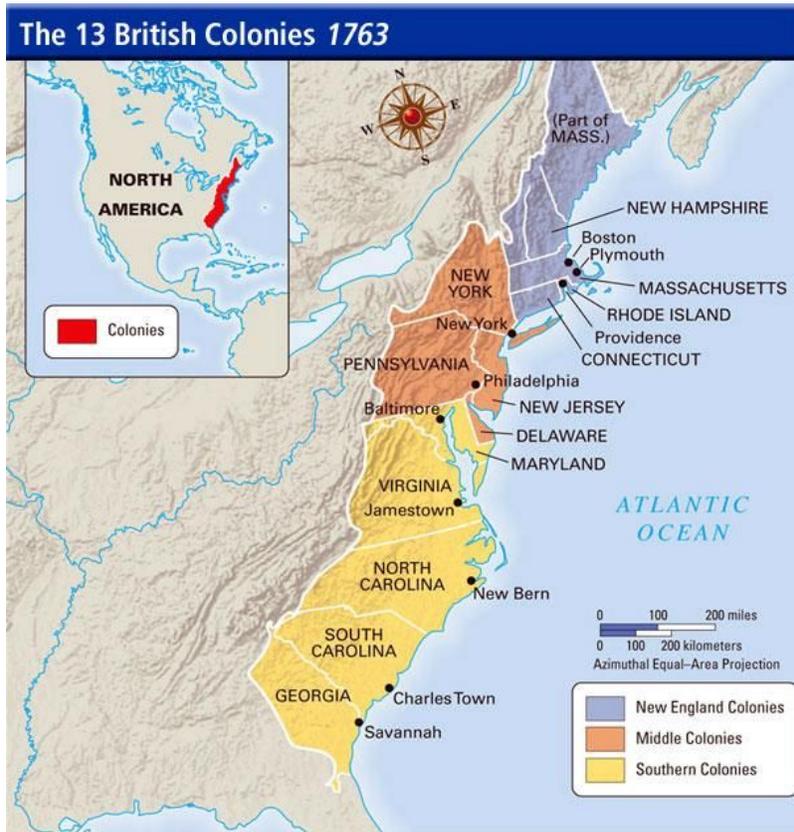

How Democratic was Colonial America?



Overview: Due to British political traditions, distance from the mother country (England/Britain), and other factors, the thirteen colonies in America began early on to develop democratic features. Despite this, many aspects of colonial life were strikingly undemocratic. A close look at the time period suggests that democracy in colonial America was a work in progress. This DBQ activity asks you to evaluate and answer the question: How democratic was colonial America?

The Documents:

Document A: Mayflower Compact

Document B: Plan of a Slave Ship

Document C: Engraving of Virginia's House of Burgesses

Document D: Fundamental Orders of Connecticut

Document E: Voting Qualifications

Hook Exercise: Democracy

Directions: Democracy is measured in many ways. Among those ways, you can tell how “democratic” a society or community is by the measuring the following things: the election process and pluralism, the amount of participation, how well the group functions, the freedom to disagree, and how just and equal the laws are. With your partner, read the description of each characteristic of democracy, and then complete the chart at the bottom of the page. Decide how “democratic” your school is by assigning a value of 1-10 for each category with 1 being the least democratic and 10 being the most democratic. Be prepared to defend your answers.

Election Process and Pluralism: In a democracy, leaders are elected through free and fair elections. There are multiple leaders and authority figures. Groups of people have the power to influence government leaders and decisions.

Amount of Participation: In a democracy, citizens have the right to participate in the democratic process. Citizens may vote and participate in order to improve their society or community.

Functioning of Group: Elected leaders are able to determine the policies of the government in a democracy.

Freedom to Disagree: Citizens have the right to disagree with authority and each other. In a democracy, people are able to express their opinions.

Just and Equal Laws: All people are entitled to the same individual rights, such as freedom of speech and freedom of religion. Citizens are treated fairly under the law.

Your School				
Election Process and Pluralism (Multiple leaders and authority)	Amount of Participation (Is everybody in the school able to participate and try to improve it?)	Functioning of Group (How well does it function?)	Freedom to Disagree (Are you free to disagree with authority and each other?)	Just and Equal Laws/Rights (Does everybody have the same rights and follow the same rules?)
Overall Score: _____				
If overall score:				
0-16 = Not very democratic		17-33 = Somewhat democratic		34-50 = Highly democratic

Background Essay

How Democratic was Colonial America?

During the 17th and 18th centuries, colonists came to America from Europe with the hopes of freedom and a new beginning. The 13 colonies that eventually would become the United States were founded in different ways and for different reasons. Whether a colonist's goal was to find new economic opportunities or religious freedom, it was a goal that required a certain amount of independence from the British **monarchy**. The great expanse of the Atlantic Ocean, spanning a distance of over 3,000 miles between the 13 colonies and Great Britain, created a safe distance for the colonists to develop skills and establish their own forms of government.

When the colonists arrived in the New World, they expected to be under some control and supervision by the mother country. Each colony had a **charter**, or written agreement



between the colony and the king of England or Parliament. For example, charters of royal colonies provided for direct rule by the king, who appointed a governor to exercise authority over the colony. The colonists were willing to pledge their allegiance to the king and pay their fair share of taxes, but also had some freedom in their everyday affairs.

Despite its efforts to control American trade, England could not possibly oversee the entire American coastline. Colonial **merchants** soon learned to operate outside British law. Finally, those who escaped religious persecution in England demanded the freedom to worship according to their faiths. A spirit of independence began to develop within colonial America.

The sense of rugged independence that developed in the 13 colonies was necessary for survival in the New World. When the colonists arrived in America, they often found rough land, harsh weather, and difficult living conditions. They had to learn to be resourceful if they wanted to stay alive in their new setting. In the southern colonies, the first settlers lived in tents made of sailcloth in

order to protect themselves from mosquitoes. Other colonists built shelters covered with bark and tree branches to keep out the winter's cold. As food supplies ran out, many colonists starved. Those who survived were forced to eat whatever they could gather or kill. One Jamestown colonist reported eating "dogs, cats, rats, snakes, toadstools, horsehides, or what not." Over time, living conditions in the colonies improved and food became more plentiful as colonists learned to farm in their new environment and **imports** arrived.

In addition to building homes and finding food to eat, colonists also created their own governments as they settled in the 13 colonies. These governments were necessary to help manage town affairs and make decisions in the colonies. Owning land, in most colonies, gave men the right to vote. The colonists' land ownership, however, also meant a loss of liberty for American Indians and enslaved Africans.

When the colonists arrived in America, they brought with them some democratic ideas that would influence their colonial governments. The **Magna Carta** or Great Charter, written in England in 1215, greatly limited the power of the king. For example, the Magna Carta stated that the king could not pass taxes without the consent of **Parliament**. Another document that influenced colonial government was the **English Bill of Rights**, which was written in England in 1689. The English Bill of Rights protected the freedom and liberty of the British people. It guaranteed individual rights such as freedom of speech in Parliament and protection from cruel and unusual punishments. When the colonists came to America, they expected that the king would rule within the boundaries of the law and that their rights would be protected in the New World.

Although the 13 colonies developed some characteristics of limited representative government, they were still far from being democratic in many ways. Your job is to read the documents that follow and answer the question: *How democratic was colonial America?*

Background Essay Questions

1. What were some reasons why colonists came to America?
 2. In what ways did England have control over the lives of colonists?
 3. What challenges did the colonists face when they arrived in the New World?
 4. Why was land so important for colonists? What did it give them?
 5. Define or explain each of these terms.
 - a. Monarchy:
 - b. Charter:
 - c. Merchants:
 - d. Imports:
 6. Describe the effect of each of the following documents.
 - a. Magna Carta:
 - b. English Bill of Rights:
-

1607 – Jamestown is founded

1619 – The first session of the Virginia House of Burgesses

1620 – The Mayflower Compact is signed

1701 – Yale College is founded in Connecticut

1725 – The population of enslaved Africans in the American colonies reaches 75,000

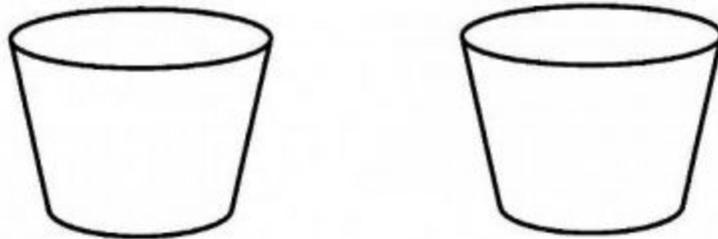
1765 – The Stamp Act imposes a direct tax on all printed material in the colonies

Understanding the Question and Pre-Bucketing

1. What is the analytical question asked by this DBQ?
2. What terms in the question need to be defined?
3. Rewrite the question in your own words.

Pre-Bucketing

Directions: After reading the Background Essay and looking at the document titles on the cover page, can you predict how you might organize a paper answering the above DBQ question? In other words, what are the possible buckets?



Document A Mayflower Compact (1620)

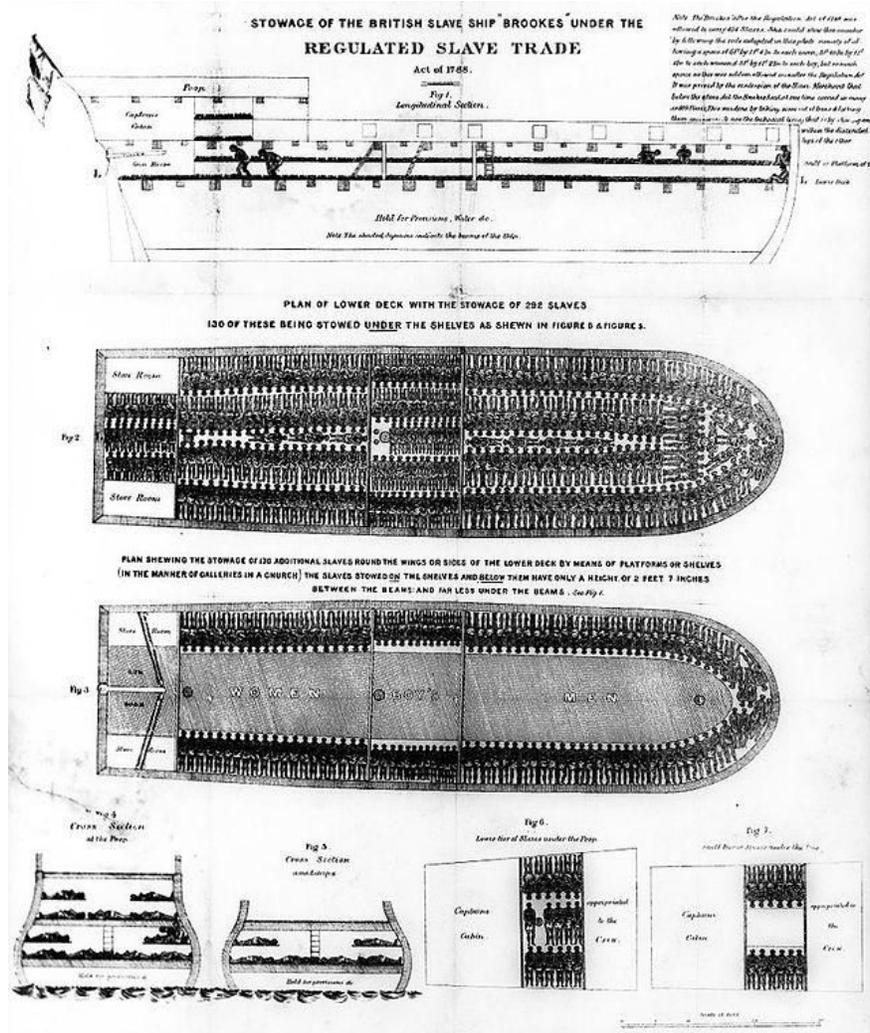
In 1620, before they landed at Plymouth, 41 of the colonists aboard the Mayflower drew up the Mayflower Compact. Under this written agreement, the colonists provided for self-government under majority rule of the male voters.

We, whose names are underwritten...having undertaken for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith, and the honor to our King and Country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the northern parts of Virginia; do by these presence of God and one another, covenant and combine ourselves into a civil body politic, for our better ordering and preservation, and furtherance of the ends aforesaid; And by Virtue hereof do enact, constitute, and frame, such just and equal Laws, Ordinances, Acts, Constitutions, and Offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most [proper] and convenient for the general good of the colony unto which we promise all due Submission and Obedience. In witness whereof we have hereunto subscribed our names at Cape Cod the eleventh of November, in the year of our sovereign lord King James of England... anno domini, 1620.

Document Analysis

1. Who wrote the Mayflower Compact?
2. What was a colonist agreeing to when he signed the Mayflower Compact?
3. What powers did the Mayflower Compact give the Plymouth settlers?
4. How does this document help answer the DBQ question?

Document B Plan of a Slave Ship



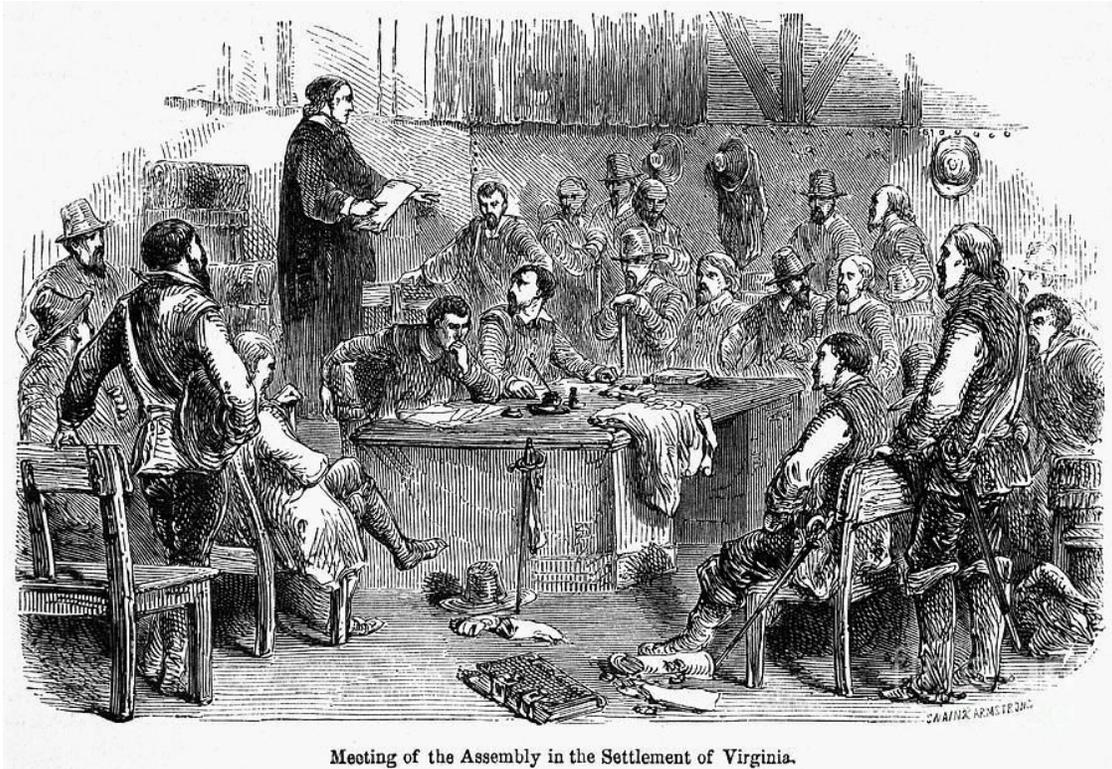
Courtesy Library of Congress

Although slavery existed in all thirteen colonies, it quickly became a vital part of the southern economy. Slaves had no legal rights and were forbidden to read or write. The document above suggests the horrible conditions on board a slave ship.

Document Analysis

1. Describe two ways in which slave traders were able to fit a large number of slaves onto their ships.
2. Name at least one undemocratic feature of the colonies that is shown in this document.
3. How does this document help answer the DBQ question?

Document C Engraving of Virginia's House of Burgesses



Meeting of the Assembly in the Settlement of Virginia.

Courtesy Library of Congress

This engraving depicts the first meeting of the Virginia House of Burgesses in 1619. This group of representatives served as the legislature (or law makers) of colonial Virginia. The Virginia House of Burgesses was made up of individuals who were elected through popular vote by the colonists of Virginia. Eventually, each colony in America would have such a legislature.

Document Analysis

1. Where was this legislature founded?
2. How did the House of Burgesses allow colonists to have a voice in government?
3. What powers did the House of Burgesses have?
4. How does this document help answer the DBQ question?

Document D Fundamental Orders of Connecticut (1639)

" . . . It is ordered that there be yearly two General Assemblies or Courts. . .and a governor shall be chosen for the year and shall have power to administer justice according to the laws here established. The choice for governor shall be made by all those who are eligible to vote. . .

"It is ordered that no person be chosen governor more than once in two years. . .

"It is ordered that every General Court shall include the governor, to moderate the court. . .and if the governor neglects or refuses to call the General Court into session, the voters may do so. . .In the General Court shall rest supreme power of the colony, and they only shall have power to make laws or repeal them, to levy taxes, dispose of unclaimed land; they shall have the power to call public officials or any other person into question for any misdemeanor and may with good reason remove or deal otherwise accordingly with the offender. . ."

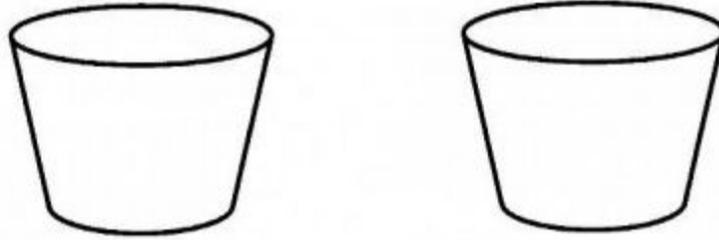
Document Analysis

1. Name at least two powers given to the General Court in this document.
2. Describe at least two democratic features of Connecticut's government.
3. Name two ways that the power of the governor was limited by this document.
4. How does this document help answer the DBQ question?

Bucketing – Getting Ready to Write

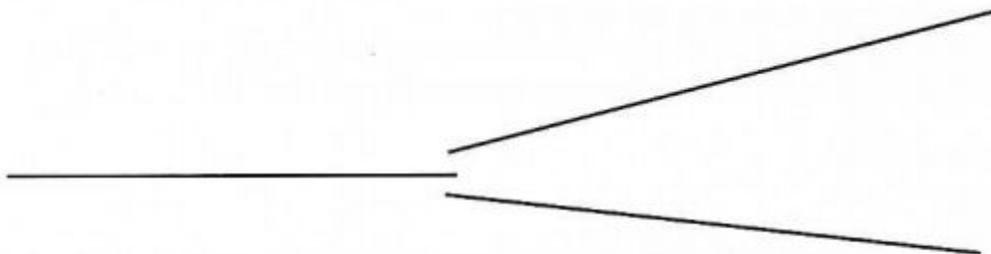
Bucketing

Look over all the documents and organize them into your final buckets. Write final bucket labels under each bucket and place the letters of the documents in the buckets where they belong. It is okay to put a document in more than one bucket. Remember, your buckets are going to become your body paragraphs.



Thesis Development and Roadmap

On the chickenfoot below, write your thesis and your roadmap. Your thesis is always an opinion and answers the DBQ question. The roadmap is created from your bucket labels and lists the topic areas you will examine in order to prove your thesis.



From Thesis to Essay Writing

DBQ Essay Outline Guide

Working Title

Paragraph #1

Grabber

Background

Stating the question with key terms defined

Thesis and roadmap

Paragraph #2

Baby thesis for bucket one (topic sentence)

Evidence: supporting detail from documents with document citation

Argument: connecting evidence to the thesis

Paragraph #3

Baby thesis for bucket two (topic sentence)

Evidence: supporting detail from documents with document citation

Argument: connecting evidence to the thesis

Paragraph #4

Conclusion: Restatement of main idea

