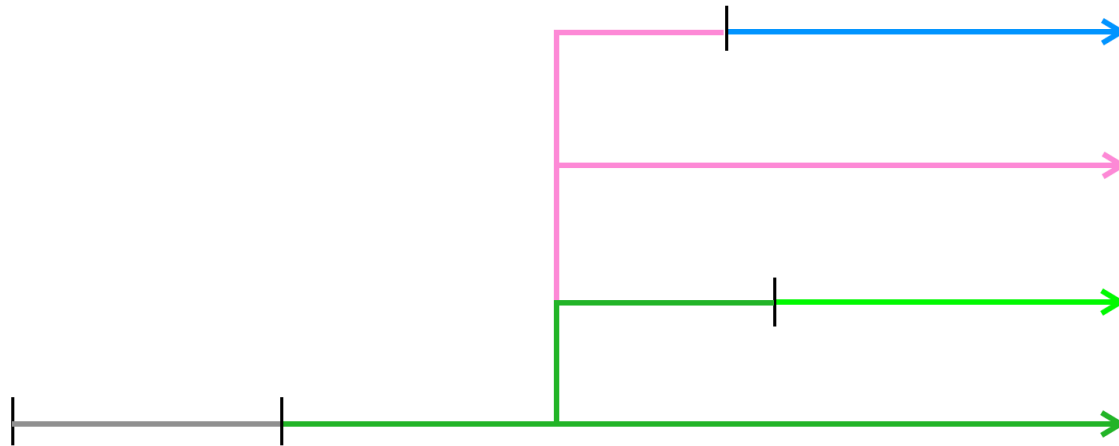


B. America and its Greco-Roman Roots

1. If we separate the elements of Western civilization from the broader context and focus on these elements exclusively, then our representation can change to one like this, where the convergence has been omitted, and tick marks are used to highlight important moments that represent significant changes.



2. One of these we know well: the birth of the United States in **1776**, when America declared its independence from the British Empire, i.e. the Anglosphere.
3. When America declared its independence, it was from the *monarchy* of Great Britain. This was an ancient form of government, adapted to more modern English culture, but still not tailored to serve the fundamental aim of the founding fathers: the protection of inalienable natural rights.
4. In creating a new country, America's leaders were reaching back far into the heritage of Western civilization, and reviving a social contract and form of government that had first been proposed in ancient Rome, namely a *republic*.
5. Also, as we have seen, Americans have become more accustomed to thinking of their country as a "democracy," and to insist that the right to vote is the most essential feature of American government. This stems from another ancient model: *Athenian Democracy*.
6. Modern Western government is thus deeply indebted to both Greece (especially Athens) and Rome.
7. Athenian Democracy was an innovation of a lawgiver named Cleisthenes **c.508 BC**. His goal was to help Athens avoid the pitfalls associated with monarchy that are to be found wherever that system is relied on, including the tyranny of kings and their supporting caste (known as an aristocracy). Athenian Democracy became an example of how a society can negotiate and debate its social contract in an open, inclusive way.

8. The problem with this form of government is that it resolves political differences by majority vote, and does not acknowledge any limits on majority rule. The most dramatic illustration of this reality is the case of the condemnation of Socrates by the Athenian democracy. Socrates was accused of undermining traditional values, i.e. the social contract, an essentially “voted to death.” He had not committed any crime, but he was unpopular, especially with Athenian political leaders, so they used the power of democracy to rid themselves of him. Perhaps not surprisingly, Athenian democracy did not last much longer!
9. Rome, for its part, contributed the powerful, related idea, that governments—even popular governments—must be limited by a set of fundamental laws (a *constitution*) in order to even more effectively avoid tyranny.
10. The Roman Republic was founded **c.509 BC** as a system of government with two elected officials called “consuls,” who functioned as co-presidents for one year at a time, and who were responsible for upholding the constitution, which came to be known as the *Laws of the Twelve Tables*.
11. A constitutional system is the most important mechanism for preventing democracy from devolving into mob rule, as sadly happened to Athens. Thus Rome’s model was very important to America’s founding fathers.

