

Name: _____ Period: _____ Date: _____

United States History

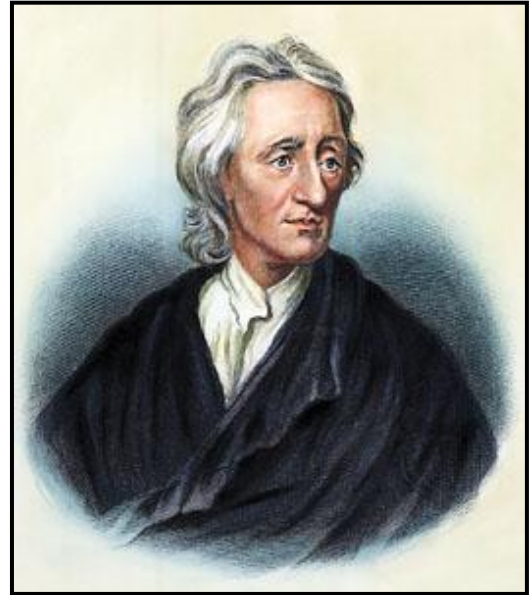


John Locke (1632 - 1704)

John Locke, widely known as the "Father of Liberalism," was an English philosopher and physician, and was considered one of the most influential of the Enlightenment thinkers. His work, which included contributions to the social contract theory, had a great impact upon the development of political philosophy. His writings influenced other Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, as well as American revolutionaries such as Thomas Jefferson. His contributions to the responsibilities of government are reflected in the Declaration of Independence.

John Locke was born on 29 August 1632, in Somerset, England. In 1647, Locke was enrolled in the prestigious Westminster School in London, and was later admitted to Christ Church, in Oxford. Although a capable student, Locke was frustrated with his course of study, claiming that the works of philosophers such as René Descartes were more interesting than the classical material taught at the university. Locke was awarded a bachelor's degree in 1656, and went on the study under such notes scientists and thinkers as Robert Boyle and Robert Hooke.

Locke exercised a profound influence on political philosophy. Locke's political theory was based upon the social contract theory. Unlike Thomas Hobbes, who claimed that people were violent by nature and acted only in their own self-interest, Locke claimed that human nature is characterized by reason and tolerance. Indeed, rather than label human beings as innately bad -



as Hobbes had done - Locke argued that the human mind was a blank slate (*tabula rasa*), that people are born without pre-formed ideas, and that knowledge is instead determined only by experience.

In 1690, Locke published what most consider his most influential work, *Two Treatises on Government*. The book, which was written as a commentary on England's Glorious Revolution of 1688, attempted to justify the peaceful overthrow of King James II by William of Orange (later named William III). The *First Treatise* argued that no government could be justified by an appeal to the idea that a king's rule is given approval by God. The *Second Treatise* began with a description of the state of nature, a picture much more stable than Hobbes' idea of "war of every man against man," and argued that all men were created equal in the eyes of God. From there, Locke went on to describe how the

only true governments were those which have the consent of the people.

Locke believed that the relationship between the governments and its people took the form of a "contract," whereby the people agreed to give up certain rights they enjoyed in exchange for order and protection provided by the government. However, if the government overstepped its limits and began to abuse its power, it would forfeit its "side" of the contract - the contract would become void and people **would not only have the right to overthrow the government, they would be morally obligated to do so.**

Locke's influence on the American Revolution was significant. His Two Treatises are evident in phrases in the Declaration of Independence, specifically the idea that all men enjoy certain natural rights: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness (here, however, Locke had originally stated Property). Of Locke's influence, Thomas Jefferson wrote: "Bacon, Locke and Newton I consider them as the three greatest men that have ever lived."

John Locke died on 28 October 1704, and is buried in the churchyard of the village of High Laver, in Essex, England.

1. What important **American document** can be **traced** to the ideas of **John Locke**?

2. Contrast the theories of **John Locke** with those of **Thomas Hobbes** regarding the **nature of human beings**.

3. What was the **main idea** behind Locke's **Second Treatise**?

4. According to Locke, under what **circumstances** do people have the **responsibility** to **overthrow their government**?
