The Age of Revolution

Chapter 29
• Ideas from the European Enlightenment movement sparked revolutions based on concepts of liberty and equality. As a result new nations were formed and older governments instituted reforms.

• Revolutionaries looked to create a fair and equitable society by instituting governments that were responsive to the needs and interests of the peoples they governed.
1. Popular Sovereignty

- Sovereignty = political supremacy and the authority to rule
- Philosophes rarely challenged monarchical rule, but looked instead to make kings responsible to the people they governed.
- They regarded government as a contract between rulers and ruled
Enlightenment Ideas

- John Locke (*Second Treatise of Civil Government*)
  - Government arose in the past when people decided to work together, form civil society, and appoint rulers to protect and promote their common interests.
  - Individuals retained personal rights to life, liberty, and property. If a ruler violated these rights, they should be deposed.
  - Rulers derive their authority from the consent of the governed.
2. Individual Freedom

- Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire called for religious toleration and freedom to express their views openly. Believed freedom of speech and religion were “natural rights”
- U.S. Bill of Rights
- When their ideas were censored in France, they worked with publishers in Switzerland or the Netherlands to get their books published and smuggled back in to France.

Enlightenment Ideas
3. Political and Legal Equality

- Enlightenment thinkers condemned the legal and social privileges enjoyed by aristocrats.
- Rousseau (*The Social Contract*) believed in an ideal society where all individuals would participate directly in the formulation of policy and the creation of laws.
• Used to justify revolutionary efforts to overhaul political and social structures
• Important to remember that Enlightenment thinkers were men of comfortable means; they were not envisioning a society where they shared political rights with women, peasants, slaves, or people of color.
• Favorite form of government of Enlightenment thinkers was a republic based on a written constitution with an elected legislature of representatives.

Global Influence of the Enlightenment
• Enlightenment ideals promoted by the American and French revolutions inspired revolutionary movements in the Caribbean and Latin America.
  • The ideals of these revolutions also inspired social reformers who sought to extend political and legal rights to women and slaves.

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