The Enlightenment
What was it?

A time period when philosophers examined the relationship between humans and their government

Key ideas:

❖ 17th & 18th centuries
❖ Extension of the Scientific Revolution
❖ Observation of natural laws applying to society & government
❖ Use of logic and reasoning (rational thinking)
❖ Philosophers questioned government authority
❖ Sought to explain the proper relationship between people & their governments
❖ Establishes the existence of human rights
❖ Becomes the seeds of the Age of Revolution
❖ Basis of the most important American documents
In Congress, July 4, 1776.

A DECLARATION

BY THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,
IN GENERAL CONGRESS ASSEMBLED,

We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such Principles and organizing its Powers in such Form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

Prisoner, accordingly, the unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America, is, That these United States are, and of Right ought to be, Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do.

And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the Protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.
Thomas Hobbes

- Humans are naturally wicked

- Social contract - government created to control people
  - Protect them from themselves

- Ruler with total power was needed
  - Total power was used to keep people safe from other people’s cruelty
John Locke

• Natural Rights - life, liberty, property

• Governments designed to protect rights

• If government fails to protect rights, citizens should overthrow government
Voltaire

- FREEDOM OF SPEECH!

- Fought for religious toleration and intellectual freedom (used satire)

- Criticized French Gov’t & Catholic Church
Montesquieu

- Separation of power
  - 3 branches of government to divide power in the hands of many … not just 1 person

- Checks and balances of each
  - Each branch has the power to “check” the others so that no 1 branch becomes “all powerful”
Rousseau

• In a perfect society → people make & obey laws
  – Problem … human nature

• Give up some of their freedom for common good
  – “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains”
Cesare Beccaria

- Wrote *On Crimes and Punishment*
  - Argued for the greatest good for the greatest number of people
    - Utilitarian concept
  - argued that the punishment of criminals should be assessed according to the amount of damage to "social welfare"
  - he argued against capital punishment and ill-treatment of prisoners
Later Developments

• During the Enlightenment, political philosophers, especially in France and England, proposed alternatives to monarchy as a form of government.
  – mankind needed government, but not an absolute monarchy like that of Louis XIV under which they lived.

• Where the political philosophers disagreed, was on what kind of government was the best.

• In the end, the philosophes could not agree upon the merits of any single form of government.
  – It was from those discussions that the American Founding Fathers derived many of their ideas about equality, freedom and the sanctity of life.
Impact of the Enlightenment

- Enlightenment ideas helped to stimulate people's sense of individualism, and the basic belief in equal rights.
  - led to the Glorious Revolution in Britain, the American Revolution, the French Revolution, and the Latin American Revolutions.
  - Some of these revolutions resulted in government based upon the ideas of the Enlightenment. On the other hand, several failed revolutions resulted in even stricter government control of everyday life.

- Few monarchs retained absolute control of their countries while also enacting reform based on Enlightenment ideas.
  - In Austria, Maria Teresa and her son Joseph II both introduced reforms based on Enlightenment ideas.
    - reduced the tax load on the peasants
    - provided free education
    - ended censorship in their empire.
  - In Russia, Catherine the Great introduced similar reforms.
    - enacted laws for religious toleration and free education
    - sought the advice of nobles and peasants in the running of government.
Enlightened Despots

Monarchs who accepted Enlightenment ideas and used their power to reform society

- **Maria Theresa** - improved tax system and education in Austria

- **Joseph II** - modernized Austria’s gov’t

- **Catherine the Great** - asked citizens for advice in Russia, & extended religious toleration