Who Holds Power?

Trace ideas about authority from colonial documents to the Constitution.

USG.C.2 "Describe the historical and philosophical foundations of the republican system of government in the United States of America. Evaluate the extent to which historical ideas and principles of human nature and authority have shaped the United..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two statements about how government gains or uses authority. Circle two warnings about how that authority can go wrong.

A Government by Consent

1. When the thirteen colonies declared independence, they faced a question: who should have the final say over government? Earlier documents offered different starting points. In 1215, Magna Carta required England's king to respect certain legal procedures, but it did not give everyone a vote. In 1620, the Mayflower Compact pledged its signers to make laws for the colony's common good and obey those laws. The Declaration of Independence later argued that governments gain their just powers from the consent of the governed. It listed abuses by King George III, including dissolving colonial legislatures, to justify replacing a government that violated that principle.

2. After independence, Americans disagreed about how to put self-rule into practice. The proposed Constitution created a stronger national government, divided authority among branches, and placed national lawmaking in the hands of elected representatives. In Federalist No. 10, James Madison argued that a large republic could reduce the danger of any one faction controlling government: representatives would refine public views, and competing groups would check one another. In Brutus Essay 1, an Anti-Federalist writer warned that a vast republic would leave citizens too distant from their rulers. George Mason also objected that the proposed Constitution lacked a national bill of rights.

3. Consider a present-day proposal for one national rule on water pollution. Supporters might say that pollution crosses state lines, so a national rule can protect people whom a single state cannot protect alone. Opponents might say that officials far away will overlook local needs and that unchecked national power could threaten liberty. These arguments echo parts of the ratification debate, although neither side has to accept every eighteenth-century claim. The Constitution ultimately combined stronger national powers with limits, including checks among branches. The Bill of Rights, adopted after ratification, answered some demands for explicit protections. The debate over where authority belongs continues.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the Mayflower Compact and the Declaration of Independence each connect government to the people it governs?

2. Why would dissolving colonial legislatures support the Declaration's argument for self-rule?

3. How did Madison and Brutus reach different conclusions about the size of a republic?

4. Which concern in the ratification debate did the later Bill of Rights address? Which concern described in the passage did it not directly resolve?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Congress is considering a national privacy rule for companies that collect student data through school apps. In four sentences, explain one argument for the rule using Madison's ideas, one argument against it using Brutus's ideas, and your judgment about where authority should rest.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · USG.C.2

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two statements about how government gains or uses authority. Circle two warnings about how that authority can go wrong. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the Mayflower Compact and the Declaration of Independence each connect government to the people it governs?	**The Mayflower Compact's signers pledged to make and obey laws for their colony's common good. The Declaration said governments gain their just powers from the consent of the governed.**
2	Why would dissolving colonial legislatures support the Declaration's argument for self-rule?	**Dissolving legislatures denied colonists a voice through their representatives, conflicting with government by consent.**
3	How did Madison and Brutus reach different conclusions about the size of a republic?	**Madison argued that a large republic could keep one faction from taking control. Brutus warned that its size would put rulers too far from citizens.**
4	Which concern in the ratification debate did the later Bill of Rights address? Which concern described in the passage did it not directly resolve?	**It addressed Mason's demand for explicit protections of rights. It did not directly resolve Brutus's concern that rulers of a vast republic would be distant from citizens.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A supporter might draw on Madison's defense of a large republic and argue that national representatives can make a rule for companies serving students in many states. An opponent might draw on Brutus's warning that distant rulers can miss local needs. I would support a national minimum privacy rule because students should not lose protection when a company operates across state lines. States should remain free to add stronger protections if their communities want them.

Accept other accurate connections between each document or writer and the stated issue. For Your Turn, the judgment may favor national, state, or shared authority if the reasoning addresses the tradeoff.