America is known as the land of freedom and democracy. Our public and private educational curriculum teaches how our government was formed, but I would venture to say very few Americans realize the influences behind the Founders' ideas of freedom. The pilgrims' role in forming our current government became an inspiring symbol of democracy and religious freedom. Their story is one of courage and faith that leads to an inspiring legacy. What is even more important is the influence that legacy had on the founding of this great nation.

The pilgrims' journey began in 1606 in Scrooby, England where a small congregation decided to make a Covenant or religious Compact. This act of defiance to the King and the established Church of England was the first step of many that the pilgrims would take. It was the beginning of their persecution from the Church which caused them to be alienated criminals. The Covenant stated that every individual had rights and that decisions in the congregation must be made by mutual consent, instead of through tyranny and oppression. Persecution over the Covenant became so great that the congregation decided to move to Holland where they could practice their religious beliefs without resistance. This decision paved the way to their later journey to America, and the process in which their decision was made demonstrated a perfect model of democracy in practice. Although some may not have agreed with the decision.
to relocate, the congregation voted by majority rule. The others were bound to accept the decision, thus developing the basic principle of democracy.

This move led to their next important but dangerous undertaking: the purchase of a printing press. Their zeal for religious freedom was so great that they wanted to circulate their ideals and allow others to read and hear about them. This idea opposed King James I's established laws of everyone following the Church of England and his control eventually led to the destruction of the Pilgrim Press. Even though the Pilgrim Press was short lived it helped to strengthen their religious convictions and develop their desire for freedom of speech.

The pilgrims longed to create a culture where their notions of freedom would not only survive, but flourish without persecution. Eventually acting upon their dreams, they made their heroic voyage to America, ending at Cape Cod. Despite the fact that this was not their chartered destination, that there were some passengers aboard who were not of the Scrooby congregation and decided they would do as they pleased, and the onset of a long and hard winter, they vowed to uphold their original Covenant and pursue freedom whatever the cost. These obstacles were contributing factors that led to the signing of one of the most important documents in history: the Mayflower Compact. The Mayflower Compact was very similar to the first Covenant that the Scrooby church established. Instead of being a strictly congregational document that bound the church to a church estate, the Mayflower Compact created a civil estate. They formed a government in which all people would have a voice in civil and state matters in order to promote the common welfare of the group. This was the first
stepping stone towards the Constitution that our Founding Fathers created to govern America.

The Pilgrims were simply ordinary people who were willing to pursue their ideals of religious freedom, self-governance, and democracy. Through their heroic and persistent struggles to separate from the established Church and the King's oppression, they helped to inspire America in its earliest years of fighting for freedom. The legacy they left behind is one to admire. Every obstacle they faced and eventually overcame, helped create the nation we live in today. Although the pilgrims did not govern their town with democracy in mind, their ideals of freedom and self-government inspired and contributed to the democracy created by the Founding Fathers. John Quincy Adams stated that "the Mayflower Compact is perhaps the only instance in human history of that positive, original social compact, which speculative philosophers have imagined as the only legitimate source of government." They unknowingly laid the foundation for America's democratic constitution. The pilgrims' pursuit of religious freedom, as well as freedom in all areas of their lives, created an atmosphere and environment where democracy could flourish. Without the pilgrims, America would not be the democratic nation it is today.