Who Gives Power?

Trace how Enlightenment ideas shaped rights and government.

MWH.C.3.3.A "Explain how the major ideas of enlightened philosophy influenced the concepts of natural rights and consent of the governed."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two claims about rights, circle two claims about where political authority comes from, and number two ways people can limit government power.

A Test for Government

1. In a London coffeehouse in the early 1700s, a reader might hear a heated question: Why should anyone obey a ruler? English thinker John Locke argued that people possess natural rights to life, liberty, and property before governments exist. Rulers do not hand out these rights as gifts. People form governments to protect them and grant authority through consent. For Locke, a government that repeatedly violates rights breaks the trust that justifies its power. People may then replace it. His argument turned a ruler's claim to inherited power into a question citizens could ask: Does this government protect us?

2. Other Enlightenment thinkers explored how power could remain accountable. Montesquieu warned that liberty is endangered when the same officials make laws, enforce them, and judge disputes. Dividing these powers among different branches could make it harder for rulers to violate rights without challenge. Jean-Jacques Rousseau focused on the people as the source of political authority. In his view, legitimate laws express the general will, the shared interests of citizens rather than the private wishes of a ruler. His argument linked consent to public participation in making laws, not simply to accepting orders after they are issued.

3. In 1776, writers of the American Declaration of Independence used similar reasoning against British rule. They said people have rights that governments must secure and that governments get their just powers from the consent of the governed. If a government persistently destroys those rights, the people may change it. The declaration did not claim that every person must vote on every law. It did, however, challenge the idea that birth alone gives a monarch rightful authority. Its promise was incomplete: enslaved people were denied liberty, and women lacked political rights. Enlightenment ideas offered a test of power that their own era did not apply equally.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Locke's idea of natural rights change what a government was supposed to do?

2. Why did Locke's idea of consent give people a reason to replace a government that repeatedly violated their rights?

3. How could Montesquieu's plan for dividing power help protect natural rights?

4. How did Rousseau's idea of the general will change the meaning of consent compared with simply obeying a ruler?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A fictional town council bans residents from criticizing its decisions, and residents never chose its members. In 4 to 5 sentences, use two Enlightenment ideas to judge the ban and the council's authority, then propose one change that would protect rights and give residents a say.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · MWH.C.3.3.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two claims about rights, circle two claims about where political authority comes from, and number two ways people can limit government power. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Locke's idea of natural rights change what a government was supposed to do?	**Locke argued that rights exist before government, so a government's job is to protect them, not grant them.**
2	Why did Locke's idea of consent give people a reason to replace a government that repeatedly violated their rights?	**People grant a government authority to protect their rights. Repeated violations break that trust, so people may replace it.**
3	How could Montesquieu's plan for dividing power help protect natural rights?	**When different branches make laws, enforce them, and judge disputes, rulers face checks that make violations of rights harder.**
4	How did Rousseau's idea of the general will change the meaning of consent compared with simply obeying a ruler?	**Rousseau connected legitimate authority to citizens' shared interests and participation in making laws, not merely their obedience to a ruler.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The ban on criticism threatens residents' liberty because they cannot speak openly about their government. Locke's view of natural rights suggests that the council should protect liberty rather than restrict it. Rousseau's idea that authority comes from the people also casts doubt on a council residents never chose. Residents could elect council members and require public meetings where criticism is allowed.

Accept other accurate links between Enlightenment ideas, natural rights, and consent. For Part 3, the proposed change should address both residents' rights and their role in government.