



Consent of the Governed

Civics is all around us. There is a lot to know about the government and how “We the People” interact with the government and each other. Let’s help each other expand our civic literacy.

Public protests in the United States draw on a long legacy of the pursuit of rights and liberties, promised by the Declaration of Independence and guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. Thomas Jefferson wrote in the [Preamble to the Declaration of Independence](#): government exists to protect the natural rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The Declaration of Independence also shares with the candid world that when “...Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government...as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.” As long as the government protects their natural rights, the people provide their consent to be governed.



The idea of the ‘[consent of the governed](#)’ was derived by the Founding Fathers through John Locke and his thinking on the relationship between [natural rights](#) and government. The protests taking place these past few months reflect citizens expressing their dissatisfaction with the government and they are advocating for change.



The Constitution protects an individual’s right to seek change through the [First Amendment](#) freedoms of speech, petition and assembly. “We the People” are able to express dissatisfaction with governmental actions and policies through peaceful protest, speeches, petitions, and elections. These protected liberties afford the American public opportunities to affect change and advocate for government transformation when they believe it is necessary, just as Jefferson said in 1776.

To Think and To Do: What is the relationship between the concept of the ‘consent of the governed’ and the First Amendment? Can you find examples of how individuals or groups exercise their First Amendment rights to advocate for change from the government?

Learn MORE about the concept of consent of the governed. Free registration may be required.

- [The Enlightenment and Its Influence](#), from Civics360
- [Do We Need Government?](#), from 8-Bit Philosophy
- [Consent of the Governed](#), from The Bill of Rights Institute

