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Paradox of Slavery in the Revolutionary War Period

Revolutionary Declarations of Rights

VIRGINIA DECLARATION OF RIGHTS

June 12, 1776

Article 1. That all men are by nature equally free and independent, and have certain inherent rights, of which, when they enter into a state of society, they cannot, by any compact, deprive or divest their posterity; namely, the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety.

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

July 4, 1776

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.

DELAWARE DECLARATION OF RIGHTS AND CONSTITUTION

September 11, 1776

Declaration of Rights, Article 10. That every member of society hath a right to be protected in the enjoyment of life, liberty, and property. . . .

Constitution, Article 26. No person hereafter imported into this state from Africa ought to be held in slavery under any pretence whatever, and no negro, indian, or mulatto slave, ought to be brought into this state for sale from any part of the world.

PENNSYLVANIA DECLARATION OF RIGHTS

September 28, 1776

Article 1. That all men are born equally free and independent, and have certain natural, inherent, and unalienable rights, amongst which are, the enjoying and defending life and liberty, acquiring, possessing, and protecting property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety.

VERMONT DECLARATION OF RIGHTS
July 8, 1777

Chapter 1. That all men are born equally free and independent, and have certain natural, inherent and unalienable rights, amongst which are the enjoying and defending life and liberty; acquiring, possessing and protecting property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety. Therefore, no male person, born in this country, or brought from over sea, ought to be holden by law to serve any person as a servant, slave or apprentice, after he arrives to the age of twenty-one years, nor female in like manner, after she arrives to the age of eighteen years, unless they are bound by their own consent after they arrive to such age, or bound by law for the payment of debts, damages, fines, costs, or the like.

MASSACHUSETTS DECLARATION OF RIGHTS
June 16, 1780

Article I. All men are born free and equal, 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.

NEW HAMPSHIRE BILL OF RIGHTS
June 3, 1784

Article 1. All Men are born equally free and independent; therefore, all government of right originates from the people, is founded in consent, and instituted for the general good.

Article 2. All men have certain natural, essential, and inherent rights; among which are—the enjoying and defending life and liberty—acquiring, possessing and protecting property—and in a word, of seeking and obtaining happiness.

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