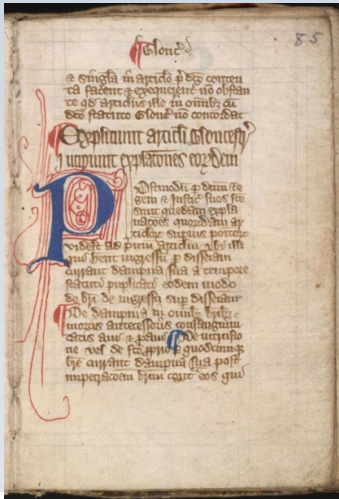


# AMERICAN STUDIES: THE ORIGINS OF AMERICAN GOVERNMENT



# Goals:

- ❑ To provide students with a high-interest introduction to American Government
- ❑ To instill in them an appreciation of the complex, serendipitous, bloody, and often lucky process by which our institutions came to be
- ❑ To offer them a dramatic, human, colorful telling of what is often a dry structural course
- ❑ To provide them an historical context in which to understand the “original intent” of the Founding Fathers
- ❑ To explain how the role and operations of government have evolved in the face of technological and social change

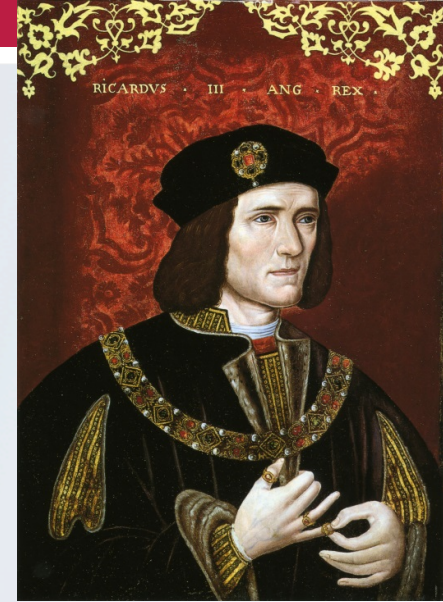


# The Medieval Origins:

- The Anglo-Saxon origins of local self-government: *hides, hundreds, fyrds, and shires*
- The Vikings and the “Law Men:” the origins of trial by jury
- The Norman Conquest, feudalism, and the rise of national monarchies: feudal custom, Common Law, and *Magna Carta*
- The High Middle Ages: the wool trade, the Hundred Years War, the Black Death, and the rise of the House of Commons
- The Wars of the Roses: Anarchy, opportunity, and the decline of the monarchy



# The Tudor Revolution



Battle of Bosworth 1485: Henry Tudor becomes Henry VII. As a regicide, Henry and his successors had to legitimize their power. All found it better through the Parliament. They would ask the Lords and Commons to pass legislation and then enforce these laws rather than impose them directly. The Parliament thus took charge of nearly every aspect of law and government. At the same time the Tudors expanded local self-government through a new voluntary office, the Justices of the Peace. This eroded the authority of the local nobles and expanded royal power as the Justices owed their positions to a royal appointment.



# The Tudor Revolution Cont.



Henry VIII continued his father's practice of ruling through the Parliament and expanded both the number and authority of the Justices of the Peace. In the Act of Supremacy of 1534, it was the Parliament which gave Henry the authority to break with Rome. Henry's power over the Parliament remained considerable, but even rubber stamping the King's will added substantially to the Parliament's authority.

Elizabeth ascended the throne in 1558. A woman and the daughter of an adulterous heretic and witch, her claim to the throne was weak at best. Like her father and grandfather before her, she turned to the House of Commons as her best ally. She expanded its authority, adopted policies popular with its members, and turned the Navy over to a group of commoner officers. She kept her expenditures low to avoid having to ask for new taxes and avoided war with Spain as long as she could to help expand trade. By her death, the Commons had come to see itself as a sort of partner to the Crown.



# The Stuart Reaction



The Stuart Dynasty sought to undo the partnership of King and Commons wrought by the Tudors, and replace it with an absolute monarchy. They also sought to impose religious orthodoxy enforced by the state. The result was Civil War from 1641 to 1647. Parliament then tried and executed King Charles I in 1649.

England became a republic for the next decade, but rapidly deteriorated into a military dictatorship led by Oliver Cromwell. In despair, Parliament invited Charles II back from exile in 1660. Charles ruled successfully for 25 years, but his brother ran afoul of the Parliament in 1688 and was driven from the throne in the Glorious Revolution. William of Orange was invited to succeed him on condition that he sign a “Bill of Rights” which became the cornerstone of English liberties down to the present day.



# The Legacy



Given the heritage of the English colonists, the students are called up on to explain why the Revolution happened in a paper.

In a mid-term, they have to explain the checks and balances built into the Constitution, the careful separation of state and federal powers, and where these assumptions came from. From this, the students are presented with the notion that the Founding Fathers were very intelligent men but drew heavily on 1000 years of English history for their inspiration.