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Course

AP United States Government & Politics

Contact

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Guided Reading Questions

All readings can be found online or at your local library.

John Locke: *Second Treatise of Civil Government*

Before reading Locke, do some research and discuss the historical context of the *Second Treatise*. When did he write this and why? What was his purpose? What was happening at the time that can provide insight into the motivations and perspective of the author?

In what many ways and in what contexts does Locke continuously refer to the laws of nature? How does Locke differentiate between the laws of nature and the laws of man? Provide specific support from the reading.

When, according to Locke, is it necessary for man to give up certain liberties under the laws of nature?

According to Locke, what is the role of the legislative power and how does it get that power? Be detailed in your response.

Under what circumstances, to Locke, might it be necessary for the people to dissolve their government and start anew? Be detailed in your response.

Baron de Montesquieu: *The Spirit of the Laws*

Before reading Montesquieu, do some research and discuss the historical context of *The Spirit of the Laws*. When did he write this and why? What was his purpose? What was happening at the time that can provide insight into the motivations and perspective of the author?

Immediately in the first five paragraphs Montesquieu lays out an idea that directly influenced the shaping of American government. What is it and why does he state it is so important?

According to Montesquieu, who should exercise executive power? Who should exercise legislative power? Why?

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What does Montesquieu say about the idea of the executive limiting the legislative power? How about the legislative limiting the executive power?

Who, according to Montesquieu, should comprise the army, and what role does he say the army should play?

To Montesquieu, what will ultimately cause the state to perish?

Jean Jacques Rousseau: *The Social Contract*

Before reading Rousseau, do some research and discuss the historical context of *The Social Contract*. When did he write this and why? What was his purpose? What was happening at the time that can provide insight into the motivations and perspective of the author?

To Rousseau, what is the fundamental question that he seeks to address in *The Social Contract*? Reword and analyze this question.

According to Rousseau, what is the social contract and what are the social contract's benefits to society? Explain thoroughly.

What does Rousseau think of the concept of individualism, and how does the social contract affect individual will?

What is Rousseau's overall thinking on the concept of representative democracy vs. direct democracy? Explain in detail.

In what ways are Rousseau's theories and Locke's theories of the role of government similar? Cite specific examples.

Thomas Paine: *Common Sense*

Before reading Paine, read the introduction in the book and discuss the historical context of *Common Sense*. When did he write this and why? What was his purpose? What was happening at the time that can provide insight into the motivations and perspective of the author?

How does Paine view the role and importance of government in general? Be specific.

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What are Paine's views on the monarchy, both in general and that of England? Use supporting details from *Common Sense*.

What arguments does Paine use to support the notion that the American colonies would be better off as an independent nation?

A number of Paine's appeals and ideas exhibit the influence of people like Locke, Montesquieu, and Rousseau. Discuss some areas where you see these influences.

Virginia Declaration of Rights and the Declaration of Independence

Certainly, the philosophies undergirding the *Declaration of Independence* were not original to Thomas Jefferson. Nor was the idea for writing such a declaration in the first place. Likewise, though the *Virginia Declaration of Rights* preceded Jefferson's Declaration of Independence, most of the ideas expressed were not original to its author, George Mason (and later added to by James Madison, Thomas Ludwell Lee, and Patrick Henry). Indeed, Mason based much of his draft on the English Bill of Rights of 1689. Moreover, both declarations have their roots in Enlightenment thought and the philosophies of the likes of Locke, Montesquieu, and Rousseau and were directly influenced by the urgings of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*.

Here are two questions to address:

What specific things do the Virginia Declaration of Rights and Declaration of Independence have in common?

What specific ideas expressed in both documents can be traced to those of Locke, Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Paine? Make direct connections.

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Philosophical Underpinnings of American Government

Analytical Essay

For the first part of your summer assignment, you've read excerpts from the works from the Enlightenment (1600s-1700s) that helped to serve as the basis for American government in the late 18th century. The guided questions (and required research on historical context) were designed to help you examine the main points and arguments most relevant to American government.

You are to take your understanding of these works and integrate it into an analytical essay concerning the roots of American government. The focus for this essay is:

The language and scope of the Virginia Declaration of Rights, the Declaration of Independence, and ultimately the United States Constitution can be traced back to Locke, Montesquieu, Rousseau. How did their works heavily influence Thomas Paine's writing of Common Sense and the writers of the Virginia Declaration of Rights and the Declaration of Independence? And how did all of these writings serve as the philosophical underpinnings of what would become government of the United States of America?

In this essay, you are to draw from specific parts of each philosopher's writings and connect them to various aspects of American government, which includes not only the Virginia Declaration and the Declaration of Independence but also what you know about the organization and powers of the United States government embedded in the Constitution (three branches, Bill of Rights, etc.).

Minimum Requirements

- 4-5 double-spaced pages
- Times New Roman, Arial, or another standard font (nothing fancy!)
- One-inch margins on all sides
- Simply your name and assignment title (AP Government Summer Assignment) in the top left-hand corner
- Proper citations and a works cited listed in MLA format if you use any outside interpretive sources, including information from your research on historical context. *No citations are required if you use only the sources provided you.

All work is due during the first week of August - Current Tilton students will submit this on Google Classroom. Incoming Tilton students will email their paper to Mr. Ruggles.