

The student will demonstrate knowledge of events and issues of the Revolutionary Period by (a) analyzing how the political ideas of John Locke and those expressed in Common Sense helped shape the Declaration of Independence.

The period known as the “Enlightenment” in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries saw the development of new ideas about the rights of people and their relationship to their rulers.

New political ideas about the relationship between people and their government helped to justify the Declaration of Independence.

The ideas of John Locke

John Locke was an Enlightenment philosopher whose ideas, more than any other’s, influenced the American belief in self-government.



Power resides in the people

All people are free, equal, and have “natural rights”.

“Natural rights” are life, liberty and property.

“Natural rights” cannot be taken away by rulers.

Government’s powers are limited to those the people have consented to give to it.

If government becomes a threat to the people’s natural rights, it breaks the social contract and the people have the right to alter or overthrow it.

The people consent to enter into a “social contract” among themselves to form a government to protect their rights.

social contract

In return, the people promise to obey the laws and rules established by their government, establishing a system of “ordered liberty.”

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Locke’s ideas about the sovereignty and rights of the people were radical and challenged the centuries-old practice of dictatorial rule