Religious Influences

Ancient Judaism stressed that people should seek to create a just society based on respect for the law. Colonial thinkers based their notion of justice on this idea.

The laws of Moses (Torah of Moses) refers to the "five books of Moses" that were used to set the precedent for law including: moral laws, social laws, and food laws. The influence of Biblical laws can be found in the legal and ethical codes throughout different aspects of national, state, and local governments.

Colonists, who were influenced by their faith, believed in natural law, the idea that a universal set of moral principles existed. Many colonists believed that a human law that violated natural law was unjust and should be changed.
From the Ancients...

“Although only a few may originate a policy, we are all able to judge it.”

From ancient Romans came the idea of representative government, or decision-making by elected officials. This idea would be the basis of U.S. government.

Ancient Greeks introduced the idea of direct democracy, or decision-making by all citizens. Direct democracy took root in New England’s town meetings, where citizens gathered to solve local problems.

The Roman Republic’s government was divided into 3 different sections - each section had different powers.
King John I Bows to freedoms (and the Barons)

1215

King John signs the Magna Carta accepting that his will is not arbitrary and the law of the land is more powerful than himself... The original document was only legally valid for three months due to lack of support...

1216 - 1369

Reconfirmations and revisions to the original document occurred over time, shaping English Common law with only 3 clauses still existing today...

I was once a contender

Clauses still around today...

Clause 1: Freedom of the English Church:

...the Church of England shall be free, and shall have all her whole rights and liberties inviolable...

Clause 9: The "Ancient" Liberties of London:

The City of London shall have all the old liberties and customs which it hath used to have...

Clause 29 (Formally Clause 39): Due Process

No Freeman shall be taken or imprisoned, or be disseised of his freehold, or liberties, or free customs, or be outlawed, or exiled, or any other wise destroyed; nor will we not pass upon him, nor condemn him, but by lawful judgment of his peers, or by the law of the land. We will sell to no man, we will not deny or defer to any man either justice or right.

King John I Bows to freedoms (and the Barons)
The glorious Revolution

The People of England and Scotland did not like King James II because he would not let them vote or practice the religion of their choice. They invited William III of Orange-Nassau to take over as king.

William signed the Bill of Rights and became king, and England became a constitutional monarchy.

We will rule together!

Is that possible?

Good for William, Mary, and common law bad for James the II
The most important idea of the Enlightenment was the belief in people's reason, that all people can think for themselves. Therefore, a person should not automatically believe in what an authority claims.

We provided the inspiration for your nation.

It was thought therefore, that the special rights and privileges of the nobility should be abolished. These were dangerous thoughts for those in power, and many philosophers were at times imprisoned or were forced into exile.
The English Enlightenment provided 3 thinkers...

**Thomas Hobbes**
Thomas Hobbes first introduced the idea that government was the result of a social contract between people and their rulers. His social contract theory laid the groundwork for the idea that government was formed by the consent of the people.

**John Locke**
John Locke wrote about the idea that all people were equal and enjoyed certain natural rights, such as the right to life, liberty, and property. This idea exerted a powerful influence on colonial thinkers and would be used to justify the revolution.

**Sir William Blackstone**
Sir William Blackstone wrote about the English common law and set the foundation for the American judicial/legal system especially with regarding a national government as the protector of people and their life, liberty, and property.
The French Enlightenment provided 2 thinkers...

Montesquieu introduced the idea of separation of powers, in which governments are organized to prevent any one person or group from dominating others. Americans applied this idea to their colonial governments.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau believed in the idea that a government formed by a social contract was legitimate if it was based on popular sovereignty. Some colonial leaders, including Thomas Paine, agreed with this idea that the government should be based on the will of the people.