



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.

Civil rights protests are happening across the country, from large cities like Chicago, IL and Seattle, WA to small towns like Williston, FL and Bethel, CT. These actions draw on a long legacy in this country of the pursuit of rights and liberties, promised by the Declaration of Independence and guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. It is Americans’ belief in the words set forth in these documents that makes a redress of grievances possible. The Founding Fathers desired a government that protected liberty and natural rights. They were influenced in their outlook by the thinkers of the Enlightenment.

One of the most influential of these thinkers was John Locke, a British political philosopher. It was Locke’s view that there was a social contract between the government and society, based on natural law. Natural law is the idea that all human beings are born with and entitled to life and liberty and that the government must respect these natural rights. This expectation creates a social contract that defines the rights, duties, and limitations of both the people and the government. When this social contract is broken, the people have the right to change it.



John Locke



The Founding Fathers included these ideas when they wrote the [Declaration of Independence](#) and drafted the U.S. Constitution. The Declaration of Independence argued that the British government had violated the social contract and deserved to be replaced by a new independent government in America. The [United States Constitution](#) promises that “We the People” shall have a government that establishes justice, ensures domestic tranquility, promotes the general welfare, and secures the blessings of liberty.

When Americans today protest, they are following in the footsteps of our Founding Fathers and demanding that their natural rights under natural law be protected and the social contract fulfilled.

To Think and To Do: How does the concept of natural rights influence the relationship between the government and the people?

Learn MORE about the concept of the social contract. Free registration may be required.

- [The Enlightenment and Its Influence](#), from Civics360
- [Do We Need Government?](#), from 8-Bit Philosophy
- [The Enlightenment: Social Contract](#), from The Oxford Observer

