

LESSON ONE

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

Founding Principles Found in this Lesson

Consent of the Governed
Liberty
Private Property

Overview

In this lesson, students will explore the structure, purpose, and significance of the Declaration of Independence. Focusing on the most famous phrases of the Declaration, students will analyze the concepts of inalienable rights and government by consent. Finally, students will begin to understand the philosophical foundations of America's constitutional government.

The object of the Declaration of Independence ... [was] not to find out new principles, or new arguments, never before thought of, not merely to say things which had never been said before; but to place before mankind the common sense of the subject, in terms so plain and firm as to command their assent, and to justify ourselves in the independent stand we are compelled to take.

–Thomas Jefferson, 1825

On the distinctive principles of the Government ...of the United States, the best guides are to be found in...the Declaration of Independence, as the fundamental Act of Union of these States.

–James Madison, 1825

Critical Engagement Questions

Why is the idea of “consent of the governed” so important in the Declaration of Independence? What does the idea of “consent of the governed” tell us about American beliefs?

Objectives

Students will:

- Examine the famous phrases of the Declaration of Independence.
- Understand the purpose and structure of the Declaration of Independence.
- Understand that individuals inherently have rights.
- Understand that legitimate government depends on the consent of the governed.
- Appreciate the constitutional principles of liberty and government by consent.

Materials

Handouts may have two versions. Version 1 is at a higher level than Version 2.

- **Handout A:** The Declaration of Independence
- **Handout B:** Key Excerpts (Version 1 and 2)
- **Handout C:** Structure of the Declaration
- **Handout D:** The Declaration, the Founders, and Slavery (Versions 1 and 2)
- **Handout E:** Slavery Essay
- **Handout F:** Comparing the *Second Civil Treatise of Government* by John Locke and the Declaration of Independence (Versions 1 and 2)
- **Handout G:** Glossary
- **Handout H:** Close Reading Test

Recommended Time

Two fifty-minute class periods.

Background/Homework

10 minutes the day before

- A. Tell students that you will focus on some of the most famous phrases of the Declaration of Independence. Distribute and display **Handout B: Key Excerpts**.
- B. Have students read the excerpt individually or in small groups, and ask them to underline what they believe are the key terms and/or phrases. Then discuss the questions as a large group.
- C. Resources for extending discussion on questions 7 and 8 from **Handout B** can be found on **Handout D: The Declaration, the Founders, and Slavery**.

Warm-Up

20 minutes

Divide the class into pairs or trios. Distribute **Handout A: The Declaration of Independence** and **Handout C: The Structure of the Declaration** to each group.

1. Assign each group one section of the Declaration to focus on. Additionally, all groups should do the signature section. *Note: You may wish to divide the Indictment section in half between two groups because of its length.*
2. Have students skim their sections of the Declaration and record the key ideas for their sections on the Handout in their own words.

Activity I

30 minutes

- A. Use an enlarged copy of **Handout C: The Structure of the Declaration (Version 1)** on the board or interactive white board, and ask students to share their responses. Once the chart is complete, ask students:
 - What is the purpose of each section?
 - What is a grievance?
 - Why include a long list of grievances?
 - What was the reason for pointing out that the colonists had tried to get the King to change the way he treated them?
 - Which do you believe is the most important section? Why?
- B. Have students read and complete **Handout D: The Declaration, the Founders, and Slavery (Version 1 or 2)** and/or **Handout E: Slavery Essay**.
 - Hold a class discussion about the role of slavery in the Founding Era.

Activity II

30 minutes

- A. In small groups, have students complete **Handout F: Compare John Locke’s *Second Civil Treatise of Government* to the Declaration of Independence (Version 1 or 2)**.
- B. After the activity is complete, have a large group discussion about the questions students answered on **Handout F**. Ask students if the ideas of liberty, equality, property, and consent of the governed change over time? If so, how? If not, why not?

Wrap-Up

20 minutes

- A. Ask students to share their personal responses to the Declaration by answering the following questions on a sheet of paper as a “ticket out the door” activity:
 - As Americans, should we be proud of the Declaration? Why or why not?
 - Are the principles of inalienable rights and government by consent in the Declaration outdated, or are they still true today?
 - Do these principles matter to you? If so, how and why?
 - What have you learned about other historical documents and people that have been influenced by the Declaration of Independence?
- B. Have students complete **Handout H: Close Reading Test**.

Homework

- A. Using **Handout A** as a guide, have students draw an illustration for each section of the Declaration of Independence. Illustrations should symbolically represent the section’s content and purpose.
- B. Have students select a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Have them research the person’s biography and prepare that person’s resume to share with the class. Students can begin their research at: **www.BillofRightsInstitute.org**.
- C. Have students discuss the significance of the Declaration of Independence with their families and write a paragraph about what they discussed.

Extensions

- A. Have students read Abraham Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address,” the *Declaration of Sentiments*, and/or Martin Luther King’s “I Have A Dream” speech. How do these documents show the ideas of the Declaration of Independence’s influence throughout American history?
- B. Have students work in groups of three to investigate ways in which the Declaration of Independence has been embraced by later individuals throughout American history. How have leaders like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Frederick Douglass, and others referenced the Declaration as they worked to expand the blessings of liberty? Groups should create a Declaration timeline to highlight historical documents and events in which the Declaration played a part.

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

IN CONGRESS, July 4, 1776.

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America, When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.--Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.

He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

Introduction

Explains why they wrote the Declarations of Independence. They justify the separation to the world.

Preamble

Explains that all people have equal inalienable rights. The purpose of government is to "secure" or protect these rights. Governments must protect the rights of the people. When governments do not do this, the people have the right and duty to change the government.

Indictment

This is a list of ways in which the colonists' rights were taken away.

He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only.

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.

He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.

He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers.

He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harrass our people, and eat out their substance.

He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.

He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power.

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation:

For Quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:

For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:

For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:

For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:

For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury:

For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences

This list further explains how the colonists' basic rights were taken away.

For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies:

For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:

For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation.

He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.

He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

Nor have We been wanting in attentions to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which, would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.

Denunciation

Explains that the colonists have complained many times to Great Britain. The people in Great Britain have not listened to them.

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

Georgia: Button Gwinnett, Lyman Hall, George Walton

North Carolina: William Hooper, Joseph Hewes, John Penn

South Carolina: Edward Rutledge, Thomas Heyward, Jr., Thomas Lynch, Jr., Arthur Middleton

Massachusetts: John Hancock

Maryland: Samuel Chase, William Paca, Thomas Stone, Charles Carroll of Carrollton

Virginia: George Wythe, Richard Henry Lee, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Harrison, Thomas Nelson, Jr., Francis Lightfoot Lee, Carter Braxton

Pennsylvania: Robert Morris, Benjamin Rush, Benjamin Franklin, John Morton, George Clymer, James Smith, George Taylor, James Wilson, George Ross

Delaware: Caesar Rodney, George Read, Thomas McKean

New York: William Floyd, Philip Livingston, Francis Lewis, Lewis Morris

New Jersey: Richard Stockton, John Witherspoon, Francis Hopkinson, John Hart, Abraham Clark

New Hampshire: Josiah Bartlett, William Whipple

Massachusetts: Samuel Adams, John Adams, Robert Treat Paine, Elbridge Gerry

Rhode Island: Stephen Hopkins, William Ellery

Connecticut: Roger Sherman, Samuel Huntington, William Williams, Oliver Wolcott

New Hampshire: Matthew Thornton

Conclusion

This is the official declaration of independence from Great Britain. The united colonies have the power to do all the things independent countries can do.

Signatures

The 56 signatures on the Declaration appear in the positions indicated.

Directions: The following paragraphs are from the Declaration of Independence. Read them carefully, and underline words or phrases you think are important. Think about the questions that follow.

Note: Some spelling, spacing, and punctuation have been changed for clarity.

We hold these truths to be self-evident:

that all men are created equal,

that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights,

that among these [rights] are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,

That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

1. What do you think “unalienable rights” (or “inalienable rights”) means?

According to the document:

2. Where do unalienable rights come from?

3. What is the purpose of government?

4. From where does government get its power?

5. Are the powers given to the government by the people limited or unlimited?

6. When should government be changed?

7. How could the Continental Congress approve this document when so many of its members owned slaves?

8. Does the fact that many of these men owned slaves mean these ideas are wrong or less important?

Directions: The paragraphs below are from the Declaration of Independence. Some words or phrases are underlined. Think about why these underlined words and phrases are important. Be ready to talk about why you think the words and phrases were important and why they are important today.

Note: Some spelling, spacing, and punctuation have been changed for clarity.

We hold these truths to be self-evident:

that all men are created equal,

that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights,

that among these [rights] are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,

That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

1. What do you think unalienable rights means?

Look at the paragraphs above and answer these questions:

2. Where do unalienable rights come from?
3. What is the purpose of government?
4. Are government's powers limited or unlimited?
5. When should people change the government?
6. Many men in the Continental Congress owned slaves. How could these same men approve the Declaration of Independence?
7. Are the principles in the Declaration of Independence wrong or less important because many men in the Continental Congress had slaves?

THE STRUCTURE OF THE DECLARATION

Directions: The Declaration of Independence is made up of six sections and the signatures. Skim over the Declaration with your group members. Don't worry if you don't understand every word. While you skim it, take note of what kinds of words, phrases and ideas are contained in each section.

	Section Title	Contents
1	Introduction <i>When, in the course of human events...</i>	
2	Preamble <i>We hold these truths to be self-evident...</i>	
3	Indictment <i>He has refused...</i>	
4	Indictment (cont.) <i>For quartering large bodies of troops...</i>	
5	Denunciation <i>Nor have We been wanting...</i>	
6	Conclusion <i>We, therefore, the Representatives...</i>	
7	Signatures	

Directions: Read the information below and use your understanding to complete the response activity on the next page.

“All Men Are Created Equal”

How did the people of 1776 understand these words? How do we understand them now?

With this statement, the Founders explained their belief that there was no natural class of rulers among people. Not everyone was born with the same talents or habits, of course. People are different. But the natural differences among people do not mean that certain people are born to rule over others. Some people might be better suited to govern, but they have no right to rule over others without their permission. This permission is called consent of the governed.

Some say that the Declaration’s authors didn’t mean to include everyone when they wrote “all men are created equal.” They say that Jefferson and the Continental Congress just meant to include white men who owned property. But this is not true. Jefferson and the Continental Congress did not believe that there was a natural class of rulers, and they asserted that the colonists had the same right to rule themselves as the people of England.

As a group, the Founders were conflicted about slavery. Many of them knew it was evil. It had already been done away with in some places, and they hoped that it would die out in future generations.

Slavery was an important economic and social institution in the United States. The Founders understood that they would have to tolerate slavery as part of a political compromise. They did not see a way to take further action against slavery in their lifetimes, though many freed their slaves after their deaths.



Over time, more and more Americans have come to see the Declaration as a moral argument against slavery. But this argument was not made by abolitionists during the Declaration’s time. When Congress began debating slavery in new territories in the 19th Century, Americans began basing their arguments in the Declaration. Eventually, more people came to realize that American ideal of self-government meant that black Americans should participate just as fully in the rights and responsibilities of citizenship as white Americans.

THE DECLARATION, THE FOUNDERS, AND SLAVERY **1**

1. He [the King] has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation hither. ... Determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought and sold...
–Original draft of the Declaration of Independence, 1776
2. Article the Sixth. There shall be neither Slavery nor involuntary Servitude in the said territory otherwise than in the punishment of crimes, whereof the party shall have been duly convicted; Provided always, That any person escaping into the same, from whom labor or service is lawfully claimed in any one of the original States, such fugitive may be lawfully reclaimed and conveyed to the person claiming his or her labor or service as aforesaid.
–Northwest Ordinance, 1787
3. There is not a man living who wishes more sincerely than I do, to see a plan adopted for the abolition of it [slavery].
–George Washington, 1786
4. We have seen the mere distinction of color made in the most enlightened period of time, a ground of the most oppressive dominion ever exercised by man over man.
–James Madison, 1787
5. Slavery is ... an atrocious debasement of human nature.
– Benjamin Franklin, 1789
6. Every measure of prudence, therefore, ought to be assumed for the eventual total extirpation [removal] of slavery from the United States. ...I have, through my whole life, held the practice of slavery in ... abhorrence.
–John Adams, 1819
7. It is much to be wished that slavery may be abolished. The honour of the States, as well as justice and humanity, in my opinion, loudly call upon them to emancipate these unhappy people. To contend for our own liberty, and to deny that blessing to others, involves an inconsistency not to be excused.
–John Jay, 1786

Select one quotation and write a response. How, if at all, does this information help you understand the topic of the Founders' view on slavery?

Directions: Read the information below and complete the activity on the next page.

“All Men Are Created Equal”

How did the people of 1776 understand these words? How do we understand them now?

With this statement, the Founders explained that while not everyone was born with the same talents or habits, the natural differences among people do not mean that certain people are born to rule over others. Some people might be better suited to **govern**, but they have no right to rule over others without their permission. This permission is called **consent of the governed**.

Some say that the Declaration’s authors didn’t mean to include everyone when they wrote “all men are created equal.” They say that **Thomas Jefferson** and the **Continental Congress** just meant to include white men who owned property. But this is not true. Jefferson and Congress believed that all individuals share the equal rights not to have life, liberty, or the ability to pursue happiness taken away.

As a group, the Founders were **conflicted** about slavery. Many of them knew it was evil. It would soon be outlawed in some states, and they hoped it would die out in future generations. The Founders understood that they would have to tolerate slavery as a part of a political compromise. They did not see a way to take action



against slavery in their lifetimes, though many freed their slaves after their deaths.

When Congress began debating slavery in new territories in the 19th century, Americans began basing their arguments in the Declaration. Eventually, more people came to realize that the American ideal of self-government meant that black Americans should participate just as fully as citizens as white Americans.

THE DECLARATION, THE FOUNDERS, AND SLAVERY **2**

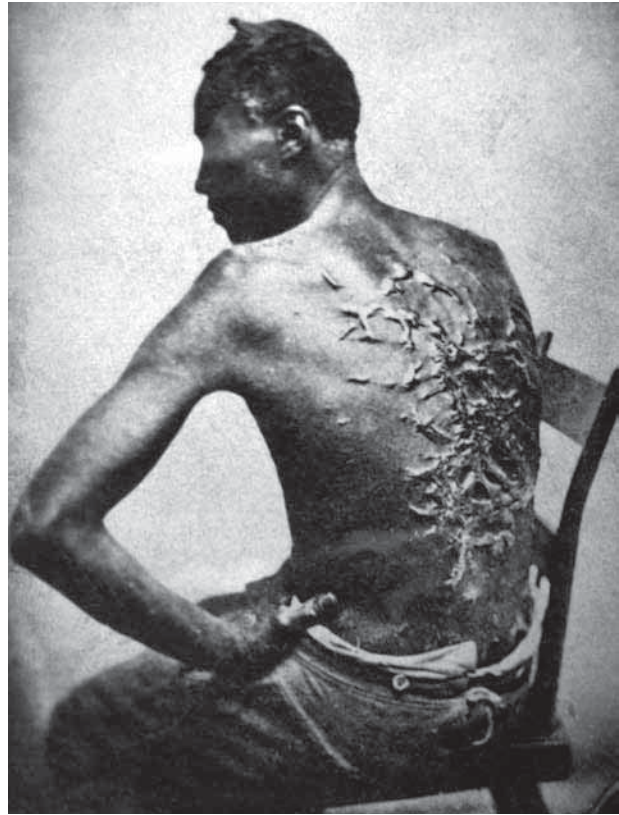
1. He [the king] has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, **captivating** and carrying them into slavery... Determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought and sold...
- Original draft of the Declaration of Independence, 1776
2. There is not a man living who wishes more sincerely than I do, to see a plan adopted for the **abolition** of it [slavery].
-George Washington, 1786
3. Slavery is ... an atrocious debasement of human nature.
-Benjamin Franklin, 1789
4. It is much wished that slavery may be abolished. ... To **contend** for our own liberty, and deny that blessing to others, involves an **inconsistency** not to be excused.
-John Jay, 1786

Select one quotation and write a response. How, if at all, does this information help you understand the topic of the Founders' view on slavery?

SLAVERY ESSAY

For nearly 250 years, the existence of slavery deprived African Americans of independent lives and individual liberty. It also compromised the republican dreams of white Americans, who otherwise achieved unprecedented success in the creation of political institutions and social relationships based on citizens' equal rights and ever-expanding opportunity. Thomas Jefferson, who in 1787 described slavery as an "abomination" and predicted that it "must have an end," had faith that "there is a superior bench reserved in heaven for those who hasten it." He later avowed that "there is not a man on earth who would sacrifice more than I would to relieve us from this heavy reproach in any *practicable* way." Although Jefferson made several proposals to curb slavery's growth or reduce its political or economic influence, a workable plan to eradicate slavery eluded him. Others also failed to end slavery until finally, after the loss of more than 600,000 American lives in the Civil War, the United States abolished it through the 1865 ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution.

American slavery and American freedom took root at the same place and at the same time. In 1619—the same year that colonial Virginia's House of Burgesses convened in Jamestown and became the New World's first representative assembly—about 20 enslaved Africans arrived at Jamestown and were sold by Dutch slave traders. The number of slaves in Virginia remained small for several decades, however, until the first dominant labor system—indentured servitude—fell out of favor after 1670. Until then indentured servants, typically young and landless white Englishmen and Englishwomen in search of opportunity, arrived by the thousands. In exchange for passage to Virginia, they agreed to labor in planters' tobacco fields for terms usually ranging from four to seven years. Planters normally agreed to give them, after their indentures expired, land on which they could establish their own tobacco farms. In the first few decades of settlement, as demand for the crop boomed, such arrangements usually worked in the planters' favor. Life expectancy in Virginia was short and few servants outlasted their terms of indenture. By the mid-1600s, however, as the survival rate of indentured servants increased, more earned their freedom and began to compete with their former



Some slaves were mistreated by plantation overseers and owners.

masters. The supply of tobacco rose more quickly than demand and, as prices decreased, tensions between planters and former servants grew.

These tensions exploded in 1676, when Nathaniel Bacon led a group composed primarily of former indentured servants in a rebellion against Virginia's government. The rebels, upset by the reluctance of Governor William Berkeley and the gentry-dominated House of Burgesses to aid their efforts to expand onto American Indians' lands, lashed out at both the Indians and the government. After several months the rebellion dissipated, but so, at about the same time, did the practice of voluntary servitude.

In its place developed a system of race-based slavery. With both black and white Virginians living longer, it made better economic sense to own slaves, who would never gain their freedom and compete with masters, than to rent the labor of indentured servants, who would. A few early slaves had gained their

SLAVERY ESSAY (CONT.)

freedom, established plantations, acquired servants, and enjoyed liberties shared by white freemen, but beginning in the 1660s Virginia's legislature passed laws banning interracial marriage; it also stripped African Americans of the rights to own property and carry guns, and it curtailed their freedom of movement. In 1650 only about 300 blacks worked Virginia's tobacco fields, yet by 1680 there were 3,000 and, by the start of the eighteenth century, nearly 10,000.

Slavery surged not only in Virginia but also in Pennsylvania, where people abducted from Africa and their descendants harvested wheat and oats, and in South Carolina, where by the 1730s rice planters had imported slaves in such quantity that they accounted for two-thirds of the population. The sugar-based economies of Britain's Caribbean colonies required so much labor that, on some islands, enslaved individuals outnumbered freemen by more than ten to one. Even in the New England colonies, where staple-crop agriculture never took root, the presence of slaves was common and considered unremarkable by most.

Historian Edmund S. Morgan has suggested that the prevalence of slavery in these colonies may have, paradoxically, heightened the sensitivity of white Americans to attacks against their own freedom. Thus, during the crisis preceding the War for Independence Americans frequently cast unpopular British legislation—which taxed them without the consent of their assemblies, curtailed the expansion of their settlements, deprived them of the right to jury trials, and placed them under the watchful eyes of red-coated soldiers—as evidence of an imperial conspiracy to “enslave” them. American patriots who spoke in such terms did not imagine that they would be forced to toil in tobacco fields; instead, they feared that British officials would deny to them some of the same individual and civil rights that they

had denied to enslaved African Americans. George Mason, collaborating with George Washington, warned in the Fairfax Resolves of 1774 that the British Parliament pursued a “regular, systematic plan” to “fix the shackles of slavery upon us.”

As American revolutionaries reflected on the injustice of British usurpations of their freedom and began to universalize the individual rights that they had previously tied to their status as Englishmen, they grew increasingly conscious of the inherent injustice of African-American slavery. Many remained skeptical that blacks possessed the same intellectual capabilities as whites, but few refused to count Africans as members of the human family or possessors of individual rights. When Jefferson affirmed in the Declaration of Independence “that all men are created equal,” he did not mean all white men. In fact, he attempted to turn the Declaration into a platform

As American revolutionaries reflected on the injustice of British usurpations of their freedom and began to universalize the individual rights that they had previously tied to their status as Englishmen, they grew increasingly conscious of the inherent injustice of African-American slavery.

from which Americans would denounce the trans-Atlantic slave trade. This he blamed on Britain and its king who, Jefferson wrote, “has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating it's [sic] most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere.” The king was wrong, he asserted, “to keep open a market where MEN should be bought & sold.” Delegates to the Continental Congress from South Carolina and Georgia, however, vehemently opposed the inclusion of these lines in the Declaration of Independence. Representatives of other states agreed to delete them. Thus began, at the moment of America's birth, the practice of prioritizing American unity over black Americans' liberty.

Pragmatism confronted principle not only on the floor of Congress but also on the plantations of many prominent revolutionaries. When Jefferson penned his stirring defense of individual liberty,

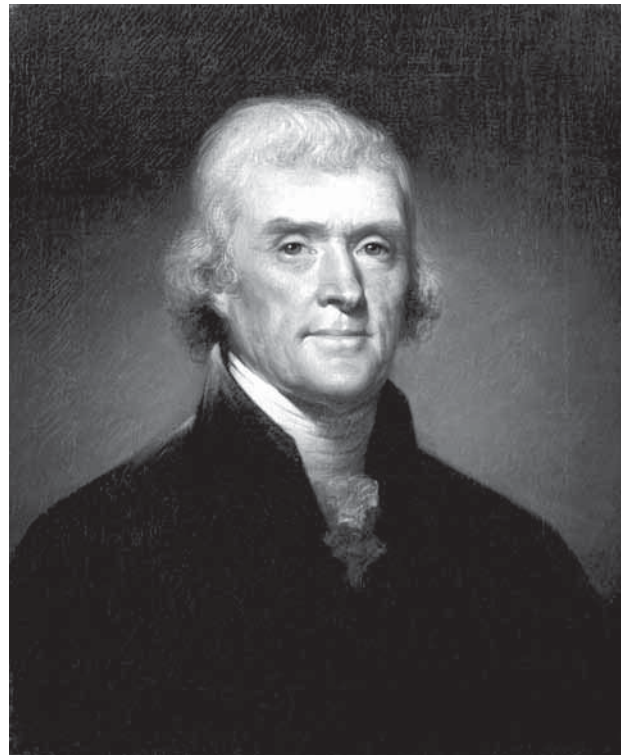
SLAVERY ESSAY (CONT.)

he owned 200 enslaved individuals. Washington, the commander-in-chief of the Continental Army and future first president, was one of the largest slaveholders in Virginia. James Madison—who, like Jefferson and Washington, considered himself an opponent of slavery—was also a slaveholder. So was Mason, whose Virginia Declaration of Rights stands as one of the revolutionary era's most resounding statements on behalf of human freedom. Had these revolutionaries attempted to free their slaves, they would have courted financial ruin. Alongside their landholdings, slaves constituted the principal asset against which they borrowed. The existence of slavery, moreover, precluded a free market of agricultural labor; they could never afford to pay free people—who could always move west to obtain their own farms, anyway—to till their fields.

Perhaps the most powerful objection to emancipation, however, emerged from the same set of principles that compelled the American revolutionaries to question the justice of slavery. Although Jefferson, Washington, Madison, and Mason considered human bondage a clear violation of individual rights, they trembled when they considered the ways in which emancipation might thwart their republican experiments. Not unlike many nonslaveholders, they considered especially fragile the society that they had helped to create. In the absence of aristocratic selfishness and force, revolutionary American governments relied on virtue and voluntarism. Virtue they understood as a manly trait; the word, in fact, derives from the Latin noun *vir*, which means “man.” They considered men to be independent and self-sufficient, made free and responsible by habits borne of necessity. Virtuous citizens made good citizens, the Founders thought. The use of political power for the purpose of exploitation promised the virtuous little and possessed the potential to cost them much. Voluntarism was virtue unleashed: the civic-minded, selfless desire to ask little of one's community but, because of one's sense of permanence within it, to give much to it. The Founders, conscious of the degree to which involuntary servitude had rendered slaves dependent and given them cause to resent white society, questioned their qualifications for citizenship. It was dangerous to continue to enslave them, but

perilous to emancipate them. Jefferson compared it to holding a wolf by the ears.

These conundrums seemed to preclude an easy fix. Too aware of the injustice of slavery to expect much forgiveness from slaves, in the first decades of the nineteenth century a number of Founders embarked on impractical schemes to purchase the freedom of slaves and “repatriate” them from America to Africa. In the interim, debate about the continued importation of slaves from Africa stirred delegates to the Constitutional Convention. South Carolina's Charles Pinckney vehemently opposed prohibitions on the slave trade, arguing that the matter was best decided by individual states. The delegates compromised, agreeing that the Constitution would prohibit for twenty years any restrictions on the arrival of newly enslaved Africans. As president, Jefferson availed himself of the opportunity afforded by the Constitution when he prohibited the continued



Although Thomas Jefferson considered human bondage a clear violation of individual rights, he trembled when he considered the ways in which emancipation might thwart their republican experiments.

SLAVERY ESSAY (CONT.)

importation of Africans into America in 1808. Yet he had already failed in a 1784 attempt to halt the spread of slavery into the U.S. government's western territory, which stretched from the Great Lakes south toward the Gulf of Mexico (the compromise Northwest Ordinance of 1787 drew the line at the Ohio River), and in his efforts to institute in Virginia a plan for gradual emancipation (similar to those that passed in Northern states, except that it provided for the education and subsequent deportation of freed African Americans). Of all the Founders, Benjamin Franklin probably took the most unequivocal public stand against involuntary servitude when, in 1790, he signed a strongly worded antislavery petition submitted to Congress by the Pennsylvania Abolition Society. This, too, accomplished little. The revolutionary spirit of the postwar decade, combined with the desire of many Upper South plantation owners to shift from labor-intensive tobacco to wheat, created opportunities to reduce the prevalence of slavery in America—especially in the North. Those opportunities not seized upon—especially in the South—would not soon return.

Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin in 1793 widened the regional divide. By rendering more efficient the processing of cotton fiber—which in the first half of the nineteenth century possessed a greater value than all other U.S. exports combined—Whitney's machine triggered a resurgence of Southern slavery. Meanwhile, the wealth that cotton exports brought to America fueled a booming Northern industrial economy that relied on free labor and created a well-educated middle class of urban professionals and social activists. These individuals kept alive the Founders' desire to rid America of slavery, but they also provoked the development of Southern proslavery thought. At best, Southerners of the revolutionary generation had viewed slavery as a necessary evil; by the 1830s, however, slaveholders began to describe it as a positive good. African Americans were civilized Christians, they argued, but their African ancestors were not. In addition, the argument continued, slaves benefited from the paternalistic care of masters who, unlike the Northern employers of "wage slaves," cared for their subordinates from the cradle to the grave. This new view combined with an older critique of calls

for emancipation: since slaves were the property of their masters, any attempt to force their release would be a violation of masters' property rights.

Regional positions grew more intractable as the North and South vied for control of the West. Proposals to admit into statehood Missouri, Texas, California, Kansas, and Nebraska resulted in controversy as Northerners and Southerners sparred to maintain parity in the Senate. The 1860 election to the presidency of Abraham Lincoln, a Republican who opposed the inclusion of additional slave states, sparked secession and the Civil War.

"I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just," Jefferson had prophetically remarked, for "his justice cannot sleep for ever." Americans paid dearly for the sin of slavery. Efforts by members of the founding generation failed to identify moderate means to abolish the practice, and hundreds of thousands died because millions had been deprived of the ability to truly live.

Robert M. S. McDonald, Ph.D.
United States Military Academy

Suggestions for Further Reading:

Bailyn, Bernard. *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, reprint, 1992.

Freehling, William W. *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776–1754*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Jordan, Winthrop D. *White Over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1968.

Miller, John Chester. *The Wolf by the Ears: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, reprint, 1991.

Morgan, Edmund S. *American Slavery—American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1975.

Tise, Larry E. *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701–1840*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987.

COMPARING THE *SECOND TREATISE OF CIVIL GOVERNMENT* TO THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE **1**

Directions: Read the excerpts from John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* and the Declaration of Independence. As you read, think about the similarities and differences between the documents, and then answer the questions below.

Note: Some spelling, spacing, and punctuation have been changed for clarity.

EXCERPTS: JOHN LOCKE, *SECOND TREATISE OF CIVIL GOVERNMENT*, 1690

Sec. 4. To understand political power right, and derive it from its original, we must consider, what state all men are naturally in, and that is, a state of perfect freedom to order their actions

A state also of equality, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more [power] than another; ...

Sec. 6. But though this be a state of liberty, yet it is not a state of license: though man in that state have an uncontrollable liberty to dispose of his person or possessions, yet he has not liberty to destroy himself, or so much as any creature in his possession, but where some nobler use than its bare preservation calls for it.

Sec. 22. THE natural liberty of man is to be free from any superior power on earth, and not to be under the will or legislative authority of man, but to have only the law of nature for his rule. The liberty of man, in society, is to be under no other legislative power, but that established, by consent, in the commonwealth; nor under the dominion of any will, or restraint of any law, but what that legislative shall enact,

Sec. 87. Man being born, as has been proved, with a title to perfect freedom, and an uncontrolled enjoyment of all the rights and privileges of the law of nature, equally with any other man, or number of men in the world, hath by nature a power, not only to preserve his property, that is, his life, liberty and estate ... But because no political society can be, nor

subsist, without having in itself the power to preserve the property, and in order thereunto, punish the offences of all those of that society; there, and there only is political society ... Those who are united into one body, and have a common established law and judicature to appeal to, with authority to decide controversies between them, and punish offenders, are in civil society one with another: ...

Sec. 124. The great and chief end, therefore, of men's uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government, is the preservation of their property. To which in the state of nature there are many things wanting.

Sec. 222. ...[W]hensoever the legislators endeavor to take away, and destroy the property of the people, or to reduce them to slavery under arbitrary power, they put themselves into a state of war with the people, who are thereupon absolved from any farther obedience ... Whensoever therefore the legislative shall transgress this fundamental rule of society; and either by ambition, fear, folly or corruption, endeavour to grasp themselves, or put into the hands of any other, an absolute power over the lives, liberties, and estates of the people; by this breach of trust they forfeit the power the people had put into their hands for quite contrary ends, and it devolves to the people, who have a right to resume their original liberty, and, by the establishment of a new legislative, (such as they shall think fit) provide for their own safety and security, which is the end

COMPARING THE *SECOND TREATISE OF CIVIL GOVERNMENT* TO THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE **1**

Directions: Read the excerpts from John Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government* and the Declaration of Independence. As you read, think about the similarities and differences between the documents, and then answer the questions below.

Note: Some spelling, spacing, and punctuation have been changed for clarity.

EXCERPTS, DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, 1776

IN CONGRESS, July 4, 1776. The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America, When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these

are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,—that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. ... But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security...

Critical Thinking Questions

1. What ideas or principles do you see in both documents?
2. According to each document:
 - a. What is the natural condition of mankind?
 - b. What is the purpose of government?
 - c. Why does a just government need the consent of the governed?

COMPARING THE SECOND TREATISE OF CIVIL GOVERNMENT TO THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE **2**

Directions: Read the excerpts from John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* and the Declaration of Independence. As you read, think about the similarities and differences between the documents, and then answer the questions below.

Note: Some spelling, spacing, and punctuation have been changed for clarity.

EXCERPTS: JOHN LOCKE, *SECOND TREATISE OF CIVIL GOVERNMENT*, 1690

Sec. 4. To understand political power right, and derive it from its original, we must consider, what state all men are naturally in, and that is, a state of perfect freedom to order their actions

Men are naturally free.

A state also of equality, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more [power] than another...

In an equal society, no one has more power than anyone else.

Sec. 22. ...The liberty of man, in society, is to be under no other legislative power, but that established, by consent, in the commonwealth; nor under the dominion of any will, or restraint of any law, but what that legislative shall enact,

Power in a legislative branch comes from the consent of the governed.

Sec. 87. Man being born ... hath by nature a power, not only to preserve his property, that is, his life, liberty and estate ... Those who are united into one body, and have a common established law and judicature to appeal to, with authority to decide controversies between them, and punish offenders, are in civil society one with another...

Man is born with the right to preserve his property, life, and liberty. Governments have the authority to judge cases between citizens and punish offenders.

Sec. 124. The great and chief end, therefore, of men's uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government, is the preservation of their property. To which in the state of nature there are many things wanting.

Property rights must be preserved for a government to be maintained.

Sec. 222. ...[W]henever the legislators endeavor to take away, and destroy the property of the people, or to reduce them to slavery under arbitrary power, they put themselves into a state of war with the people, who are thereupon absolved from any farther obedience ... by this breach of trust they forfeit the power the people had put into their hands for quite contrary ends, and it devolves to the people, who have a right to resume their original liberty, and, by the establishment of a new legislative, (such as they shall think fit) provide for their own safety and security, which is the end

If the legislature takes away property or other rights, they will have to give up their power. The citizens then have a right to establish a new government for safety and security.

COMPARING THE *SECOND TREATISE OF CIVIL GOVERNMENT* TO THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE **2**

Directions: Read the excerpts from John Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government* and the Declaration of Independence. As you read, think about the similarities and differences between the documents, and then answer the questions below.

Note: Some spelling, spacing, and punctuation have been changed for clarity.

EXCERPTS, DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, 1776

IN CONGRESS, July 4, 1776. The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America,

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

The connection between the American colonies and Britain must come to end because Britain is not allowing protect the colonists’ rights.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by

their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,—that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness....

People’s inalienable rights including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness cannot be taken away from them. The people must give permission to the government to rule, and if government ends peoples’ rights, the people have the right to change the government.

1.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. What ideas or principles do you see in both documents?
2. According to each document:
 - a. What is the natural condition of mankind?
 - b. What is the purpose of government?
 - c. Why does a just government need the consent of the governed?

HANDOUT G
GLOSSARY

Abolish: To stop or get rid of.

Alter: To change.

Consent of the Governed: The power of government comes from the people.

Declaration: A public announcement or statement.

Denunciation: A rejection of something because it is bad.

Deriving: Obtaining from.

Endowed: Provided with.

Independence: Not dependent on others; Freedom from outside control.

Indictment: A statement that someone has committed a crime.

Instituted: Started or begun.

Liberty: Except where authorized by citizens through the Constitution, government does not have the authority to limit freedom.

Pursuit: The act of looking for something or trying to get something.

Right: The natural freedom to do something.

Self-evident: clearly true without needing to be proven.

Unalienable (inalienable) rights: Rights which belong to us by nature and can never be justly taken away.

CLOSE READING TEST

Directions: Read the following questions carefully and choose the *best* answer from the choices given.

1. In line 5, the pronoun “they” refers to
 - a. “one people” (line 1)
 - b. “political bands” (line 2)
 - c. “Laws of Nature” (line 4)
 - d. “opinions of mankind” (line 5)
2. The overall tone of lines 1-6 is
 - a. angry and resigned
 - b. controlled and respectful
 - c. conciliatory and humble
 - d. hopeful and condemnatory
3. In line 6, the phrase “impel them” suggests that the colonists are
 - a. acting rashly and impulsively
 - b. being forced to revolt
 - c. fearful of the British ruler
 - d. determined to gain their independence
4. In line 7, the phrase “self-evident” most nearly means
 - a. mysterious
 - b. vague
 - c. apparent
 - d. unnoticeable
5. Lines 7-15 appeal most strongly to the audience’s sense of
 - a. ethics
 - b. history
 - c. emotion
 - d. logic
6. The phrase “light and transient” in line 14 most nearly means
 - a. “trivial and transparent”
 - b. “emotional and passing”
 - c. “luminous and ephemeral”
 - d. “insignificant and temporary”
7. The sentence that begins in lines 16 and ends in line 19 (“But when ... future security”) most nearly means that
 - a. continued transgressions on the part of a ruler forces his subjects to rebel and form their own government
 - b. citizens do not have the power to decide what form their government will take
 - c. absolute Despotism should not be tolerated by any group of people
 - d. the American colonists have considered their decision carefully and rationally
8. The sentence that begins in line 19 (“Such has been) is marked by which of the following stylistic devices?
 - a. oxymoron
 - b. parallelism
 - c. figurative language
 - d. hyperbole
9. The tone of the sentence that begins in line 20 (“The history of...”) is best described as
 - a. accusatory and resigned
 - b. benevolent and rational
 - c. restrained and logical
 - d. condemnatory and indignant

10. In line 20, the term “usurpations” most nearly means the
- unlawful seizure of power
 - harmful use of power
 - neglect of power
 - benevolent use of power
11. The purpose of the introduction (lines 1-23) is to
- convince the audience that King George is an unfit and tyrannical ruler
 - describe the rational underpinnings of the colonists’ decision
 - present any potential objections to the contents of the declaration
 - explore the colonists’ choices and determine the best course of action
12. Which of the following is NOT proof the author offers that the British has unfairly usurped the colonists’ power?
- “He has refused his assent...” (line 24).
 - “He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws...” (line 25)
 - “He has refused to pass other Laws..” (line 28)
 - “He has called together legislative bodies...” (line 31)
13. The primary purpose of lines 24-73 is to
- describe in detail a series of coincidences
 - provide proof for an earlier claim
 - appeal to the audience’s sense of compassion
 - list possible reasons for the King’s actions
14. Which of the following phrases in context does NOT serve to portray King George as tyrannical and repressive?
- “plundered our seas” (line 64)
 - “the works of death, desolation” (lines 66-67)
 - “Cruelty & Perfidy” (line 67)
 - “the merciless Indian Savages” (line 72)
15. The body (lines 24-84) achieves its coherency primarily through
- description
 - parallelism
 - contrast
 - comparison
16. The primary purpose of the text as a whole is to
- convince the audience to support the colonists
 - explore the choices open to the colonists
 - meditate upon the consequences of rebellion
 - determine the correct course of action
17. The overall tone of the text is best described as
- passionate and restrained
 - indignant and angry
 - bitter and resigned
 - rational and resolute
18. The primary audience for the text is
- American colonists
 - other world leaders
 - British citizens
 - King George
19. The primary audience for the text is most likely
- educated and patriotic
 - foolhardy and loyal
 - independent and self-serving
 - logical and knowledgeable
20. The author of the text would mostly likely prefer a government that is
- local and limited
 - strong and centralized
 - temporary and fluid
 - weak and passive