**The Age of Enlightenment**

During the Enlightenment, or Age of Reason, intellectuals began to examine the standards by which rulers governed. The principles of this time held that everything, including the government, was worth examination and scrutiny. These principles spread to our early political scientists.

These new liberal ideas stated that individuals had natural rights and that government was an agreement or contract between the people and their ruler. In this governmental contract both the ruler and the citizen had rights and responsibilities.

Power needed to be separated and balanced so that individuals or groups did not become corrupt through those powers. The people wanted a change from absolutism and the divine right of kings to constitutionalism. Constitutionalism was the belief that the government contract should be written down, making clear what powers were given to whom.

The philosophers believed that the government "contract" and its supporting laws needed to reflect the "general will" of the people. Laws should be agreed upon by both the ruler and those governed. Assemblies of citizens should be formed with real power to influence the government and judge whether rulers acted properly.

Rulers and governments which abused their power and did not protect the rights of the citizens were corrupt and the people had a right to rebel and replace the ruler. The ruler also had the right to expect that the citizens would respect the government and laws which were just.

After the American Revolution and the French Revolution, more and more countries began to write constitutions which reflected these liberal ideas. Political theorists or thinkers further examined how to determine if the laws or rules of government really reflected the "individual rights" of the citizens and the "general will" of the people.

It became accepted that legislation and justice ought to reflect what was the best for the most people, or the greatest good for the greatest number. Discussion and debate on exactly who was a citizen and had the right to take part in the new governments continued to grow. Discussions on slavery, women's rights, and discrimination continue today.

1. How did Enlightenment thinkers define the relation between the government and the people?

2. Why did Enlightenment thinkers believe powers of government out to be separated?

3. Define "Constitutionalism."

4. What do Enlightenment thinkers mean when they use the phrase "general will?"

5. According to Enlightenment thinkers, what should happen to governments that were corrupt or failed to protect the rights of citizens?

6. What obligation did the subjects have in the eyes of the ruler?

7. Which two historical events intensified the discussion of needed changes in government?