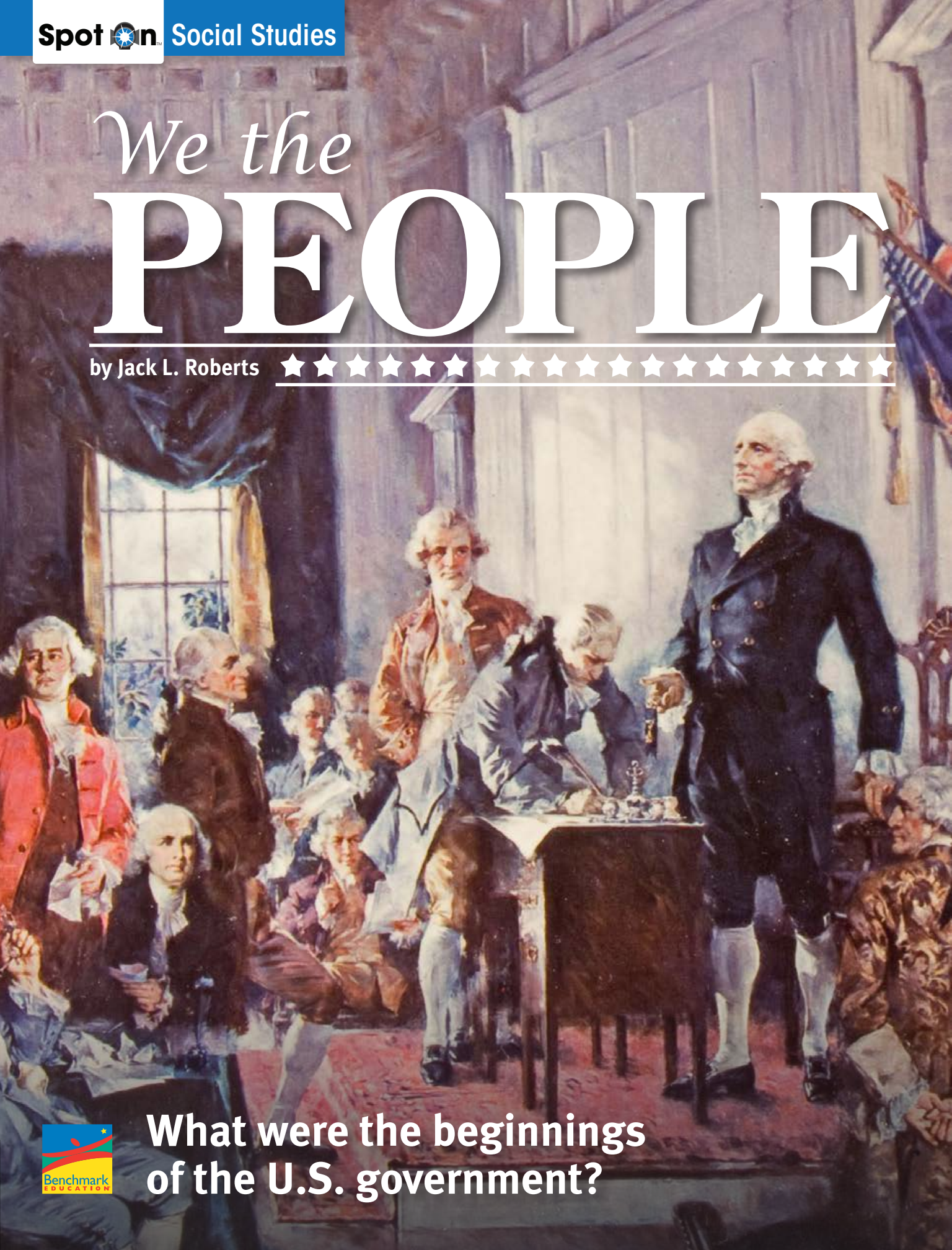
Spot On Social Studies

We the PEOPLE

by Jack L. Roberts



What were the beginnings of the U.S. government?

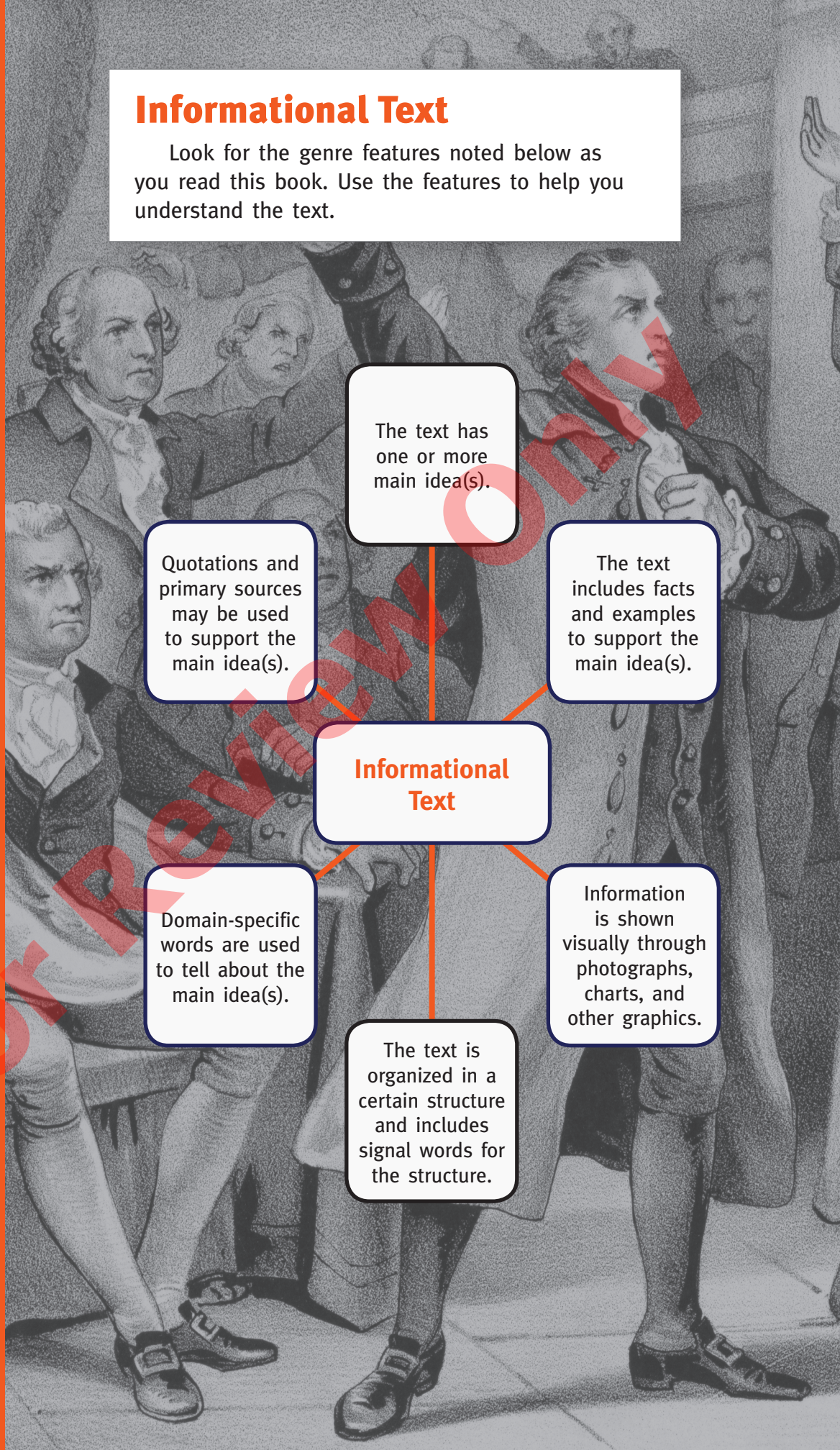
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Democracy in the United States of America

Where does the U.S. government get its power? The answer is "from the people." The citizens of the country vote for the men and women who run the government. Those people, called representatives, vote for or against new laws.

If citizens don't like what the government does, they can vote for new people to represent them.



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Our government is based on an idea called "consent of the governed." That means the people consent (or agree) to give the government its power.

This idea is what makes the U.S. government a **democracy.** A democracy is a form of government in which power is held by the people.

How did the United States become a democracy? The story starts when the Pilgrims first arrived in North America nearly 400 years ago.



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CHAPTER 1

Colonial America:

1620–1764

In September 1620, a ship called the *Mayflower* sailed from Plymouth, England. The *Mayflower* was headed for the English **colony** of Virginia. (Virginia was England's first colony in what is now the United States.) The *Mayflower* carried 102 men, women, and children. They were going to America for many different reasons.

About forty of the passengers wanted freedom to practice their religion. They were called "Saints." Today, we know them as Pilgrims.

The *Mayflower* didn't reach Virginia, however. Instead, it ended up in what is now Massachusetts. There, the Pilgrims founded Plymouth Colony.



In 1620, after more than two months at sea, the Pilgrims landed in what is now the state of Massachusetts.

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The Mayflower Compact

The Pilgrims knew they needed rules and laws to **govern** their new colony. So in November 1620, the men on the ship got together in a small cabin on the *Mayflower*. They all signed an important document. It said that the Pilgrims would obey, or follow, laws and rules. These rules and laws were made "for the general good of the colony."

Today, this document is called the Mayflower Compact. Many people say it is the earliest **constitution** of the United States. A constitution is a set of basic rules and laws used to govern.



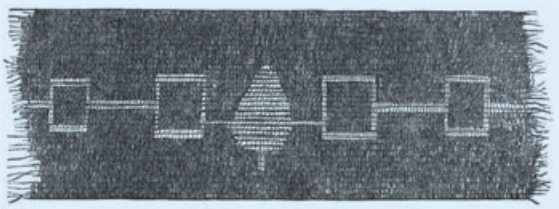
▲ **Forty-one men signed the Mayflower Compact.**

The Iroquois Confederacy

Long before the Pilgrims arrived, five Native American nations formed a group known as the Iroquois Confederacy. This confederation united the Iroquois in peace. Iroquois leaders wrote a set of laws known as the "Great Law of Peace." They recorded each law on a string of wampum (beads made of shell).

The Iroquois Confederacy was an example of representative democracy. That's a type of government in which people vote for representatives to pass laws for them. It is also a type of government that is based on "the consent of the governed."

Many years later, Benjamin Franklin and other American leaders, called the Framers, used some of the Iroquois' ideas of government to write important documents such as the U.S. Constitution.



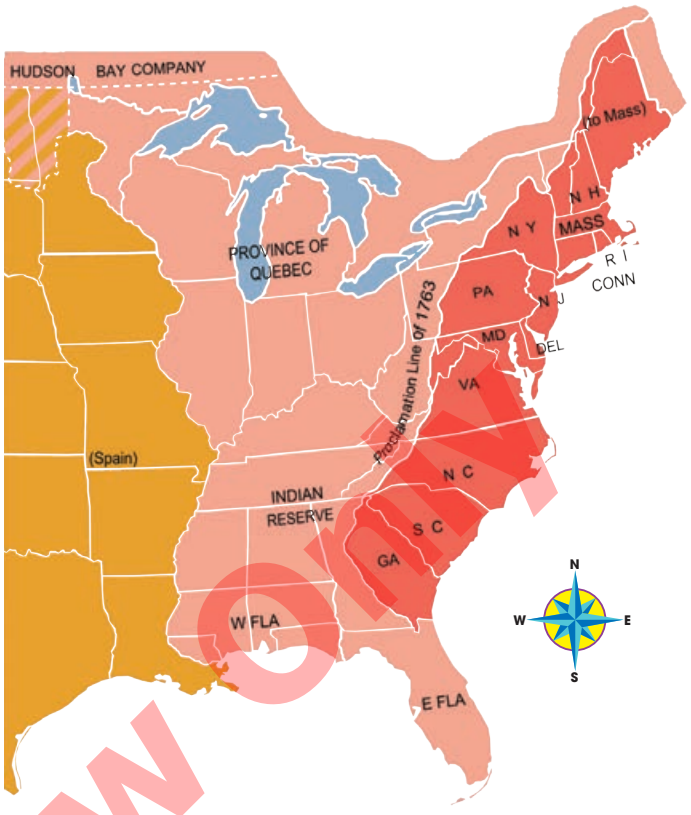
▲ **This belt made of wampum shows the flag of the Iroquois Confederacy.**

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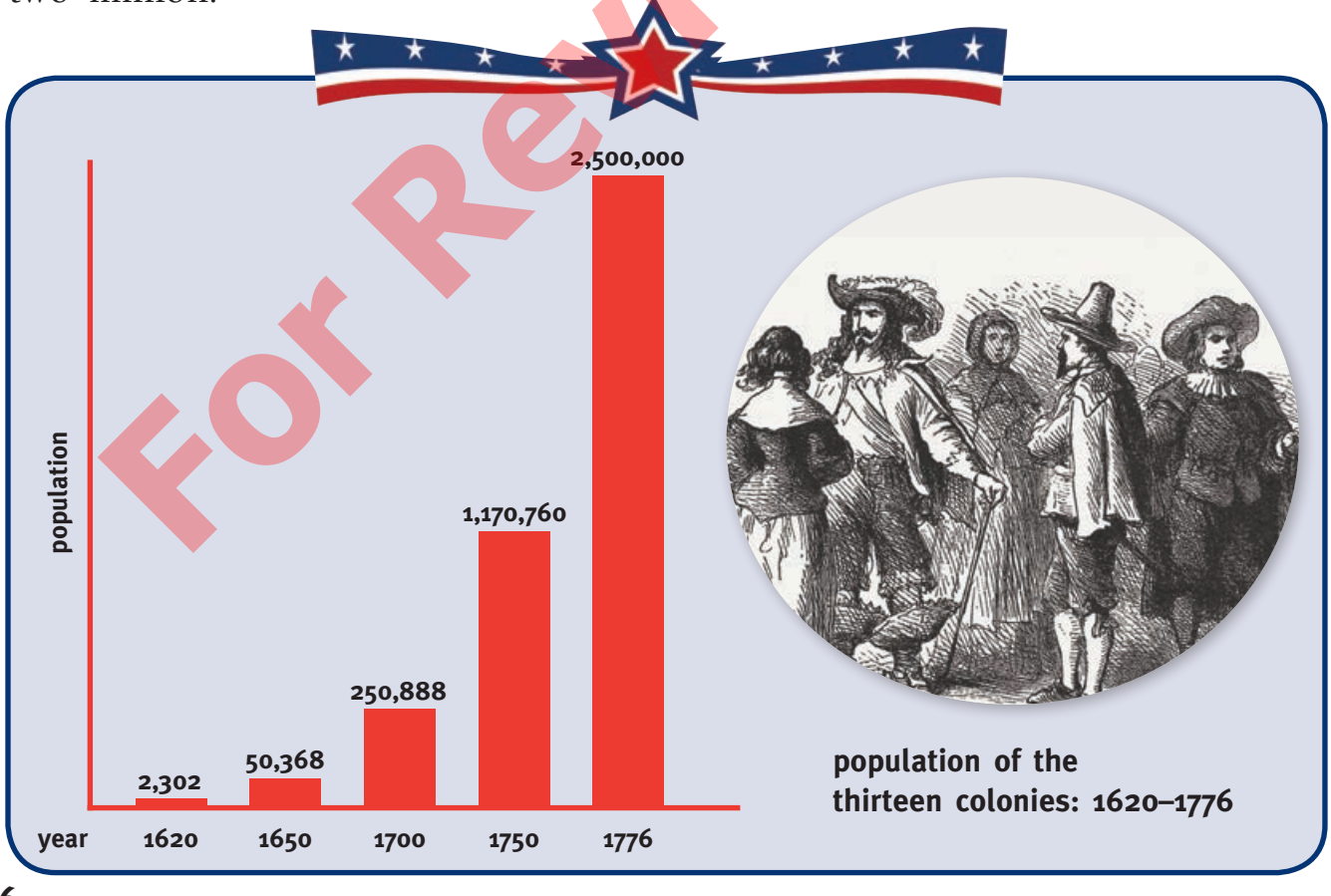
The Growth of the Colonies

After the founding of Plymouth Colony, many more people came from Great Britain and other European countries. They started new colonies. By 1733, there were thirteen British colonies on the east coast of North America.

The population of these colonies grew quickly. In 1650, there were just over 50,000 people in all thirteen colonies. By 1776, there were more than two million.



▲ **The thirteen colonies lay along the Atlantic shore of what would later become the United States.**



population of the thirteen colonies: 1620–1776

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The Beginning of Change

As the colonies grew, the British government mostly left the colonies alone to govern themselves.

But in 1760, things began to change. George III became king of Great Britain. Three years later, he issued a new rule. It said that American colonists could not settle or buy land outside the colonies. This had an impact on the relationship between colonists and the Native Americans who had lived on this land for thousands of years. Ever since early colonial times, colonists and Native Americans had faced conflict and competition for land and resources. King George wanted to prevent wars, but the new rule angered the colonists.

Then, in April 1764, the British government passed the Sugar Act. This put a tax on sugar, coffee, and a few other things that colonists needed. The colonists were upset about paying more money for those items.



▲ George III became king of Great Britain and Ireland on October 25, 1760.

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CHAPTER 2

The Road to Revolution:

1765–1775

In 1765, the British government issued another new law, called the Stamp Act. The law said that colonists had to buy a stamp to put on any printed documents, such as newspapers or marriage licenses.

When they heard about this law, the colonists became angry. They did not have representatives in the British government who could vote for or against this tax. So they felt they should not have to pay the tax. The colonists had a term for this situation. They called it "taxation without representation."

Great Britain already had some soldiers in the colonies. But as colonists began to protest, Britain sent more soldiers to Boston in 1768. The presence of the soldiers made the colonists even angrier.



▲ **The Sons of Liberty was a secret organization. Its members spoke out against British taxes. Here, the Sons of Liberty and other colonists protest the Stamp Act.**

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