



Founders' Influence:  
SS.7.CG.1.2  
**Founding Principles**  
**READING #1**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



**SS.7.CG.1.2 Benchmark Clarification 1:** Students will recognize principles contained in the founding documents (e.g., due process of law, equality of mankind, limited government, natural rights, the rule of law).

America has stood as a symbol of liberty and freedom since its inception in 1776. The Founding Fathers wanted to ensure that the new republican government was unlike any other that existed before, and exemplified principles from other governments into the founding documents that shaped America. These documents include the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.

The Declaration of Independence, written in 1776, listed the **grievances** of the British colonists against the English monarchy and declared the colonies free and independent states. The Founding Fathers were influenced by **John Locke**, an **Enlightenment** philosopher who believed people were born with the right to life, liberty (freedom), and property. The Declaration of Independence expands on those ideas and asserts that government is meant to protect the natural rights of the governed and ensure the equality of mankind. This is echoed in the **Preamble** of the Declaration of Independence, *"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."*

The Founding Fathers were also influenced by John Locke's concept of **social contract**, or the idea that the people enter into an agreement with a government for the protection of natural rights by obeying its laws. This idea was expanded in the Declaration of Independence after the British monarchy failed to acknowledge the colonists' rights, *"--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..."* The Declaration illustrates the colonists' support for **republicanism** and the concept of a limited government with elected officials. **Limited government** protects citizens by making sure the government does not have too much power. Both the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution address the idea of limited government. The ideas behind republicanism include the **consent of the governed**, or will of the people, and the idea of the **rule of law** as more powerful than any one person in a country, including leaders.

Many of the ideas expressed in the Declaration of Independence influenced how government is structured in the U.S. Constitution. The Constitution, written in 1787, is the supreme law of the United States. The ideas of limited government, natural rights, and rule of law are evident throughout the document, and are coupled into the concept of **due process of law**. Due process is the right of people accused of crimes to have laws that treat them fairly so they cannot lose their life or freedom without having their legal rights protected. The right of **habeas corpus** is one example of how the U.S. Constitution limits the power of the government.

**consent of the governed** - an agreement made by the people to establish a government and abide by its laws

**due process** - the right of people accused of crimes to have laws that treat them fairly, so that they cannot lose their life or freedom without having their legal rights protected

**Enlightenment** - a period in European history when many educated people stressed the importance of learning and reasoning; education was considered the key to understanding and solving society's problems

**grievance** – a complaint

**habeas corpus** - the principle that the government has to provide a cause or reason for holding a person in jail

**John Locke** – English philosopher during the Enlightenment period, known for his contributions on ideas such as natural law, limited government, social contract, and religious toleration.

**limited government** - a government that has been limited in power by a constitution, or written agreement

**natural rights** - the belief that individuals are born with basic rights that cannot be taken away by governments

**preamble** – an introduction; the introduction to the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution

**republicanism** - support for a republican system of government.

**rule of law** - the idea that those who govern must follow the laws; no one is above the law