

Explore More—Colonial Ideas and Practices

Directions: Listen to your teacher talk about how the British colonial period created the basis for the development of the governmental and economic systems in the United States today. Circle any words you don't understand. Underline or highlight important ideas in the text. Write notes in the margins to help you understand key points. Then answer the questions in your own words.

How did the British colonial period create the basis for the development of political self-government?

From the time they arrived in America, the English colonists knew they wanted to have some form of self-government. They wanted control over how they lived their lives. The Jamestown colonists created the House of Burgesses, the Pilgrims wrote the Mayflower Compact, and the Pilgrims and Puritans elected their own governors and held town meetings. These were important steps in the evolution of democracy in the United States.

What is the significance of the representative assemblies that started during the British colonial period?

In 1619, the Jamestown colonists established the House of Burgesses, which was a representative government—the first in the New World. Nothing like this had ever happened in a French or Spanish colony. The House of Burgesses established the first tax in America, and agreed that the burgesses would be elected by the taxpayers of Virginia. The people who were elected to this colonial assembly had the power to pass laws. The House of Burgesses became a model for state governments and later for the United States House of Representatives.

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What is the significance of the town meetings that started during the British colonial period?

In 1620, England was ruled by King James I. He believed in the divine right of kings. This means he thought God had given him the right to be king. He wanted to be an absolute monarch. He wanted to make all the laws and decide how much money people should pay in taxes. He didn't want to consider other people's opinions or ideas. This kind of government is called a monarchy because it is headed by a monarch.

Even though the Pilgrims and Puritans knew they were under the authority of a monarch, they believed in self-government. They wanted to make their own laws. Once a year, they met in town meetings to elect people to public office and make local laws. Each colony had a governor and a legislature called a general court. The general courts evolved into legislative bodies that were similar to the House of Burgesses.

How did the British colonial systems compare with those of the Spanish and French?

Both the Spanish and French followed an economic policy known as mercantilism. According to this policy, colonies were to provide raw materials to the ruling country. In turn, the ruling country would use the raw materials to make goods, which they would then sell to their colonists.

Both Spain and France believed their colonies existed only to benefit them. They did not want their colonies to set up their own companies or businesses. All the colonies had were raw materials. This kind of economy is very centralized and government controlled. The British colonies operated differently. They sent raw materials to England, but they also began to set up their own companies and business. This positioned them to be more successful in a market economy, which is based on the buying and selling of goods and services. A market economy is more decentralized. British colonists would be better prepared to participate in a market economy because they would have goods and services to sell. ❖

YOUR TURN!

1. What is self-government?

2. Give two examples of self-government in the colonies.

3. What is a market economy?

4. How did the British colonial system compare with the French and Spanish colonial systems?
