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### The Thirteen Colonies

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- **Fundamental Orders of Connecticut, 1639**
- **Declaration of Independence, 1776**
- **U.S. Constitution, 1789**
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**Critical Thinking** Virginia, settled in 1607, was the first English colony in America. Georgia was the last, in 1733. How were the governments of these colonies similar?
System of Checks and Balances

**CONGRESS**

*Legislative function*

Congress passes the laws that create executive agencies and the programs they administer, and it can override presidential vetoes by a two-thirds vote of both chambers and can impeach the president.

Senate ratifies treaties and confirms presidential appointments to the executive branch and the courts.

**PRESIDENT**

*Executive function*

President can recommend legislation to Congress, veto bills passed by Congress, and implement laws passed by Congress.

**COURTS**

*Judicial function*

Courts can interpret congressional statutes and declare acts of Congress unconstitutional.

Courts can declare presidential actions unconstitutional and can determine whether the executive branch is properly administering laws passed by Congress.

Courts confirm judges.

Critical Thinking The principle of checks and balances prevents one branch of government from becoming too powerful. In what ways does Congress check the Supreme Court?
Why Do I Have to Study Government?

When asked about government, many high school students will say that it is uninteresting. Politics, however, can be an exciting subject. People fight and die for political beliefs. Governments address some of the most basic issues in your life—the purity of the food you eat, your personal safety, your education, and your right to voice an opinion.

A textbook that deals primarily with the institutions of government and does not relate them to your everyday world makes government difficult to understand. This textbook, United States Government: Democracy in Action, is different.

The authors know that our success as a representative democracy and a leading voice for freedom in the world depends on your understanding of and participation in government. That is why they want you to become a positive, interested, contributing citizen.

Government Concepts

To help you better understand how government works, how it is a dynamic, exciting process, and how it impacts you, United States Government: Democracy in Action emphasizes 14 key government concepts. In this textbook, you will find a built-in structure that helps you identify the key concept in every lesson and see it in action.

Each section begins with a Reader’s Guide that introduces the key government concept emphasized in that section under the heading, Understanding Concepts. In each section review, Concepts in Action allows you to demonstrate you understand the key concept by completing the related activity. In every chapter review there are review questions under the heading of Understanding Concepts that reinforce the key concept presented in each section of the chapter. These concepts will help you better understand government and see why it is important to you today. Read more about these concepts on the next page.
Growth of Democracy  We take democracy for granted, but it has taken generations to develop. This concept will help you understand how democracy grows and why.

Federalism  The Founders established a system of shared powers known as federalism. This system is dynamic. The constantly changing relationship between the states and the federal government is a central issue in the study of United States government.

Separation of Powers  To prevent a concentration of power, the Constitution divided power among three branches of government—legislative, executive, and judicial. This is a source of our government’s strength and also, at times, a source of conflict.

Checks and Balances  Closely related to the concept of separation of powers, checks and balances outlines specific ways in which each branch affects the powers of the other branches.

Civil Liberties  The United States has a long history of personal freedoms. An appreciation for the struggle to preserve and extend these freedoms is vital to the understanding of democracy.

Civil Rights  Like personal freedoms, civil rights have developed throughout our history. Citizens should understand the important concept of civil rights—your guarantee of equality under the law.

Civic Participation  For a democratic system to survive, its citizens must take an active role in government. Not only do you have important responsibilities such as voting and understanding the laws, you also have opportunities to contribute through your unique abilities. Look for features and activities called Participating in Government throughout this book.

Comparative Government  A better understanding of United States government is gained by comparing it to other governments in the world. The text includes an entire unit devoted to these comparisons, as well as special features called Comparing Governments.

Global Perspectives  We live in an interdependent world in which every nation’s actions contribute to the world’s political, social, and economic environment. The text examines this interdependence in the concept of global perspectives.

Constitutional Interpretations  The Constitution outlines the framework of our government. The Founders, however, realized that the government would have to deal with unforeseen changes. Therefore, they wrote the Constitution in language that provides the necessary flexibility.

Political Processes  The procedures for governing the nation on a daily basis are known as political processes. United States Government: Democracy in Action details the dynamic processes of government as they affect both the officeholders and you, the citizen.

Public Policy  The course of action a government takes in response to issues is called public policy. This text examines the concept in relation to specific government decisions at every level.

Free Enterprise  The free enterprise economy of the United States is consistent with the nation’s history of rights and freedoms. Freedom of choice in economic decisions supports other freedoms. Understanding the concept of free enterprise is basic to studying American political institutions.

Cultural Pluralism  The United States is not only a nation of immigrants, it is a nation that has benefited from the cultural contributions of all the various groups that now make up its population. Cultural pluralism also serves as a constraint on government, requiring political solutions within a consensus of a variety of views.