**Monarchies vs. Republics Handout**

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*Democracy* was first theorized and practiced by the Greeks. Others, such as the Romans and the Dutch, developed this idea into a *republic* in which citizens voted some of their peers to fill government offices, usually within the rules of a constitution.

By way of contrast, most countries, especially European countries, were governed by monarchs, which were usually hereditary, meaning rule passed down within families, such as from father to son or daughter. Sometimes these were *absolute* monarchs, in which a king or queen governed without any significant restrictions on his or her power. In other cases, as in England, there were *constitutional* monarchs, in which monarchs governed jointly with an elected Parliament and within certain rules. Even in the English case, though, important decisions were being made by someone *no one* chose to rule.

# The American Republic

The idea that the governed should have a voice in their government, rather than be arbitrarily ruled, was attractive to the Founding Fathers, many of whom were also schooled in philosophy and familiar with the concepts of natural law. Natural law, as the Founding Fathers understood it, and described in the Declaration of Independence as “the laws of nature and Nature’s God,” holds that there are certain core natural rights inherent in personhood.

The Declaration of Independence asserted that ‘all men are created equal,’ meaning that no one has, by right, the innate authority to rule another. In order for a government to have legitimate authority, it must act with the consent of the people that it governs—or in the phrase of the Declaration, “the consent of the governed.”

While that argument of the Declaration seems open to different forms of government that preserve the rights of the people, Americans increasingly came to believe that the principle that ‘all men are created equal’ entailed a republican form of government, in which citizens consented to government by electing the people to govern them.

Moreover, the colonists’ experience with their own local government within the British empire had shown them that this was no mere theory but workable in practice.

All the newly independent states governments maintained and strengthened republican government—voting for state legislatures and governors—which was later guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution. In writing the Constitution, the framers ensured that every position was either elected by the people or chosen by those elected by the people. Moreover, other than judges, every position required re-election by the same people. George Washington established the precedent that presidents should only serve two terms, rather than for life—akin to a monarch. Washington recognized the importance of showing that the people should choose new governing officials. This two-term limit on the presidency was eventually formalized by the 22nd Amendment.

Members of Congress do not have term limits, so it is possible that they can serve for life. However, because they are elected, it is in their best interest to recognize public opinion and be mindful of it. If they fail to heed the will of the people, or recognize their needs, they can be voted out of office (which is far less messy than a revolution).

# The English Monarchy

At the time, England was a constitutional monarchy, meaning that the king governed jointly with an elected Parliament, which exercised the legislative power of the realm. There were further limits to the monarch outlined in the English bill of rights. England had briefly attempted a republican government in the 17th century, and it’s not an exaggeration to state that there were already strong republican ideals in place in England at the time.

But constitutional monarchies are still not the same as constitutional republics.

The executive power was vested in a monarch, not elected by the people but chosen by DNA. It is an inherited position. King George III inherited the throne from his grandfather King George II in 1760. George II inherited it from his father George I, who inherited it from his second cousin, once removed, Queen Anne.

Originally the monarchs maintained complete power, but over time the balance shifted, and by the end of the 1600s, Parliament was its own body. The balance of power between the monarch and elected Parliament has continued to shift, and today the English monarch is primarily ceremonial.

Finally, monarchies are not as bound by public opinion as are democracies or republics. However, public opinion can still play a role. In a constitutional monarchy, the elected part of the government responds to popular will. But even in an absolutely monarchy, a complete failure to recognize public opinion can lead to very bad things, such as a revolution, so there is some wisdom behind listening to the people.