

# Founding Documents

You mean there was more than one founding document?

## Mayflower Compact

When the **Pilgrims** left England for the New World in 1620, they knew that they needed to set up a form of government that was similar to what they had in England. Pilgrims drew upon two strong traditions. One was the idea of a **covenant**, which dated back to Biblical times. The other was the belief in a social contract. Puritans believed that covenants existed not only between God and man, but also between groups of people. The rules of the Mayflower Compact allowed all male members of the community to participate in government. It was a way for the settlement to develop democratic ideals.



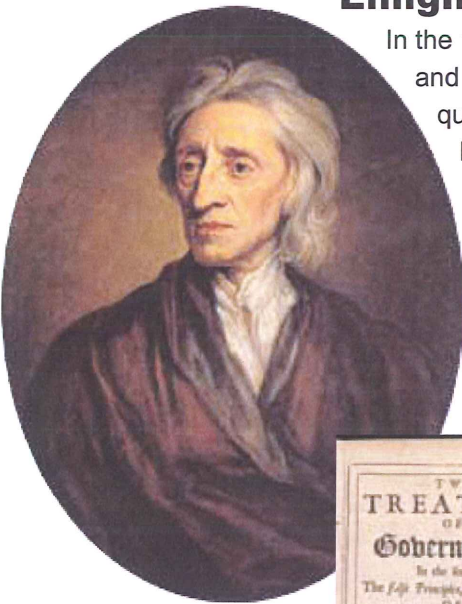
Source: Acknowledgment of the people in favor of the Mayflower Compact  
http://images.suite101.com/2698144\_com\_800pxscene.png

## Virginia House of Burgesses

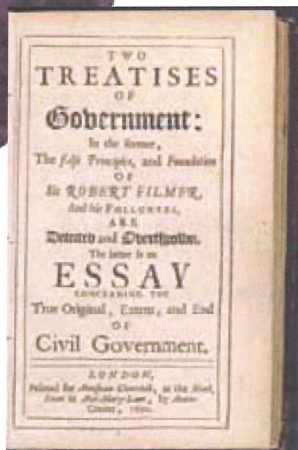
In 1619, the settlers in Jamestown, Virginia created the House of Burgesses as the first **representative body** in the New World. This body was very important to allow the people of the Virginia colony to have a say in governing the colony. The House of Burgesses made laws that could be passed or vetoed by the governor and the Virginia Company directors. These laws became models for the states after the American Revolution. Famous members of the House of Burgesses included George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Patrick Henry.

## Enlightenment in the New World

In the 17th and 18th centuries, European philosophers like John Locke, Montesquieu, and Thomas Paine, influenced people all over the world. Their writings began to question the role of government in people's lives. This time period is called the Enlightenment because a "light" was turned on to new ideas. Locke's writings included the idea of a social contract. This contract stated that the people would come together to form a government and follow the laws. The government, in turn, would protect the people. A more radical idea from Locke was that if the government became a threat to the people's property, the people had the right to overthrow the government. Many of Locke's ideas were repeated in the Declaration of Independence.



Source: Enlightenment author John Locke  
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:JohnLocke.png

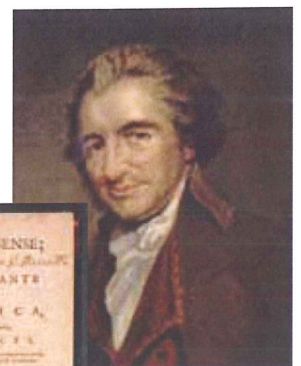


Source: Two Treatises of Civil Government  
http://www.xtimeline.com/\_\_\_UserPic\_Large/1309/ELT200709070202398431112.JPG

Montesquieu believed power in government should be separated among different sections. This separation would prevent one person or group from having too much power and control over a country.

Thomas Paine wrote a pamphlet known as *Common Sense* which challenged the rule of the colonies by the King of England. Thomas Jefferson would later detail many of the **grievances** against the king that Paine described in *Common Sense*.

Source: Thomas Paine  
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Thomas\_Paine.jpg



Source: Thomas Paine's pamphlet: *Common Sense*  
http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4a/Common-sense.jpg





## Declaration of Independence

In response to the harsh laws that were placed on the American colonists, the 13 colonies met at the First Continental Congress. The colonies were upset at how they were treated by England. The colonies could not agree on what to do. When the colonies met again in 1776 at the Second Continental Congress, the representatives decided that the colonies would break away from the King of England and fight for independence.

Jefferson was given the task of writing the Declaration of Independence, and he used the ideas of Locke and Paine when he created one of the most well known parts of the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain **unalienable** rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." On July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was approved by the Congress.



Source: Declaration of Independence being presented to Congress  
[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Declaration\\_independence.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Declaration_independence.jpg)

## Articles of Confederation

When the Revolutionary War was over and the new nation needed a government, the 13 states set up the Articles of Confederation, which outlined the powers of the new United States government. The states were fearful of a powerful central government like England's. The Articles of Confederation were weak because there was no common **currency**; Congress did not have the power to tax or regulate trade and there was no **executive** nor judicial branch. Within ten years, it was evident that the Articles of Confederation would not fix the problems of a new country. The states agreed to meet in Philadelphia to come up with a new plan, a constitution.

## United States Constitution

James Madison of Virginia was the main author of the Constitution. Madison followed Montesquieu and divided powers among three branches of government. Another important division of power was between the federal government and the states who had flexibility to govern themselves. A major obstacle was how to balance power between central and state governments. The Virginia Plan was designed to have a **bicameral legislative** branch. Under the Connecticut **Compromise**, each state would have two senators, and membership in the House of Representatives would be based on population. Slaves were counted as three-fifths of a person for representation. The Bill of Rights was added to ensure that individual rights were guaranteed on the national level.

### Key Vocabulary

**Pilgrims:** settlers who left England for religious reasons

**Contract:** a formal agreement

**Covenant:** agreement among members of a group

**Currency:** money

**Representative body:** the group that is elected to make the laws of the community

**Grievances:** complaints

**Unalienable:** something you are born with and cannot be taken away

**Bicameral:** two parts or houses which make up the legislature or congress

**Executive:** in a democratic system, the person or group that carries out or enforces the laws. In the United States, the executive is the president

**Legislative:** branch of government that makes the laws

**Compromise:** cooperation; settle a dispute by both sides giving up a bit on its position

### Quick Review

1. Why is the Virginia House of Burgesses important in United States history?
- First to elect a King in the colonies
  - First to represent native Americans
  - First representative body in new world
  - First to overthrow the king

2. How was the Constitution an improvement over the Articles of Confederation?
- State government had more power
  - National government had more power
  - Power was given back to England
  - A king was granted power in America

3. What is the correct sequence (I-Articles of Confederation, II- Constitution, III-Declaration of Independence, IV-Mayflower Compact)
- I,II,III,IV
  - IV,III,II,I
  - IV,III,I,II
  - IV,II,III,I