

PROJECT: LEGAL TRADITIONS

In America today, we live under laws that are rooted in ancient traditions. It's rather eye-opening to trace some of our most basic rights to laws of civilizations that existed 2000 to 4000 years ago!



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OBJECTIVES

- Identify today's ideals of basic human rights in classical traditions and religions.

Before You Begin

In this unit, you've looked at Judaism, Greek and Roman societies, and the rise of Christianity. Each of these cultures and religions had clear laws, tenets, or codes that were fundamental to its society or beliefs. Many of them have transcended time to impact our lives today in a wide variety of ways. Three specific rights from ancient times have made their way into our understanding of basic human rights. Not only America, but many countries around the world believe that many rights developed long ago are

fundamental to human rights and should be a part of every modern society. These are written in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

Equality before the law

Innocent until proven guilty

Trial by a jury of your peers

Directions

Look at each of the three rights above and think about them for a moment. Are these new concepts to you? How do they function in our society? Are they part of every society across the world? Think back to the unit and consider which of these laws may have roots in ancient cultures and religions, especially, the Mosaic law, Christian thought, and Greek and Roman governments. Take one at a time and trace its origin. Where was each concept derived from, and how has it changed over time? How might this particular idea have been different from ideas in other cultures? How would it have changed the way that people functioned in society? In a comprehensive essay, write about each of the rights above, analyzing origins, ancient cultural impact, and how they have evolved to be so fundamental in our present time.

Prompt

Unit assignments and outside sources, such as the Internet, encyclopedias, and basic history of law texts, will provide helpful insight. Remember the importance of reading and citing original sources. Start with an outline, and fully develop the story of each right, citing both ancient and contemporary resources and fully arguing your opinion.