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The Mayflower Compact was the first agreement of self-government developed in America. There were 102 passengers on the *Mayflower*. 41 of the passengers were religious separatists seeking freedom from the Church of England. The ship set off with the destination of Virginia, given to them by the Virginia Company who financed the journey, but accidentally landed in what is now Massachusetts due to the lack of accurate navigation technology. The Virginia Company was at first meant to act as the government organization for the new colony, but since the ship landed outside the company's territory, many colonists felt that there was no government to make and enforce rules upon them. Fortunately, some colonists such as William Bradford took charge and acted quickly, handling potentially dangerous mutinous feelings among the settlers by drafting up the Mayflower Compact. Many of the themes and ideas of the Mayflower Compact are still reflected in our government's documents such as the Constitution to this day nearly 400 years later.

An idea intrinsic to our nation's government is the concept that the government should be made up of leaders chosen by the citizens, rather than being run by someone destined to rule from birth as England did in the early 1600's, the time of the Mayflower's journey. Under the Compact, John Carver was chosen as the first governor, replaced by William Bradford when he died. After that, yearly a governor and a few assistant governors was chosen by a group of adult males of the colony known as the Civil Body Politic. The government established by the Compact was a republic style of representation, similar to what the US still used today, albeit with a much more complicated process of choosing the leaders. The Compact did not have term limits however, with Bradford being re-elected about 30 years straight. The Constitution did not

have term limits either at first, but George Washington made the intelligent decision of leaving office after 8 years, to keep from looking like a king staying in power for too long. Overall, much of the basic structure of the government established by the Compact carried over somehow to the Constitution and the government of the US today.

Another common theme between the Compact and our government now is the guarantee of fair treatment and due process under the law. The Compact promises that the government and its officials would apply the laws to everyone equally, and that the government would also have to follow its own laws, "...and by virtue hereof to enact, constitute, and frame such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions and offices..." Our Constitution today has similar clauses, protecting citizens from being, "...deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law", as stated by the fifth amendment. Since both documents were written by important people leaving the autocratic and tyrannical British government behind, it makes sense that they would both include limits on the government's arbitrary power in the text by which they planned to run an administration. The idea that the government should serve the people has also carried over from the Compact. The Compact was signed by all of the surviving members of the Mayflower's journey, showing that the colonists realized a government was necessary and they supported the one which would be created by that document. Since having approval from everyone on the Constitution, the writers began the document with "We the People," signifying that the people who would be affected by the passing of that document agreed to its terms. Consent of the governed has been a theme carried through much of history in the new world, starting with the Mayflower Compact. Overall, many themes from the Mayflower Compact such as representation of citizens in the government, the guarantee of fair and equal treatment under the law, and

consent of the governed have remained a constant in American government and legislation since being introduced by the Mayflower Compact nearly 400 years ago.

Sources:

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