

Primary Source



Enactment of Hereditary Slavery Law in Virginia 1662
- ACT XII, from William Waller Hening, Statutes At
Large: Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia
1809-23 Vol 2: 170

How did the principles of the Declaration of Independence contribute to the quest to end slavery from colonial times to the outbreak of the Civil War?

- ☐ I can interpret primary sources related to Founding principles of liberty, equality, and justice from the colonial era to the outbreak of the Civil War.
- ☐ I can explain how laws and policy, courts, and individuals and groups contributed to or pushed back against the quest to end slavery.
- ☐ 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

Codify	To formally write into law
Bond	To hold in slavery

Building Context

With better economic conditions in England in the mid-seventeenth century, the number of people coming to the North American colonies as indentured servants greatly diminished. Large and small planters alike instead invested in African slaves as a source of labor. Slavery was **codified** or formally written into law, and the number of enslaved persons in Virginia increased from 300 in 1650 to 13,000 in 1700. Other southern colonies likewise codified slavery over time, as shown in the second document from South Carolina in 1740. In this way, chattel slavery as it is called today evolved gradually, beginning with customs before being written into law.

Enactment of the Hereditary Slavery Laws Virginia 1662 - Act XII

Source: https://www.nps.gov/ethnography/aah/aaheritage/chesapeake_pop2.htm

... Be it therefore enacted and declared by this present grand assembly, that all children borne in this country shall be held bond (in slavery) or free only according to the condition of the mother, And that if any Christian shall commit fornication with a negro man or woman, he or she so offending shall pay double the fines imposed by the former act.	Notes
---	-------

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

1. According to these laws, how was a child's status as free or enslaved established? What effect would this determination have on the number of enslaved people in the colonies?

2. How might this law reflect the fact that the number of indentured servants coming to the colonies greatly diminished in the mid-seventeenth century and beyond?