

Name:

Period:

AMERICAN ROOTS OF THE FIRST AMENDMENT

Directions: *Read the document excerpts. Then write one paragraph comparing and contrasting the three documents. What do they have in common? How are they different?*

George Mason:

Excerpts from the Virginia Declaration of Rights (1776)

Section 6. That elections of members to serve as representatives of the people, in assembly ought to be free...

Section 12. That the freedom of the press is one of the great bulwarks of liberty, and can never be restrained but by despotic governments.

Section 16. That religion, or the duty which we owe to our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence; and therefore all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience; and that it is the mutual duty of all to practice Christian forbearance, love, and charity toward each other.

Thomas Jefferson:

Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom (1786)

No man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinion in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities....

We are free to declare, and do declare, that the rights hereby asserted are of the natural rights of mankind, and that if any act shall hereafter be passed to repeal the present or to narrow its operation, such act will be an infringement of natural rights.

James Madison:

The First Amendment (1791)

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

THOMAS JEFFERSON

what he did

- Wrote the Declaration of Independence (1776)
- Served in Paris during the Constitutional Convention, but wrote to Madison supporting the inclusion of a bill of rights
- Wrote the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom (1786)
- Served as America's first secretary of state, second vice president, and third president

what he said

A bill of rights is what the people are entitled to against every government, and what no just government should refuse, or rest on inference. (Letter to James Madison, 1787)

Erecting the 'wall of separation between church and state,' therefore, is absolutely essential in a free society. (Letter to the Danbury Baptist Association, 1802)

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. (Declaration of Independence, 1776)

what others said about him

He was certainly one of the most learned men of the age. It may be said of him as has been said of others that he was a "walking Library," and what can be said of but few such prodigies, that the Genius of Philosophy ever walked hand in hand with him. —James Madison, 1826

[His writings are] a mass of taste, sense, literature, and science, presented in a sweet simplicity...which will be read with delight in future ages. —John Adams, 1822

JAMES MADISON

what he did

- Known as the "Father of the Constitution" (1787)
- Understood that many believed the Constitution did not fully protect individual rights
- First opposed adding a bill of rights, because rights were implied by the Constitution and it would be impossible to list every right
- Promised that a bill of rights would be added to satisfy concerns that it did not protect individual rights. Several states ratified the Constitution after he made this promise.
- Wrote the Bill of Rights as a member of the House of Representatives (1791)
- Served as America's fourth president

what he said

The powers delegated by the proposed Constitution to the federal government are few and defined. Those which are to remain in the State governments are numerous and indefinite. (Federalist No. 45, 1788)

As a man is said to have a right to his property, he may be equally said to have a property in his rights. (Property, 1792)

what others said about him

Eloquence has been defined to be the art of persuasion. If it included persuasion by convincing, Mr. Madison was the most eloquent man I ever heard. —Patrick Henry, November 12, 1796

Every person seems to acknowledge his greatness. He blends together the profound politician with the scholar. —William Pierce, notes on the Constitutional Convention, 1787