Assess and Reflect: The Declaration of Independence, Natural Rights, and Slavery

- I can demonstrate my understanding of natural rights theory as the foundation of the Declaration of Independence and slavery’s contradiction of those rights in a way that is meaningful to me.

Using your analysis of the Declaration’s preamble text in Part I, Thomas Jefferson’s draft of the Declaration, and Benjamin Banneker’s letter in Part II, complete one of the following options and the required final reflection questions:

Option 1: Make a mind map that visualizes your understanding of the Declaration of Independence and how slavery was at odds with the natural rights principles at the heart of the Declaration. In a letter to a friend, Thomas Jefferson referred to the Declaration of Independence as “an expression of the American mind.” Your mind map will be an expression of your mind as it understands this Founding document, and therefore it may not look like anyone else’s. You should, however, be able to explain your map to your classmates. Your map can include facts and statements, but it can also include pictures, doodles, questions, opinions, and reflections.

Option 2: Create an annotated illustration depicting your understanding of the Declaration of Independence and slavery. Include an explanation at the bottom or on the back of your illustration of the major points your illustration conveys.

Option 3: Create a short video or narrated slide show that explains the purpose and importance of the Declaration of Independence, and also discusses the contradiction between the Declaration’s principles and the existence of slavery.

Final Reflection (required): Reflect on and answer the following questions:

A. Why do the natural rights within the Declaration still matter today?
B. Why is it important to discuss the contradiction between natural rights theory and the system of slavery that existed in the United States for over 200 years?
C. What questions do you still have about the Declaration and slavery?