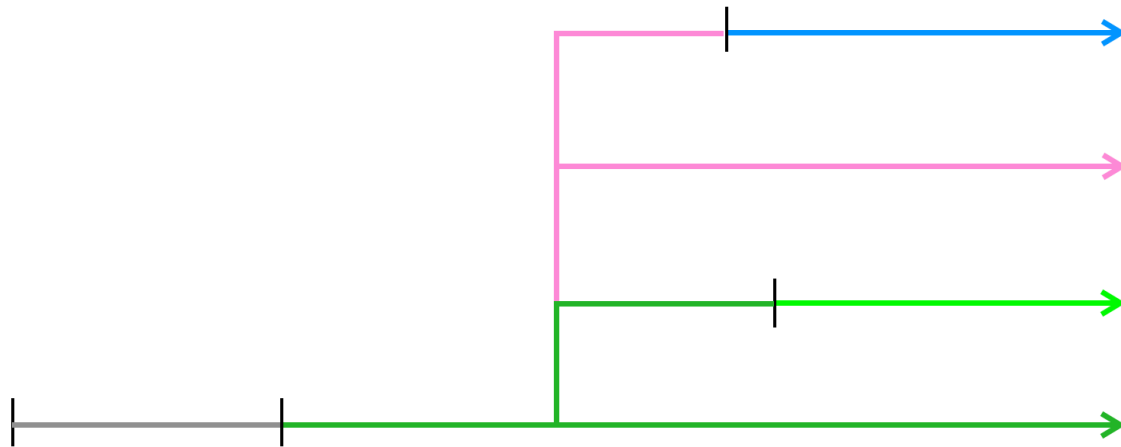


## B. America and its Greco-Roman Roots

1. If we separate the family of Western civilization from the rest, and don't worry about making the lines come together, then our timeline looks like this, where tick marks are used to highlight important events.



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 because the founding fathers could not guarantee the protection of inalienable natural rights under monarchy.
4. In creating a new country, America's leaders were reaching back far into the story of Western civilization, and reviving an idea proposed in ancient Rome: a *republic*.
5. Also, as we have seen, modern Americans think of their country as a "democracy," and tend to insist that the right to vote is the most important right. This stems from another ancient model: *Athenian Democracy*.
6. Modern America owes a lot to ancient Greece (especially Athens) and Rome.
7. The exact root of democracy is invention of it by Athenian leader Cleisthenes **c.508 BC**. His goal was to create a government where all the citizens could vote in the making of the laws.
8. The problem with this form of government is that it did not have limits on what the majority could do. The most dramatic illustration of this reality is the case of the condemnation of Socrates by the Athenian democracy. Socrates was "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 stop the tyranny of the majority.
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. It involves a set of laws that cannot be changed by the majority, and protections for individual rights. Rome’s model for protecting rights was very important to America’s founding fathers.
12. So, for starters, our diagram of Western Civilization begins with Rome & Greece, and stretches up to modern America.

