

KEY TERMS

PRINCIPLES OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Why did the American colonists believe that they had the right to overthrow their government? By examining the principles of the American Revolution, you will engage with key concepts from the period and the meaning of these key principles that continue to drive our democracy today.

Review the interaction to help you fill out the chart below with the module key terms:

- Natural Rights
- Popular Sovereignty
- Rule of Law
- Social Contract Theory

Every revolution (or push for change) needs a sturdy foundation rooted in key principles that answer a simple (but essential) question: *Why?*

Think about the American Revolution. The American colonists were small in number, were mostly farmers, and against the odds still chose to pick a fight with the most powerful country in the world. That took courage, but it also took powerful ideas. What principles made them believe that they could win—and that the American Revolution itself was a fight worth winning?

Read over the definitions of the four key principles. These principles helped to support the colonists' claim for independence. Begin to complete the other attributes of the principles. As you do so, re-read the questions stated above and discuss them with peers. Remember that *principles* are defined as “fundamental truths that serve as the foundation of a system of belief or behavior or for a chain of reasoning.” How do these principles serve as the foundation for the American Revolution and continue to define the American idea?

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Definition

Natural rights are rights that are given by God or by nature. They come not from a law passed by the government but rather are inherent in all individual human beings from birth.

Characteristic

Natural Rights

Example

Non-Example

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Definition

The Constitution establishes a government based on the consent of the governed. The sovereign power is held not by a King or an aristocracy but by the American people.

Characteristic

Popular Sovereignty

Example

Non-Example

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Definition

The rule of law is the basic idea that we have a neutral government of laws, not an arbitrary government of one person. In other words, no one is above the law.

Characteristic

Rule of Law

Example

Non-Example

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Definition

People form a government with limited powers and temporary control over some rights. The government has an obligation to provide greater security and safety in return.

Characteristic

Social Contract Theory

Example

Non-Example