

The Enlightenment

- During the 17th and 18th century Europe experiences a scientific and political “thought” revolution known as “The Enlightenment”.
- Philosophers and others started using reason, science and mathematics to understand the world around them.
- People were no longer happy with the idea that things were the way they were just because someone told them “God Made It That Way”
- People wanted to understand why it was the way it was.

Social Contract Theory

- Created by John Locke
- Belief that people “contracted” with the government to protect their interests
- If Government doesn’t protect your rights, then the people have the right to revolt, and the government should be disbanded.
- Colonists eventually use this as justification for the American Revolution
- Thomas Jefferson will borrow the phrase “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness” from John Locke for the Declaration of Independence.

Charles Montesquieu

- Philosopher and Enlightenment Thinker
- Creates the idea of checks and balances
 - The idea that government should have separate but equal parts that check the power of the other branches to prevent the government from getting too powerful.
 - Three Branches (Executive, Legislative, Judicial).
 - This belief caused colonists to think that King George and Great Britain had too much power over life in the colonies especially since the colonists had their own governments set up.

Great Awakening

- After the Enlightenment, many colonists turned away from religion. They thought it was dry, dull, and distant.
- In an attempt to reassert religious influence, preachers tried to appeal to the emotions of the colonists to bring them back to religion
 - Fire and brimstone sermons
- There was a series of revivals (1730's to 1740's) known as the Great Awakening
 - George Whitefield: known as the Great Awakener
 - Jonathan Edwards

Impact of the Great Awakening

- Encouraged colonists to challenge authority
 - American Revolution might not have happened without the Great Awakening
- Leads to a greater influence of the church on society and the development of laws, etc.
 - It paved the way for the eventual separation of Church and State.
- Inner religious emotions were more important than outward religious behavior
- Religious colleges were established – Princeton and Brown