.

1. John Locke (1632-1704) - English

In his book *Two Treatises on Government*, Locke refuted the divine right of Monarchy, and established a theory which states that all men are born free and equal. Each person should have equal access to the natural rights of life, liberty, and property. No law should limit those three principles and it is a government's responsibility to uphold the principles. He views one of the government's main responsibilities is to punish those who break the three principles. He came up with the idea that people, not god, gave the ruler the right to rule, and because of this if ever the government was not doing its job correctly then it is the people's right to overthrow and change the government.



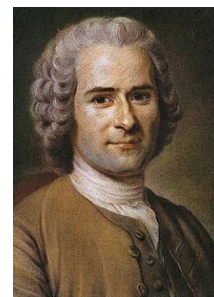
2. Charles de Montesquieu (1689-1755) - French

Expanding on the ideas of Locke in his book *The Spirit of Laws*, Montesquieu added the judiciary branch to Locke's Executive and Legislative branch. He admired the English system of laws, and wrote on the separation of powers. Montesquieu observed three different forms of government: "republican, monarchial, and despotic." He further divided republican government into democracy and aristocracy. Of which he dismissed a pure democracy as impossible because they easily become corrupted back into despotism or monarchy, when the feeling of equality and fairness evaporate. In order to ensure that does not happen a healthy judiciary branch is important to keep the other two branches of government in check.



3. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1704) - French

In his book *The Social Contract*, Rousseau comes up with his theories on government. He believed in what he called "a state of nature" in which people are purely instinctual and harmful, so he says people made a contract with the government to give up some of their individual freedoms in exchange for protection. Since governments get their power from the power it is their duty to do what is best for the general will (that means the most people). To ensure this happens Rousseau calls for a direct democracy where all citizens directly vote on new laws instead of a representative government where elected officials vote.



Information collected from:

Mount, Steve. "Constitutional Topic: The Census." USConstitution.net. 3 Jan. 2011. 27 Feb. 2011.

Delaney, James J. "Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy." *Rousseau, Jean-Jacques*. Niagara University, 21 Oct. 2005.

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European Thinkers' Influence on American Government: Questions

Directions: After reading the paragraphs about the enlightenment thinkers answer the following questions.

1. In the Chart below fill summarize the main ideas of the three thinkers in your own words. Focus on their unique ideas, or what they contribute.

John Locke	Charles de Montesquieu	Jean-Jacques Rousseau
-	-	-
-	-	-
-	-	-

2. Using what you've read explain what it means that governments have a "social contract."

3. What do you think Locke means by having natural rights of "Life, Liberty, and Property"?

4. Why is Rousseau in favor of a democracy? Why is Montesquieu not?