

★ THE MAYFLOWER COMPACT ★

In November 1620, a group of religious separatists known as the Pilgrims landed off Cape Cod, in present-day Massachusetts. The group had been awarded a right to establish a plantation from the Virginia Company. However, their ship had landed much further north, and some members of the group realized that the Virginia Company had no authority to govern them. They would have to establish their own government.

To begin some form of government, the settlers agreed to cooperate under the conditions of a compact, or agreement. The Mayflower Compact was not a constitution. The Compact was less than 200 words long. It stated a theory of government, not a system of government.

The Mayflower Compact was a remarkable document. The Compact stated a revolutionary new theory about the way that people should be governed. It contained the idea that a government should be formed by the consent of the people, and that the government should work for the common good of the people. The Compact also embodied the principle that the government obtained its authority to rule from the people.

A century later, the ideas contained in the Mayflower Compact became known as the "social contract" theory of government. One hundred and fifty years later, the American colonists used the ideas of the social contract theory to justify independence from England.

The original version of the Mayflower Compact has spelling and punctuation that make it difficult to read. The spelling, punctuation, and wording in the version printed below have been modified to make the document easier to read.



In the name of God, Amen. We, whose names are signed to this document are the loyal subjects of our great leader, Lord King James. Our great king rules Great Britain, France, and Ireland. Our king rules by the grace of God, and he is the defender of the Christian faith and all things honorable.

We have undertaken a voyage on the ship *Mayflower* to plant the first colony in the Northern parts of Virginia. We have undertaken this voyage for the glory of God, the advancement of the Christian faith, and the honor of our king and country.

At this time, in the presence of God and one another, we do solemnly and mutually pledge and combine ourselves together into a single united community. We form this compact for our better ordering and preservation, and the advancement of the goals we all believe in. And in order to accomplish our ends, we will from time to time enact, make up, and frame, such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions, and offices as shall be thought most important and convenient for the general good of the colony. In addition, we promise all due submission and obedience to the colony and its leaders.

In witness to our pledge, we have written our names on this document at Cape Cod on November 11, 1620, in the year of the rule of our leader, Lord King James of England, France, Ireland, and Scotland.