The Rise of Democratic Ideas

Prologue

Important ideas that led to modern democracy can be traced back through history
The Legacy of Ancient Greece and Rome

• Ancient Greece
  – Cities develop in small fertile valleys
  – (City-states) Each city had own government
    • Monarchy—rule by single leader
    • Aristocracy—rule by noble land owners
    • Oligarchy—rule by the wealthy/powerful
    • Democracy—rule by people (direct involvement)
Ancient Greece

• Shift from monarchy to democracy led by three important individuals over a period of about 130 years.
• Political and economic problems forced these leaders to make changes to how government operated and who was considered a citizen
• Citizenship belonged to wealthy landowning men
• This took place in Athens, which had become Greece’s largest city state.
• The three political leaders who made changes were Solon, Cleisthenes, and Pericles.
Solon (594 BCE)

- **Stopped** practice of selling people and their family into slavery for not paying debts
- Established **4 classes of citizens** allowing more people to participate in government
- Allowed **poor to make decisions on juries**
- Only wealthy could be government officials
- His decisions brought compromise between rich and poor during bad time
- Stopped use of death penalty for minor crimes
Cleisthenes (508 BCE)

- Considered the “founder of Athenian democracy” because of his reforms
- Reorganized the assembly
- Allowed citizens to make laws
- Weakened power of families and clans
- Created political instead of social divisions in city
Pericles (461 BC)

- Ruled during Athens’ “Golden Age”
- Increased #s of paid government officials
- Started system to pay jurors for their work
- Poorer citizens could participate in gov’t
- Created a direct democracy as citizens created own laws, served on juries and did not elect representatives
Greek Philosophers use Reason (300 BC)

- Several great thinkers (philosophers) made a lasting impact on Athenian law & Western thought.
- Logic and reason was used to figure out how the world worked, how people thought, and morality.
- 2 main principles show Greek respect for human intelligence and allowed democracy to develop:
  - Universe is orderly and it operates on unchanging laws.
  - People can understand these laws thru use of logic and reason.
Socrates 469 BCE 399 BCE

- Wanted his **students** to examine their deep beliefs
- Used **Q & A (Socratic Method)** to probe
- Looked for flaw in reasoning so students could come to truer understanding of reality
- “The unexamined life is not worth living”
Plato - 427 BCE – 347 BCE

- Was Socrates greatest student
- Wrote about how an ideal government should work in The Republic
- Wanted a philosopher-king to rule
Aristotle  384 BCE 322 BCE

- Plato’s student
- Wrote about physics, politics, gov’t, ethics and more
- Studied astronomy, geology geography, economics, and other sciences
- Examined the physical world and human belief, thought, and knowledge
- Aristotle was more interested in science – considered father of scientific method
- tutor of the young prince Alexander, who grew up to be Alexander The Great.
- opened his own school, the Lyceum (lie-SAY-um).
The Legacy of Greece

• Greece set lasting standards in politics & Philosophy.

• Greeks did not rely on superstition or traditional explanations of the world. Instead, they used reason & intelligence to discover predictable patterns that they called “Natural Laws”.

• The Greeks developed direct democracy in order that citizens could actively participate in political decisions.

• They were the first to think of 3 branches of government
  
  • Legislative branch – to pass laws.
  
  • Executive branch – to carry out the laws.
  
  • Judicial branch – to settle disputes about the laws
• Rome rose and Greece fell but both had contact with each other

• Rome evolved from being ruled by kings, many who were brutal, to the establishment of a republic (government where people elected representatives to make laws)

• Early republic was marked by tension between the patricians (wealthy landowners with political rights/power) and plebeians (farmers, artisans, merchants who could vote but not hold office)
The 12 TABLES

- Plebeians pressure patricians for power and a Written code of laws called 12 Tables
- Laws written/carved on 12 stone tablets
- Laws put on public display
- Established two new ideas in government
  - all free citizens had the right to protection under the law
  - Law would be administered fairly
Republican Government

- Separate branches of government
  - Legislative—senate and two assemblies
  - Judicial—Court system
  - Executive—two consuls (one year) ran army and directed the government

In times of crisis, a dictator could be appointed for 6 months. He had absolute power, made laws, and commanded the army.

As Rome grew, problems governing developed and an emperor was chosen to rule in 27 BC.
Roman Law

• As Rome grew, conquered people were exposed to the system of laws that were applied to everyone in the empire. Roman Law was based on reason. We remember Roman Law for several important principles that are valid today.
  – All citizens had the right to equal treatment
  – A person was considered innocent until proven guilty in court
  – Burden of proof for crime fell onto the accuser
  – Any unreasonable law could be set aside
Justinian’s Code

- Emperor Justinian had his legal advisors organize over 1000 years of Roman laws into a manageable system of four parts
  - The Code—nearly 5000 laws
  - The Digest—summary of legal opinions of previous decisions
  - The Institutes—Textbook for law students
  - The Novellae—new laws after the code

Justinian’s Code made a huge impact on legal systems across Western Europe and made Roman government “a system of laws, not of men.” US legal code adopted much of what Justinian did.