Republicanism and Western Democratic Thought

**Historical Investigation Questions**

* What is republicanism?

**Source Set** *(input)*

* Primary Sources: James I, English Bill of Rights
* Secondary Source: variety of excerpts on Republicanism

**Procedures in Brief** *(process)*

* Students read and analyze James I statement about the power of kings.
* Students read and analyze the English Bill of Rights.
* Students read, summarize, and synthesize definitions of republicanism.

**Assessment** *(output)*

* Students develop their own definition of republicanism based on their readings.

**Additional Literacy Scaffolds:** As teachers move English learners and low-literacy students towards independence, they may wish to use some or all of these additional literacy supports with their students:

* Pared-down primary source excerpts
* Graphic organizer
* Paragraph Frames

**SOURCE 1: James I, the King of Great Britain’s speech to Parliament March 1610**

Background: King James I ruled Great Britain, Scotland and England, from 1603 to 1625. Historians often highlight the confrontational relationship that he had with Parliament as an example of his advocacy for absolute rule. However, while Parliament only met for 36 months of his 22 year rule, during these periods the King and Parliament often conflicted over the budget. Over the course of his reign, King James compiled speeches and writings advocating for the divine right of kings.

Adapted from: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/299922/James-I> And <http://www.historytoday.com/john-spiller/james-i-parliament-and-faction>

Read the excerpt below and answer the questions about the text in the box on the right.

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| **Excerpt from the King’s Speech**  Available at: http://www.h-net.org/~hst201/SpeechParl.htm | **Glossary** | **Student Response** |
| The state of Monarchy is the supremest thing upon earth; for kings are not only God’s lieutenants upon earth and sit upon God’s throne, but even by God himself they are called gods. There be three principal similarities that illustrate the state of Monarchy: one taken out of the word of God and the two other out of the grounds of policy and philosophy. In the Scriptures kings are called gods, and so their power after a certain relation compared to the Divine power. Kings are also compared to the fathers of families, for a king is truly *parens patriae*, the politic father of his people. And lastly, kings are compared to the head of this microcosm of the body of man.              Kings are justly called gods for that they exercise a manner or resemblance of Divine power upon earth; for if you will consider the attributes to God you shall see how they agree in the person of a king. God hath power to create or destroy, make or unmake at his pleasure; to give life or send death; to judge all, and to be judged nor accomptable to none; to raise low things and to make high things low at his pleasure; and to God are both soul and body due. And the like power have kings: they make and unmake their subject; they have power of raising and casting down; of life and death; judges over all their subjects and in all causes, and yet accomptable to none but God only… | *Scriptures-*writings from the Bible  Divine-having to do with god  exercise a manner or resemblance—to act like  accomptable—accountable  subject—people who live in the kingdom and are under the control of the king | To what three things does James I compare kings?  What aspects of kingship does he claim allow kings to be god-like?  What control does he claim that kings have over their subjects? |

What does James I claim about kingship?

What evidence does he use to support his claim? Identify specific quotes from the text above and paraphrase them below.

What power did the king have in Britain?

**SOURCE 2: The English Bill of Rights 1689**

By 1689, many elites in Great Britain were concerned that the monarch had too much power over the state and wanted control over government to be shared between the king and Parliament. With the Revolution of 1688, a new king and queen took power in Great Britain, and they agreed to the Bill of Rights created by Parliament. Read the excerpt from the English Bill of Rights below and consider what rights did the people gain? What power did the king lose?

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| **Excerpt from the English Bill of Rights**  http://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th\_century/england.asp | **Glossary** | **Student Response** |
| That the pretended power of suspending the laws or the execution of laws by regal authority without consent of Parliament is illegal;  That the pretended power of dispensing with laws or the execution of laws by regal authority, as it hath been assumed and exercised of late, is illegal; …  That levying money for or to the use of the Crown by pretence of prerogative, without grant of Parliament, for longer time, or in other manner than the same is or shall be granted, is illegal;  That it is the right of the subjects to petition the king, and all commitments and prosecutions for such petitioning are illegal;  That the raising or keeping a standing army within the kingdom in time of peace, unless it be with consent of Parliament, is against law;  That the subjects which are Protestants may have arms for their defence suitable to their conditions and as allowed by law;  That election of members of Parliament ought to be free;  That the freedom of speech and debates or proceedings in Parliament ought not to be impeached or questioned in any court or place out of Parliament;  That excessive bail ought not to be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted; …  And that for redress of all grievances, and for the amending, strengthening and preserving of the laws, Parliaments ought to be held frequently. | execution the laws—making laws  regal authority—the king or queen’s actions  levying money—taxing  petition—make a formal request, asking for something to be done | Does the king have a right to make laws?  Does the king have a right to collect taxes?  Why is it important to be able to petition the king?  What are the benefits to not having a standing army?  What are some freedoms for individuals outlined in the document?  What are some powers now controlled by Parliament? |

Summarize the document: What rights did the people gain? What power did the king lose?

**SECONDARY SOURCES: Republicanism**

The contest between the king and Parliament over who controlled government was one that continued on throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth. In fact, the tradition of liberty and rights was one that formed part of the political tradition of the American colonies and eventually led them to revolt against the king of Great Britain in 1776. In part, the government of the United States was formed as a response to ideas of absolutism as presented by King James. The principle of power divided and shared among citizens representing the interests of the whole forms the basis for our government today. This political theory can be called, republicanism. Like all big concepts, republicanism cannot be defined by a single term. Below are several documents that define the term republicanism. Choose one document and:

1. Read the document and highlight all of the ideas associated with republicanism. Underline the idea or example you think is most important to understanding the concept.

2. Create a summary of republicanism in your own words.

3. Draw a picture of republicanism.

4. Gather with students who read other passages and share your summary, underlined text, and image. As a group, create one definition of republicanism based on all of the readings. Choose one passage from one of the excerpts that you think best supports your summary of the term.

**Excerpt 1: Republicanism**

When asked what kind of government the Constitutional Convention had created, Benjamin Franklin replied: “A republic, if you can keep it.” Article IV, Section 4 of the Constitution contains an unamendable provision that begins: “The United States shall guarantee to every state in this Union a republican form of government.” This refers to the principles and practices appropriate to a government in which ultimate authority resides in the people and in which elected officials and representatives are responsible to the people and must govern according to the law. But republicanism involved more than eliminating a king and instituting a representative government. It also involved a critique of monarchical society: A republican society was to be a society free of the corruptions, pretensions, and rigid class stratification found in Europe. Monarchical societies maintained their authority through hereditary privilege, patronage, standing armies, and a religious establishment. A truly republican society, in contrast, depended on the independence and the moral virtue of its citizens. At the time of the American Revolution, the only republics in the world were tiny: the city-states of Italy and Switzerland and the Netherlands. Larger republics, like England during the mid-seventeenth century, had collapsed into dictatorship. One of James Madison’s goals in shaping the US Constitution was to create a republic that would endure despite its large size and that would not have to depend entirely on the virtue of the country’s leaders. In the Federalist Papers, he argued that in a large republic, diverse and conflicting interests would balance and neutralize each other. The objective of the Constitution was to create a system of government that would control men’s desire for power and safeguard individual liberty. To prevent concentrations of power, the framers established a system of checks and balances. Authority was divided between the federal and state governments and was further divided among the three branches of the federal government. The framers of the Constitution hoped to weaken the basis of monarchical society. They wanted to eliminate the forms of corruption, such as nepotism and the holding of multiple public offices, that characterized the British government.

Found at Gilder Lehrman: https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/creating-new-government/timeline-terms/republicanism

**Excerpt 2: Republicanism**

Republicanism is a term for beliefs that have defined the American political experiment. In particular, republicanism stems from a form a government where the people are sovereign.  In such a government, virtuous and autonomous citizens must exercise self-control for the common good. Republican citizens should not seek office or use public office for economic gain. Public officials must subordinate their personal ambitions for the good of the community. A republican citizen also must be prepared to thwart corrupting influences that would lead the nation toward tyranny or despotism.  Republicanism is based on the assumption that liberty and power continually battle. Therefore, citizens must protect a fragile liberty from destructive power. Perhaps most importantly, all citizens (the definition of which has changed over the years) in a republic are equal…

The republic of the founding Fathers of America was much different than the monarchies of the old world. John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, among others, endeavored to reorder politics. This would be accomplished in several ways. One, an elective democracy of citizens would be judged by merit and not ancestral lineage. Two, a weak executive would be less likely to influence and corrupt legislators. Third, frequent elections would ensure that officials remained committed to the public good. Fourth, the series of checks and balances in the constitution would prevent any political faction or sector of society from threatening the majority. Such an experiment, the founders believed, would create an ideal society that the rest of the world would emulate.

Found at the North Carolina History Project: http://www.northcarolinahistory.org/commentary/61/entry

**Excerpt 3: Civic Republicanism**

**civic republicanism,** tradition of political thought that stresses the interconnection of individual freedom and civic participation with the promotion of the [common good](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/128312/common-good).

The concept of civic republicanism is most easily understood as a form of government that contrasts with autocratic forms of government, where one person rules over the state in his or her own interest. However, such an understanding belies an oversimplification that masks civic republicanism’s complexity and rich heritage. As an approach to governance, the principal ideals of civic republicanism can be traced back to the ancient works of [Plato](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/464109/Plato), [Aristotle](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/34560/Aristotle), [Plutarch](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/465201/Plutarch), and [Cicero](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/117565/Marcus-Tullius-Cicero), among others; its more modern adherents include [Niccolò Machiavelli](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/354571/Niccolo-Machiavelli), [Montesquieu](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/390782/Montesquieu), [James Harrington](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/255874/James-Harrington), and [James Madison](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/355859/James-Madison).

The phrase res publica is most readily understood as “that which belongs to the people,” where “the people” represent not just the masses but an organized [society](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/551813/society) founded on justice and a concern for the common good. It follows, then, that a state founded on civic republican ideals is one whose political constitution is aimed at securing the common good of all its citizens. This task is chiefly fulfilled by the successful promotion of key ideals, such as mixed constitutions, [civic virtue](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1916876/civic-virtue), and patriotism, and by institutions restrained by certain principles, such as the [separation of powers](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/473411/separation-of-powers) and the principle of [checks and balances](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/108283/checks-and-balances)…

[T]he constitutional focus is on creating the institutional arrangements that preserve individual freedom by stressing, in addition to traditional republican ideals, more modern principles, such as certain antimajoritarian devices like judicial review, representative government, and a strong sense of the rule of law. The thought behind these principles is to ensure that the government does not exercise any arbitrary power over the citizenry.

From the Encyclopedia Britannica: http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1916872/civic-republicanism