

# The role of the founders of american democracy essay example

[Philosophy](#), [Freedom](#)



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## **Introduction:**

American Constitution was not a result of a day's effort. There were a lot of discussion, debates and compromises which went into the making of a viable US Constitution. The founding fathers of American democracy were invariably influenced by the political ideas of some all-time great philosophers including John Locke, John Winthrop and Thomas Paine. Divided on the distribution of power among a central governing body and state governments, Federalists and Anti-Federalists too are mere reflection of the ideas propagated by these three philosophers. In order to know more about the political ideals of these forefathers, I would highlight on the main ideas of Locke, Winthrop, Paine, Federalist and Anti-Federalist drawing a comparison and contrast between the ideals and their relevance today.

## John Locke

John Locke was one of the great philosophers of all time. His ideas on government and the natural human rights were instrumental in the formation of American constitution. Locke's ideas as expressed in Second Treatise Concerning Civil Government emphasize upon the need of building a secure society through the formation of a government made by the support of majority of people concurring in the agreement to surrender their political rights into the hands of a designated body. He believed that the legislative body should be accountable for deciding upon the laws and its proper implementation to keep order in the society. The legislative power of the government would be handed over to a representative assembly which would speak for everyone in the society. It would be the sole responsibility of the government to look after the needs of the people who are to be governed, failing which people have the right to rebel and overthrow the government. Locke also believed that human beings are born with the natural rights; the right to life, liberty and property. Since human beings are rational, they should have the liberty to act the way they want without harming others. A governing body, according to Locke, limits individual freedom and hence if a man is wronged, instead of the government punishing the perpetrator, the man himself, since all are equal in the state of nature, can take the action of inflicting punishment on his wrongdoer. According to Locke, each of us holds right to our own body and actions. Therefore, any production that is the fruit of one's labor will be one's own. But as God wants everyone to be happy, no man should possess more than he can make use of. Each of us should have the same right to reap benefits

out of our property and land, as long as it doesn't infringe on the rights of others.

## **John Winthrop**

John Winthrop was a puritan lawyer whose contribution to the New England colonial development profoundly influenced the new social and political order of the colonists. Winthrop's main ideas stressed on the question, why are some people rich and others are poor? He believed that God made the difference between rich and poor purely based on three reasons, 1) diversity encourages people to worship God in a variety of ways, 2) The rich people's kindness towards the poor and the poor's submission to the rich is an ideal spirit of public life, 3) People of different social rung having the same needs and sharing the struggle is crucial to a society. However, Winthrop believes that excessive wealth is detrimental to self-improvement and hence the wealthy should share their wealth with the deprived without expecting anything in return. According to Winthrop, everyone in a society must love each other and be willing to sacrifice either of their lives or of their wealth to build a strong unified community. Winthrop believed that in order to maintain order in the society, a government must be built with power to wield over its citizens. The government should address both the secular and spiritual concerns of the community to nurture a healthy communion among public.

## **Thomas Paine**

Thomas Paine, a great English-American philosopher of the 18 century, had his main ideas based on the government, the monarchy, the state of the

colonies under British rule, and the capability of the Colonies. According to him, there is no difference between society and government. Though society is good for people, government is not. He believed that monarchy is evil. Since England was a warring country, any colony under British rule was at great danger of constantly being pulled into the war and thus at the mercy of Britain's enemies. Hence colonies should try to obtain freedom from British rule at all cost. He believed that if the colonies managed to free themselves from the rule of monarchy, they would flourish and form a new government based on the principle of by the people and for the people.

## **Federalists and Anti-Federalists**

During the formation of American constitution, there were a lot of debates and rows which gave birth to two groups of delegates divided on opposing views - Federalists and Anti-Federalists. While Federalists were in support of dividing the sovereignty between the central government and state governments, Anti-Federalists opposed the view expressing doubt that vesting of too much power in the president would lead to the creation of monarchy.

## **Comparison and Contrast:**

Though both Locke and Winthrop believed in the formation of a governing body in order to maintain peace in the society, there was difference the way they looked at it. For Locke, formation of a government was less important compared to the legislative body entrusted with the responsibility of making standing laws to maintain order in the society. But for Winthrop, formation of the government was as important as a legislative body. In fact John Winthrop

himself was one of the three main leaders of New England and he believed their oligarchy was completely fair because as faithful believers of God, they were meant to implement God's rule on earth. Again, Locke believed in the right of the people to rebel against the government if the latter is non-functioning. He also stressed on man being a rational being and as and when required men should have the utmost liberty do as he pleased following the reasons of their minds. Winthrop, on the other hand, wanted people to believe that everything is God's will and that absolute liberty resists authority and brings moral degradation. Locke believed that whatever a man would produce on his own merit, it would be his completely, whereas Winthrop believed in sharing. Thomas Paine's views about monarchy matched with that of Anti-Federalists who believed that monarchy is evil. Federalist's views also matched with Thomas Paine's idea of an ideal government " by the people and for the people."

## **How Relevant These Ideas Today**

All these philosophers' point of views, to a great extent, is relevant to this day. Locke's beliefs are what the foundation of American Constitution is based on. Winthrop's belief that an ideal government should address both secular and spiritual concerns of people is quite relevant today in the current state of affairs. Winthrop's opinion that a rich man should show kindness to poor is validated by the charitable work numerous wealthy people of the world engage themselves with. Thomas Paine's idea of an ideal government of 'by the people and for the people' is very much in practice today in form of government being elected by the common people's votes.

## **Conclusion:**

Locke, Winthrop and Paine are the great philosophers of all time whose ideas and philosophies influenced the formation of American Constitution, to a great extent. Though their ideas about the government, religion and liberty slightly vary from each other, but they all come down to serve the same thing; well-being of people. Federalists and Anti-Federalists, on the other hand, are ramifications of these great philosophers who with their opposing views try to fulfill the purpose of the nation looking after the needs of the citizens and their welfare.

## **Reference**

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