

Primary Source

Constitution of Massachusetts, 1780

Constitution of Kentucky, 1792



How did the principles of the Declaration of Independence contribute to the quest to end slavery?

- ☐ I can interpret primary sources related to principles of liberty, equality, and justice in the Founding era.
- ☐ I can create an argument using evidence from primary sources.
- ☐ I can analyze issues in history to help find solutions to present-day challenges.

Essential Vocabulary

Emoluments	benefits
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Building Context

After declaring independence from Great Britain, the former colonies wrote new constitutions outlining the role of government, the rights of their citizens, and the way they would function as independent states. Some states addressed slavery directly, while others omitted it. In the following two constitutions, pay particular attention to the way each addresses equality and what implications that may have for slavery.

Constitution of Massachusetts, 1780

Source: <http://www.nhinet.org/ccs/docs/ma-1780.htm>

<p>PART THE FIRST</p> <p>A Declaration of the Rights of the Inhabitants of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.</p> <p><u>Article I. All men are born free and equal</u>, and have certain natural, essential, and unalienable rights; among which may be reckoned the right of enjoying and defending their lives and liberties; that of acquiring, possessing, and protecting property; in fine, that of seeking and obtaining their safety and happiness.</p>	<p>Notes</p>
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Constitution of Kentucky, 1792

Source: https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/thorpe-the-federal-and-state-constitutions-vol-iii-kentucky-massachusetts#lf1514-03_head_006

<p>ARTICLE XII.</p> <p>That the general, great and essential principles of liberty and free government may be recognized and established, WE DECLARE</p> <p><u>I. That all men when they form a social compact, are equal</u>, and that no man or set of men are entitled to exclusive separate public emoluments [benefits] or privileges from the community, but in consideration of public services.</p> <p>Article IX: The Legislature shall have no power to pass laws for the emancipation of slaves without the consent of their owners, or without paying their owners, previous to such emancipation, a full equivalent in money for the slaves so emancipated;...</p>	<p>Notes</p>
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Comprehension and Analysis Questions

1. How does the Massachusetts Constitution reflect the influence of the Declaration of Independence?

2. In 1780, when its constitution went into effect, slavery was legal in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, though it was not mentioned in the 1780 Constitution. How is the institution of slavery at odds with the Declaration of Rights in the **Constitution of Massachusetts, 1780**?

3. The two documents include language about who is considered equal (underlined). What is the difference between the two? What implications did this difference have for slavery in Massachusetts versus slavery in Kentucky?

4. What does this request illustrate about Founding principles of liberty in equality and justice as understood by African Americans in the Founding era? How were these ideas turned into action?