

Founding Father's Ideology

Athenian Democracy “was a radical form of Democracy” (Boorstin, 219). Perhaps too radical for our Founding Fathers when they debated over what shape our government would take during that fateful summer in Philadelphia. The Founding Fathers will look instead to the world's longest lasting government, the Republic of Rome as a model for the United States government.

More than a few of those in attendance had likely researched Plato's *Republic* in preparation for the Constitutional Convention. In what is today considered the bedrock of thought concerning government, Plato condemns Athenian Democracy. **According to Plato “mob rule, demagoguery, and a chronic tendency toward anarchy are the essential weaknesses of democracy” (Patterson, 158).** Mob rule was exactly what the Founders were concerned about. They wanted only educated, affluent men of property taking part in their representative government. In Rome the common man or “rabble” did not have a place in government. The Athenian practice of any citizen obtaining a government position by chance lottery would have been preposterous to the Founders. Most felt that citizens who did not know any better should just pay their taxes and go on being productive citizens, not participants in government.

The American Revolution to a large regard occurred over taxes. In its apex the Roman Republic taxed extremely little to support all its municipal programs and the prosperity its people afforded. Our Founding Fathers looked to this example and would turn over in their graves if they knew what we paid today! *C'est la vie.*

The “total” Democracy in place in ancient Athens was completely dependant on slavery. For its citizens to be able to participate in their sovereign assemblies they had to have slaves at home sowing the field and baking the bread to keep life going. Rome's Republic also had slaves

but its government functioning was not dependant upon them. A good portion of the Founding Fathers were slave owners and some already thought that the issue of slavery would be a problem. As a result they pushed for an end to the slave trade in 1790 in hopes that slavery would just die a natural death. But they did not want a government whose functioning was entirely dependent on the structure of slavery as in Athens.

“With Rome's triumph... the idea of freedom completed its conquest of the Western mind in both its secular and its spiritual aspects”

http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/1/9/7/4/0/p197401_index.html, 4/2/06). As our Founding Fathers looked to Rome as a guide to secular freedom they also recognized the importance of spiritual freedom as well. As long as you paid homage to the Roman Republic you were left alone to a large degree to practice religion privately. The fact does remain that the Christians were persecuted before Constantine's reign but only when they refused to pay tribute to Rome, caused disturbances and sought martyrdom. In Athens the main public reason given for Sophocles' sentence was religious. The Founding Fathers from New England knew the dangers of having the government intertwined with religion or acknowledging an official religion. Many of their fathers had come to America seeking religious freedom. As a result the Constitution will have a clause specifically stating that our government cannot favor one religion over another.

Finally the Founders likely looked towards the basic facts of stability, longevity and prosperity. Rome's apex of Republic will eclipse Athens 'mob rule' by more than 300 years. No other society will enjoy the prosperity Rome's Republic had until ours would come along. Indeed, today our Congressmen and media would do well to realize that our Founding Fathers looked to Rome and not to Greece as the mold for our Constitution. **“We are a Republic today, not a Democracy” (Dr. Finnegan, 2/15/06).**