



# Historical Society of Pennsylvania

“Preserving American Freedom”

## Declaration of Independence: The Struggle for Equality DBQ

**Directions:** The following question requires that all students compose an essay based on the documents below and knowledge obtained through various sources.

**Question:** In what way and to what extent does the Declaration of Independence serve as a benchmark for the actions of disenfranchised or otherwise oppressed citizens of the United States of America.

### Document A

**Source:** A Declaration By the Representatives of the United States of America, In General Congress Assembled, July 4, 1776.

In Congress, July 4, 1776.

#### A DECLARATION

BY THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

IN GENERAL CONGRESS ASSEMBLED.

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— -That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, "deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed," that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these Ends, "it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new Government, laying its Foundation on such Principles, and organizing its Powers in such Form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

## Document B

**Source:** The Constitution of the Pennsylvania Society, for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and the Relief of Free Negroes, Unlawfully Held in Bondage, 1787

It having pleased the Creator of the world, to make of one flesh, all the children of men—it becomes them to consult and promote each other's happiness, as members of the same family, however diversified they may be, by colour, situation, religion, or different states of society. It is more especially the duty of those persons, who profess to maintain for themselves the rights of human nature, and who acknowledge the obligations of Christianity, to use such means as are in their power, to extend the blessings of freedom to every part of the human race; and in a more particular manner, to such of their fellow-creatures, as are entitled to freedom by the laws and constitutions of any of the United States, and who, notwithstanding, are maintained in bondage, by fraud or violence.—From a full conviction of the truth and obligation of these principles—from a desire to diffuse them, wherever the miseries and vices of slavery exist, and in humble confidence of the favour and support of the Father of Mankind, the subscribers have associated themselves under the title of the "Pennsylvania Society for promoting the abolition of slavery, and the relief of free Negroes unlawfully held in bondage."

President:

Benjamin Franklin

## Document C

**Source:** Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens, Threatened with Disfranchisement, to the People of Pennsylvania, March 14, 1838

Was it the intention of the people of this commonwealth that the convention to which the Constitution was committed for revision and amendment, should tear up and cast away its first principles? Was it made the business of the Convention to deny "that all men are born equally free," by making political rights depend upon the skin in which a man is born? Or to divide what our fathers bled to unite, to wit, TAXATION and REPRESENTATION? We will not allow ourselves for one moment to suppose, that the majority of the people of Pennsylvania are not too respectful of the rights and too liberal towards the feelings of others as well as too much enlightened to their own interests, to deprive of the right of suffrage a single individual who may safely be trusted with it. And we cannot believe that you have found among those who bear the burdens of taxation any who have proved, by their abuse of the right, that it is not safe in their hands. This is a question, fellow-citizens, in which we plead *your* cause as well as our own. It is the safeguard of the strongest that he lives under a government which is obliged to respect the voice of the weakest. When you have taken from an individual his right to vote, you have made the government, in regard to him, a mere despotism; and you have taken a step towards making it a despotism to all.

## Document D

**Source:** Owen Brown (Brother of John Brown) Declaration of Liberty July 4 1859

"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; & the persuit of happiness. That Nature hath freely given to all Men, a full Supply of Air. Water, & Land; for their sustinance, & mutual happiness. That No Man had any right to deprive his fellow Man, of these Inherent rights, except in punishment of Crime.... Such has been the patient sufferance of the slaves of the United States, and such is now the necessity which constrains them to brush this foul system of oppression, The history of Slavery in the Unites States, is a history of injustice & Cruelties inflicted upon the Slave in evry conceivable way, & in barbarity not surpassed by the most Savage Tribes. It is the embodiment of all that is Evil, and ruinous to a Nation

## Document E

**Source:** D.F. Royer (U.S. Indian Agent), Report of American Horse, et al. Nov. 27, 1890 - "Sioux Correspondence" subseries of the John Rutter Brooke Papers (HSP Collection).

I think the late Sioux Commissioners (General Crook, Major Warner and Gov. Foster) had something to do with starting this trouble. I was speaker for the whole tribe. In a general council I signed the bill [the late Sioux bill] and 580 signed with me the other members of my band drew out and it divided us and ever since these two parties have been divided. The non-progressive started the ghost dance to draw from us. We were made many promises but have never heard from them since. The Great Father says if we do what he directs it will be to our benefit but instead of this they are every year cutting down our rations and we do not get enough to keep us from suffering. General Crook talked nice to us and after we signed the bill they took our land and cut down our allowance of food. The commission made us believe that we would get full sacks if we signed the bill but instead of that our sacks are empty. We lost considerable property by being here with the Commissioners last year and have never got anything for it. Our chickens were all stolen, our cattle some of them were killed. Our crops were entirely lost by us being absent here with the Sioux Commission and we have never been benefitted one bit by the bill and in fact we are worse off than we were before we signed the bill. We are told if we do as white men we will be better off but we are getting worse off every year.

## Document F

**Source:** Moorfield Storey Statement against acquiring Philippine Islands 1898

Is it right for this country to kill the natives of a foreign land because they wish to govern themselves—to enjoy the freedom which in this very city our fathers declared the inalienable right of every human being? "Let it be remembered" said the Continental Congress in addressing the States at the end of the Revolution "that it has ever been the pride and boast of America that the rights for which she contended were the rights of human nature".

"True statesmen as they were" said Lincoln "they knew the tendency of prosperity to breed tyrants, so they established these self-evident truths, that when, in the distant future, some men, some faction, some interest should set up the doctrine that none but rich men, or none but white men, or none but Anglo-Saxon white men, were entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, their posterity might look up again to the Declaration of Independence and take courage to renew the battle which their fathers began; so that truth, justice and mercy and all the humane and Christian virtues might not be extinguished from the land; so that no man would hereafter dare to limit and circumscribe the great principles on which the temple of liberty was being built."

## Document G

**Source:** Broadside: Declaration of Men of Many Races July 4 1918

**When** in the course of human events it became necessary for the American people to dissolve the political ties by which they had been bound, and to assume among the Powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature, and Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind required that they should declare the causes which impelled them to the separation.— We hold these facts to be self-evident, that the German Emperor is in quest of world dominion, and that at every step taken in pursuit of his mad ambition he has tempted the German people to trample upon principles dear to the hearts of all who love America.— He has with calm forethought and cool deliberation planned for many years to stifle the free expression of popular will and to set up for the guidance of his government a standard of national conduct at variance with the moral law.— He has plunged the world into a war so unnecessary as it is appalling.

## Document H

Source: Dora Kelly Lewis Letter April 14 1920

I found after I telephoned to you last night that some very serious things were looming. 1) The Governor was in town and had told people that suffrage is dead in this session. 2) The Evening Journal wh. represents Coleman Dupont's policies had a very bad anti article. It has been heavily supporting us, and it is important to have it continue to do so as everyone knows that it represents "J.C.'s" views. "J.C." being J. Coleman Dupont. He is Repub. Nat'l Chairman, and our fear has been that when his cousin A.J. Dupont supported suff. that he wd withdraw his support—on account of the rivalry that exists between them. Two of the senators were worried over the article last night, because it told of strong anti sentiment in their district, & we have been endeavoring to show the world how much prosentiment exists in Sussex County.

## Document I

**Source:** Brochure for “Reminder Day” for Homosexual Rights July 4, 1968

Why are those who are concerned with the rights of homosexuals demonstrating today?

Because the homosexual American citizen finds himself denied many of the unique and special features of American life that are guaranteed by the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and its Bill of Rights.

The homosexual American citizen feels he is being denied many of the liberties and freedoms guaranteed by those documents and enjoyed, without second thought, by his fellow American citizens.

"All Men Are Created Equal"

Homosexuals, known as such, are rarely treated as equals and they are often placed in a status of inferiority. The Federal, state and local governments not only discriminate against them grossly and pointlessly, but these institutions serve to maintain the prejudice against them.

"All men are endowed with certain unalienable Rights, among these are the pursuit of  
Happiness"