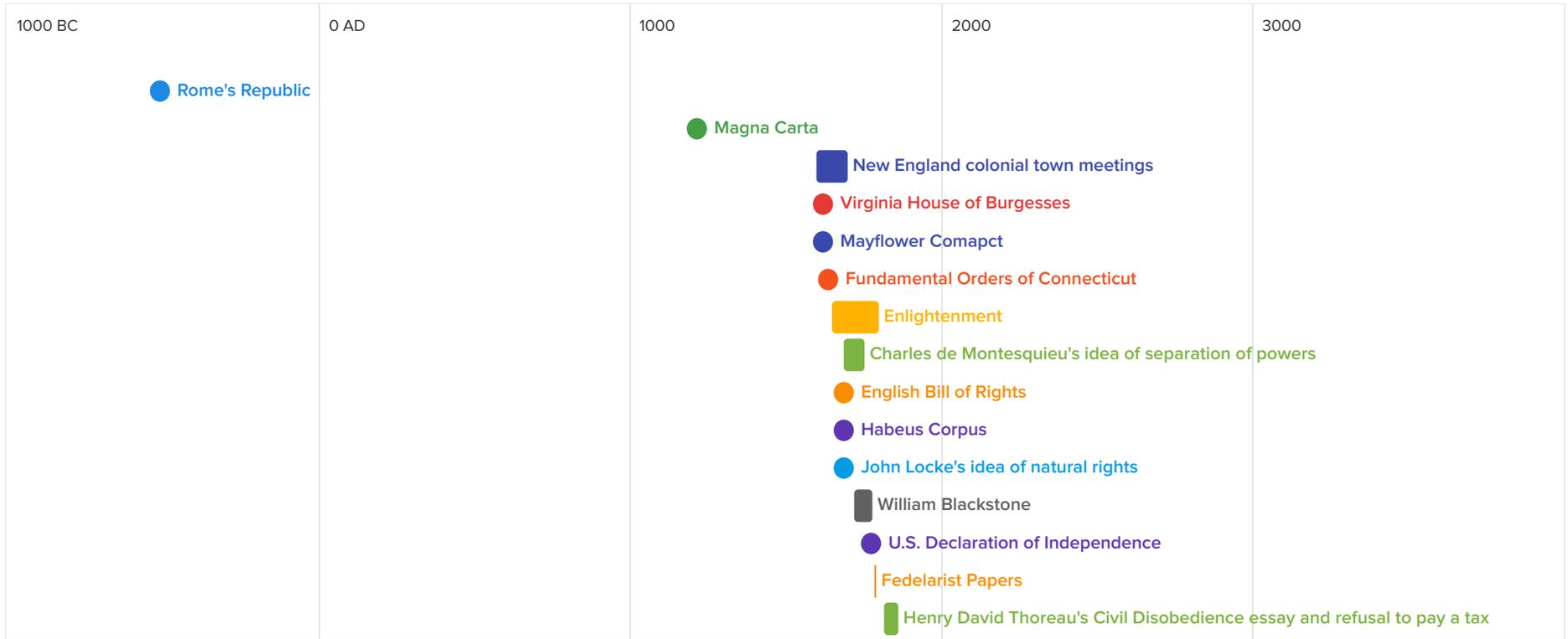


# Historical Influences on the U.S. Constitution



## Events

**Rome's Republic**

509 BC

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The people who created the Roman's Republic established a system of elected representative government. They built a government to check and balance power by dividing its functions. The Founding Fathers saw this as an excellent model for the U.S. government. This government also cautioned the Founding Fathers. Independence and public service were virtues that the Founding Fathers saw in the citizens of Rome. They knew that the Roman Empire had developed from the Republic and they thought of ways to keep the government from gaining too much power.

**Magna Carta**

1215

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The Magna Carta contained two basic principles that helped to shape both the American and British government. it made clear that English monarchs themselves had to obey the law and also stated that English nobles had certain rights, rights that were later extended to other classes. The idea of property rights greatly influenced early Americans. Basically the document limited the power of the king and guaranteed a citizen's right to fair treatment under law. The idea of "the rule of law" was important to the framers of the Constitution.

**New England colonial town meetings**

1600 - 1700

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The New England colonial town meetings were open forums that promised democracy. These town meetings were open to the general public and was a place for community members to feel safe and secure in attending and expressing their opinions. it was a democratic style of government and allowed mass participation in politics.

**Virginia House of Burgesses**

1619

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The Virginia Company promised the settlers of Jamestown, that as English citizens, they had the right to a representative assembly. The new governor established the House of Burgesses, the first representative assembly in the American colonies. Many of the American founders had served in the Virginia House of Burgesses, included George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. To the delegates of the Constitutional Convention, the right to representative government was clear.



<p><b>Mayflower Compact</b> 1620</p>	<hr/> <p>It was the first plan of government written and acted on in what is now the United States. Its basic principles of self-government and common consent set an important precedent in the colonies and influenced the framers of the Constitution. It states a belief in the idea that political authority rests in the hands of the people, "people have a say in the government."</p>
<p><b>Fundamental Orders of Connecticut</b> 1639</p>	<hr/> <p>It is considered a constitution in the modern sense and is claimed to be the first written constitution. It was a major stepping stone on the way to modern day democracy, it was a detailed plan of government which gave power to the people. It laid the groundwork for today's government. It helped shape our government into what it is today and brought democracy to America.</p>
<p><b>Enlightenment</b> 1650 - 1800</p>	<hr/> <p>The Constitution was also based on the ideas of the European Enlightenment. Enlightenment thinkers believed that people could improve society through the use of reason. Many of the Constitution's framers had read the work of Enlightenment thinkers.</p>
<p><b>Charles de Montesquieu's idea of separation of powers</b> 1689 - 1755</p>	<hr/> <p>The French Enlightenment thinker influenced American ideas on how a government should be constructed. In his 1748 book <i>The Spirit of Laws</i> he stressed the importance of the rule of law. The powers of government should be clearly defined and divided up. He suggested three separate branches - the legislative, executive, and judicial. This idea, known as the separation of powers, was designed to keep any individual or group from gaining too much power.</p>
<p><b>English Bill of Rights</b> 1689</p>	<hr/> <p>It was created by the English Parliament and signed by the king. It limited the power of the monarchy and increased the liberty of the English people. It also set forth fundamental ideas to the writers of the Constitution. Certain rights and requirements—the president will carry out the laws made by Congress, the judicial branch must be independent, Congress alone can levy taxes, freedom of speech—and more, trace their origins to the English Bill of Rights. It went further in protecting the rights of the citizens. The document stated that parliamentary elections should be held regularly and upheld the right to a trial by jury and allowed citizens the right to bear arms.</p>

- Habeus Corpus**  
1689  

The idea that no person should be held in prison without first being charged with a specific crime. Referenced in the English Bill of Rights.
- John Locke's idea of natural rights**  
1689  

The English writer John Locke published Two Treatises of Government in 1690. In it, he stated two important ideas. First, he declared that all people had natural rights to life, liberty, and property. He also suggested that government is an agreement between the ruler and the ruled. The ruler must enforce the laws and protect the people. If a ruler violates the people's natural rights, the people have a right to rebel. The framers of the Constitution wanted to protect people's natural rights and limit the power of the government.
- William Blackstone**  
1723 - 1780  

William Blackstone is the 18th century jurist who wrote a four-volume work on English law. These volumes, known as Blackstone's Commentaries, had a substantial influence in American law. His commentaries were still used long after his death. His main contribution to the U.S. Constitution was his use of common law.
- U.S. Declaration of Independence**  
July 4, 1776  

The Declaration protested that the king had made judges "dependent on his will alone." The Constitution set up a court system independent of the President and legislature.
- Fedelarist Papers**  
1787 - 1788  

They were first written by Alexander Hamilton under the pseudonym Publius. He recruited James Madison and John Jay to also write under the same pseudonym. They were written in order to speed up the ratification process of the U.S. Constitution and were written by Fedelarists, who supported the U.S. Constitution. They served two purposes, to persuade New Yorkers to ratify the Constitution and helps us understand more clearly what the writers of the Constitution had in mind when they drafted the document.





## Henry David Thoreau's Civil Disobedience essay and refusal to pay a tax

1817 - 1862

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In July 1846 Henry David Thoreau was arrested and jailed for not paying a tax. A anonymous source, probably a relative, paid the tax for him and he was released before one night, This incident prompted him to write his famous essay, Civil Disobedience. His minor act of defiance caused him to conclude that it was not enough to simply be against slavery and war. In this act, he refused his allegiance to the government, promoting the idea that you didn't have to support the government.