The Enlightenment took place during the 18th century and was defined as "man's leaving his self-caused immaturity." A popular motto took place: "dare to know." It was a period of questioning and appliance of reasoning to explore many subjects often left untouched. People were leaving behind their past and advocating the use of scientific method instead of unproven beliefs on religion. The Enlightenment takes its name from those who wanted to contribute to a brighter future and society.

Different paths were taken in order to make this period possible. The intellectuals didn't immediately gather their information from original scientific sources. Due to the fact that most philosophers expressed their notions through complex literary works, popularizers taught their ideas.

The first step to Enlightenment was a new skepticism especially in terms of religion. Earlier periods had attempted to restore religion as the central focus of people's lives; it was only natural to question this practice.

Next, many traders, missionaries, medical practitioners and explorers began taking notes of their excursions. These discoveries brought new insight on the way other civilization lived, covering all aspects dear to them. Such as: religion, customs and beliefs. People were beginning to compare themselves and realized the similarities or differences that shaped their society. The “Noble Savage” was an important idea at this time.
A last important trait for the inspiration of the Enlightenment came from two men. Isaac Newton and John Locke. Newton was known as a genius and made a great deal at instructing his personal rules to later uncover natural laws governing politics, economics, religion, arts, etc. His concept was recognized as the Newtonian world-machine. Being all born as babies, Locke tried to prove that humans acquired their notions of life through nurture instead of nature. He believed people could change and adopt new attitudes to create an improved society. “Locke held that physical sensations interpreted by the mechanical faculties of reason, memory, and judgment, were the entire basis of knowledge and experience.” In addition, he contributed the doctrines of self-reliance and the assumption of rights, which basically guaranteed the unalienable rights of life and freedom to all men.

Taken together, these philosophers offered a possibility for a brave new world.

The leading figures of the Enlightenment were known as philosophers; they were literary people, professors, journalists, statesmen, and social reformers above all. They emerged from various social classes though most were French. They helped shape the culture in France and most importantly, Paris, but their movement soon spread across Europe and to the West. Although they had different backgrounds, they all shared a common point which was to discuss and attempt to change the world. Philosophers relied on scientific methods to explain events and applied rational criticism on all their works. A few dominant men left us with lasting impressions.

Montesquieu, a French noble, criticized French institutions such as the church and monarchy. Much of the French Enlightenment is based on his works touching religion,
slavery and prejudice. He also distinguished three forms of governing: monarchical, republican and despotism which was dependent on fear to inspire obedience.

Once his works were translated in English, they were applied to the American institution.

The most moving man was Voltaire, son of a middle class family who grew up to be a prolific author and wrote in diverse forms. He touched many common themes like other philosophers but he was best regarded for his criticism towards traditional religion and religious toleration. He fought intolerance in France and valued deism.

A third French giant, Denis Diderot also concentrated his works on religion and openly judged Christianity to be the worse of all religions. This changed his views from practicing deism to atheism, ending with a materialistic concept of life. His most famous work known as "the great work of life" influenced many doctors, clergymen, teachers and lawyers once the book became affordable.

The later Enlightenment period gave birth to Jean Jacque Rousseau who held mainly political beliefs. The American Declaration of Independence was the culmination of all these philosophies coming to their peak.