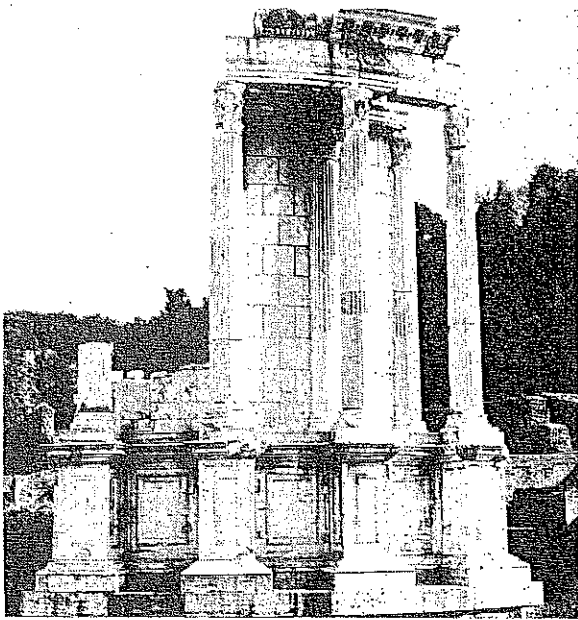


What is republican government?

The Founders were influenced by their study of history

Over 2,000 years before our nation began, there existed in ancient Europe a government which greatly influenced the ideas of the Founders. This was the **Roman Republic**, which lasted from 509 B.C. to 27 B.C. Its capital was Rome, which was located in what is now called Italy. Some of the ruins of the buildings of this ancient government can still be seen in Rome today.

The Founders were influenced by what historians had written about the people and



How could a government that existed over 2,000 years ago influence the development of our Constitution?

the government of the Roman Republic. They read that during the Republic, the Roman people governed themselves without a king. The common people and the **aristocrats** (wealthy upper class) shared the power to govern. The people chose leaders to make and administer laws for their country.

The Founders called the government of Rome a **republican government**. They defined a republican government as a type of government in which

- the citizens have the power to govern,
- the citizens give power to leaders they elect to represent them and to serve their interests, and
- the representatives are responsible for promoting the **common welfare** (the good of the entire community).

The Founders thought that republican government was possible in Rome only because of the **civic virtue** of the Roman citizens. Civic virtue meant that both citizens and their leaders lived modest lives. They worked hard and they put the common welfare above their own selfish interests. They believed that the benefits of republican government were that

- the laws made by representatives elected by the people would be fair and would serve the common welfare rather than the selfish interests of one group, and
- people would have greater freedom and be able to live secure and comfortable lives.

The Founders thought a republican form of government was the best form of government they could create for themselves. Then they would have the same benefits they thought the ancient Romans had enjoyed.

How should a republican government be organized?

The Founders also learned about republican government from Montesquieu (1689-1755). He was a French writer the Founders admired so much that they often called him "the celebrated Montesquieu." They thought he was an expert on what republican government should be like. Montesquieu believed that the best way to



Why was Montesquieu important to the Founders?

make sure a government would serve the common welfare was to do the following things.

- **Separate the powers of government** among the different branches, or parts, of the government so that no one branch would have all the power. Each branch should represent the interests of a different group in society.
- **Balance the powers** among these branches so no one branch would have so much power it could control the others.
- **Give each branch ways to check the use of power** by the other branches.

Montesquieu and many others believed that no single branch could control the entire government if its powers were separated, balanced, and checked. Then no single branch could use the government for its own selfish purposes. The result would be a government that would promote the common welfare.

The Founders thought it was important to teach and promote civic virtue among citizens. They believed that the Roman Republic had failed in the end because its citizens lost their civic virtue. They had promoted their own selfish interests at the expense of the common welfare.

By the time of the American Revolution, the Founders believed strongly in the ideals of republican government. They thought that Great Britain was violating these ideals. They claimed the British government was guilty of serving selfish interests at the expense of the common welfare. It had violated those rights it was the purpose of good government to protect.

After the Revolution, the Founders were able to establish their own government. They tried to make sure this government would not violate their rights. An essential step, they thought, was to create a constitutional government. You will learn what a constitution and a constitutional government are in the next lesson.

Answer all questions on another sheet of paper.

1. What three components comprise a "republican government"?
2. Explain the role civic virtue plays in a republican government.
3. According to the founders, what were the two main benefits of a republican government?
4. List and explain the three ways to organize a government that Montesquieu felt would ensure that the common welfare was served.
5. According to the reading, what was Great Britain doing that the Founders believed was violating their rights? Explain.