

# The Enlightenment and our Society Today

## Group A) Montesquieu

An influential French writer, Montesquieu devoted himself to the study of political liberty. His most famous phrase “power should be a check to power”, means that each branch in government should balance another branch. The King would hold **executive power**- they carried out the laws of the state. The Parliament held the **legislative power**- the power to make laws. The courts held the **judicial power**. They applied the laws to each case or situation. Montesquieu called this the **separation of powers**.

*“Constant experience shows us that every man invested with power is apt to abuse it and carry his authority as far as it will go. Political liberty can only be found in moderate governments when there is no abuse of power.*

*To prevent this abuse, it is necessary, from the very nature of things, that power should be a check to power. In every government there are three (3) sorts of power: the legislative to make the laws, the Executive (to carry out the laws), and the judiciary (to interpret the laws). “*

**Briefly explain the beliefs of the above philosophe:**

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## Group B) Voltaire

Voltaire – poet, essayist, playwright, historian, and, above all, critic of society. He was a great crusader for liberty, and was twice imprisoned for his writings. In his life and in his works Voltaire represented the spirit of the Enlightenment.

**On Tolerance:** *Tolerance (acceptance) has never brought about civil war. Intolerance has covered the earth with destruction. Each citizen must be permitted to believe and to think that which he rightly believes in. Each person should be able to speak freely as long as it does not disturb the public order. Each person must be able to freely practice any religion which he believes in...*

**On Universal Tolerance:** *It does not require great art, or magnificently trained eloquence, to prove that Christians should tolerate each other. I, however, am going further: I say that we should regard all men as our brothers. What? The Turk my brother? The Chinaman my brother? The Jew? The Siam? Yes, without doubt; are we not all children of the same father and creatures of the same God?*

**Briefly explain the beliefs of the above philosophe:**

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## Group C) Beccaria

An Italian philosophe name Beccaria turned his thoughts to the justice system. He believed that laws existed to help keep order in society, not to get revenge on criminals. He criticized the abuse of justice. This included the torturing of witnesses and suspects, irregular trials, and punishments that were cruel. He said the degree of the punishment should be based on the seriousness of the crime. *Beccaria's book completely changed the face of European society: forty years after it was written, most European countries had abolished torture and maiming as well as severely trimmed the number of crimes punishable by death.*

*“Any punishment that goes beyond the need to preserve order in society is unjust by its very nature.”*

**Briefly explain the beliefs of the above philosophe:**

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## Group D) Mary Wollstonecraft

In the 1700's many women also picked up these Enlightenment themes. She disagreed with others who said that women's education shouldn't be equal to men's. She argued that women, like men, need education to become virtuous. She urged women to enter male-dominated fields of medicine and politics.

*“Contending for the rights of women, my main argument is built in this simple principle, that if she be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue; for truth must be common to all, or it will be inefficacious (ineffective) with respect to its influence on general practice. If children are to be educated to understand the true principle of patriotism, their mother must be a patriot...but the education and situation of woman at present shuts her out from such investigations.”*

**Briefly explain the beliefs of the above philosophe:**

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**Directions:**

- 1. With your group go to the same letter you had before, and read the “Society Today” scenario.**
- 2. Discuss how your philosophe would react to the scenario and answer the question using EVIDENCE from their beliefs on the other side of the sheet.**
- 3. Group Roles: One student in your group is responsible for explaining the scenario to the class, one student is responsible for explaining YOUR answer to the question to the class, one student is responsible for sharing your answer on the board, and ALL of you must write your answer down.**

**Society Today Scenarios**



**Group A) Society today**

Beginning during the time of George W. Bush’s Presidency, there was a vast overuse of the power of the executive (presidential) branch of government. Bush began a telephone wiretapping program without the permission of the courts. Tens of millions of Americans have had their telephones tapped, emails and text messages viewed, and library records checked by the government and they didn’t even know it. This program became part of a new policy known as the Patriot Act and is still in use today.

***How you think Montesquieu would feel about a government who secretly checks people’s telephone calls, emails, and text messages?***

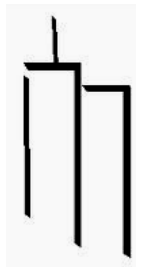
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**Group B) Society today**

There has been a great deal of controversy about the planned building of a new Mosque (Islamic place of worship) near the site where the World Trade Center once stood (Ground Zero). Since it was followers of a radical branch of the Islamic religion who attacked the World Trade Center on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, many Americans are against the building of this new Mosque. Others point out that the new Mosque is for peaceful, non-militant Muslims, and that everyone in the United States has the right to freedom of religion.



***What might Voltaire say about the building of this new Mosque? Explain your answer.***

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**Group C) Society today**

As a result of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, the US has captured many prisoners. These prisoners are being held in various detention centers around the world. It has been documented and confirmed that they are sometimes mistreated and tortured in an effort to gain valuable information needed to fight the war on terror.

***How do you think Beccaria would feel about the mistreatment of these prisoners?***

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**Group D) Society today**

In Japan, educated women are often forced to retire or quit their jobs after they have babies. Though these women are as educated and hard-working as their male co-workers, they are often not considered for high level positions because they have children at home and cannot work 15 hour days.



***How do you think Mary Wollstonecraft would view the treatment of female workers in Japan?***

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### Alternate Activity

**ACTIVITY:** Murrow is surely one of the best high schools in New York City. However, no school is perfect. Think about some of the experiences you've had here at Murrow and create one new law that you think would help improve our school. *Your law must be based on the specific ideas of any of the philosophes we learned about today. Work TOGETHER with your group to create the law. Every group will share their law on the board.*