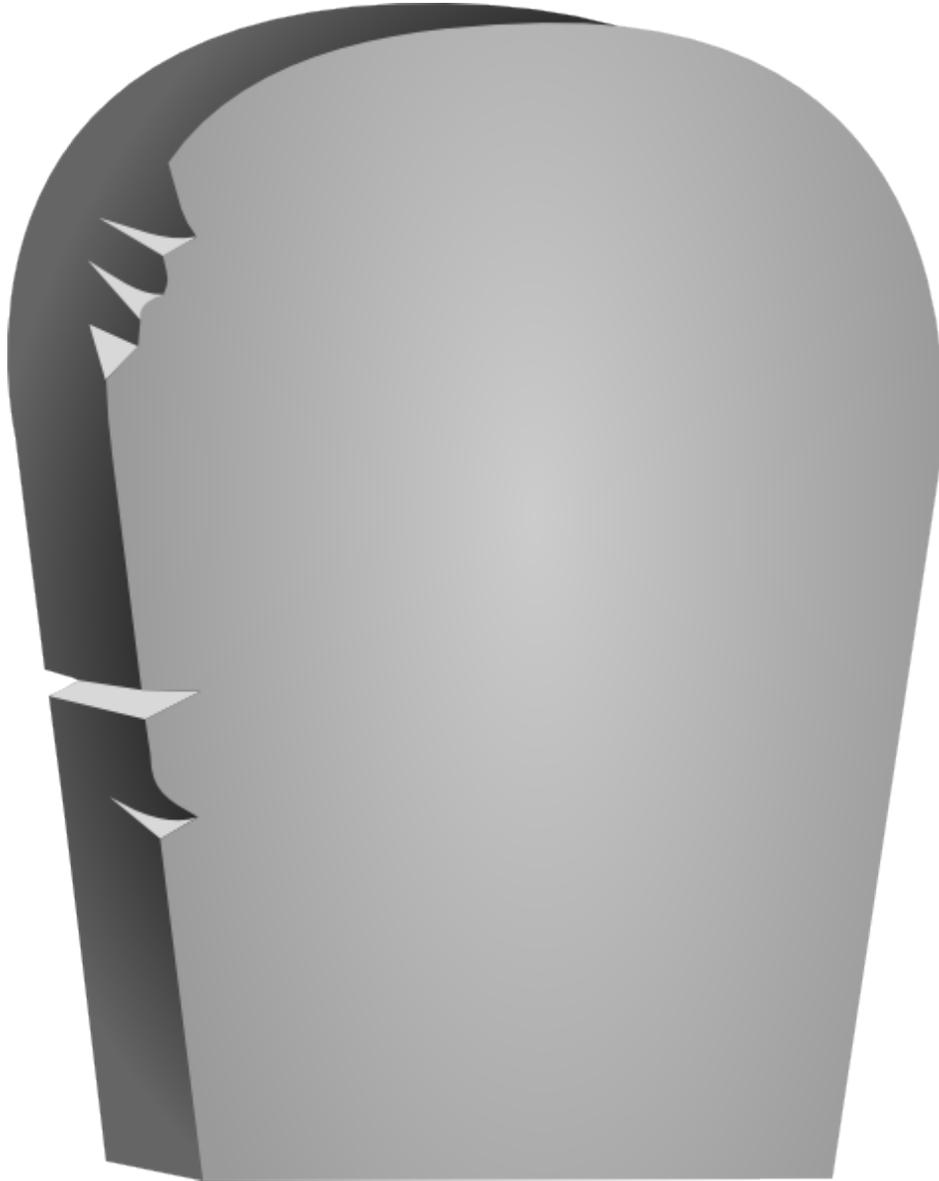


DBQ Essay: Jefferson and the Virginia Statue on Religious Freedom: What does it mean to you?

Hook

If you could think of 3 great contributions to be listed in your tombstone/epitaph what would they be? Using the tombstone/epitaph below, write 3 items that you would like to be remembered for.



When you finish your tombstone, take to a moment to consider all that you know about Thomas Jefferson. On his marker, Jefferson listed 3 items which he believed to be his greatest contributions. List below what you think those 3 items might have been.

Background Essay

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*Here was buried
Thomas Jefferson
Author of the Declaration of American Independence
of the Statute of Virginia for religious freedom
& Father of the University of Virginia*

These are the words that Jefferson that are inscribed on monument over Jefferson's grave. It was these 3 accomplishments that he explained should be noted, "As testimonials that I have lived, I wish most to be remembered." It is easy to see why Jefferson wanted to be noted as the author of the Declaration of Independence, as it has become the national symbol of our country and any University of Virginia Cavalier can easily recall Jefferson's passion for education. However, some might be surprised to see that he was also very proud of the Virginia Statute. This DBQ will seek to help students understand the causes, impact, and lasting impact of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, while encouraging students to make personal connections.



The Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom was first drafted by Thomas Jefferson in 1777, and was introduced to the Virginia Assembly in Fredericksburg in 1779. It was not adopted by the Virginia Assembly until January 1786. Religious toleration exists somewhat in Virginia prior to the Revolution. At this time, as was the typical practice in those days, religion is partially funded and state sponsored in Virginia. In Virginia of course, it is the Anglican Church (later called the Episcopalian Church after the Revolution) that is the chosen and sponsored religion. While the Anglican Church is the dominant church, the 18th century encounters significant diversity of religious groups such as the Presbyterians and Baptists. Many scholars believe that 20-35% of the population does not subscribe to the Anglican Church. There is toleration, but a clear lack of freedom. There are historical accounts of church leaders begin whipped, fined, and imprisoned. The greatest incidents occur in the countries of Culpeper, Spotsylvania, and Hanover County.

Jefferson believed that the coercion of religion was in conflict with natural rights and therefore, believed that an established religion was in conflict with the founding principles of the new nation. Jefferson also knew that in order for the revolution to be successful, it would need the support of the religious communities. When Patrick Henry put forth his bill to the Virginia Assembly in 1784, it sought to provide state funds to teachers of Christianity. Unable to stay quiet on the matter, Jefferson wrote the Virginia Statute for Religious freedom to oppose Henry's ideas. Supported by his friend James Madison, the statute was adopted in 1786, making Virginia the first state to separate church and state.



Sources

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Timeline for the activity

1777 - Virginia statute on religious freedom is written by Thomas Jefferson, introduced in March 1779

June 1, 1779 – June 3, 1781: Jefferson is Governor of Virginia

Jan 1784 – Patrick Henry's Bill to fund religious teachers is introduced

August 1785 – *Memorial and Remonstrance* is written by James Madison

January 1786 – Virginia statute on religious freedom is passed, largely to the pursuance of Madison

June 1788 – US Constitution is ratified

September 1789, 1st amendment and the rest of the bill of rights is submitted for ratification

December 1791 - Bill of rights is adopted

November 1796 – Treaty of Tripoli is signed

March 1801 – Jefferson presidency begins

Jan 1802 – Danbury Baptist letter sent

March 1809 Jefferson presidency ends

DBQ Question: The Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom: What does it mean to you?

After reviewing the documents below, please determine why Jefferson believed a Statute for Religious Freedom was necessary, what the statute entailed, and then consider its impact on Government and religion in the United States.

Document #1

A Bill Establishing a Provision for Teachers of the Christian Religion

Author: Patrick Henry, *January 1, 1784*

Whereas the general diffusion of Christian knowledge hath a natural tendency to correct the morals of men, restrain their vices, and preserve the peace of society; which cannot be effected without a competent provision for learned teachers, who may be thereby enabled to devote their time and attention to the duty of instructing such citizens, as from their circumstances and want of education, cannot otherwise attain such knowledge; and it is judged that such provision may be made by the Legislature, without counteracting the liberal principle heretofore adopted and intended to be preserved by abolishing all distinctions of preeminence amongst the different societies or communities of Christians;

Be it therefore enacted by the General Assembly, That for the support of Christian teachers, per centum on the amount, or in the pound on the sum payable for tax on the property within this Commonwealth, is hereby assessed, and shall be paid by every person chargeable with the said tax at the time the same shall become due

Document #2

Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments. June 20, 1785

Author: James Madison. Anonymous at the time it is released.

We the subscribers, citizens of the said Commonwealth, having taken into serious consideration, a Bill printed by order of the last Session of General Assembly, entitled "A Bill establishing a provision for Teachers of the Christian Religion," and conceiving that the same if finally armed with the sanctions of a law, will be a dangerous abuse of power, are bound as faithful members of a free State to remonstrate against it, and to declare the reasons by which we are determined.

"...Because the Bill violates that equality which ought to be the basis of every law, and which is more indispensable, in proportion as the validity or expediency of any law is more liable to be impeached. If "all men are by nature equally free and independent," [Virginia Declaration of Rights, art. 1] all men are to be considered as entering into Society on equal conditions; as relinquishing no more, and therefore retaining no less, one than another, of their natural rights. Above all are they to be considered as retaining an "*equal* title to the free exercise of Religion according to the dictates of Conscience." [Virginia Declaration of Rights, art. 16]"

Document # 3

Virginia Declaration of Rights, Article 16

Author: George Mason

"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."

Document #4

Source: Map

Author: Trinityhistory.org 1750



Document #5

Source: The History of the Kettocton Baptist Association, published 1808

Author: William Fristoe, Early Baptist minister

“ At another time,... while at devotion, a mob having collected, they immediately rushed upon them in the meeting house, and began to inflict blows on the worshippers, and produce bruised and bloodshed, so that the floor shone with sprinkled blood the days following.”

Source: Wellspring of Liberty (secondary source), Published 2010

Author: John Ragosta

“At another time a lawless mob, headed by two magistrates seized Mr. Moore and another preachers who was with him and carried them off to duck them.”*

Note: “Duck them” was a common form for persecution for dissenters. It was the process of pulling a subject under water several times, almost until drowning occurred. This was often done to mock Protestant baptism practice.

Document #6

Source: Virginia Statue of Religious Freedom. Written 1777, introduced in 1779. Becomes approved by US Congress in 1786

Author: Thomas Jefferson

“Be it enacted by the General Assembly, That no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods, 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”

Document #7

Source: 1st Amendment to the United States Constitution

Author: James Madison

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

Document #8

Source: *Right of Conscience Inalienable. January 1791*

Author: John Leland, famous Baptist Minister who supported Jefferson and Madison in religious liberty law

"Every man must give account of himself to God, and therefore every man ought to be at liberty to serve God in a way that he can best reconcile to his conscience. If government can answer for individuals at the Day of Judgment, let men be controlled by it in religious matters; otherwise, let men be free." - *Right of Conscience Inalienable.*

Document #9

Source: Letter to the Danbury Baptists, January 1, 1802

Author: Thomas Jefferson

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should “make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” thus building a wall of separation between Church & State. Adhering to this expression of the supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of conscience, I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore to man all his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties.

Document #10

Source: Newspaper Article

Author: Unknown, Published September 13, 1783 in the Virginia Gazette.

Note: This source is written about by John Ragosta in his work “Wellspring of Liberty.”

“(This) was broached again publicly in a letter urging, ‘Nations are happy only in proportion as they are virtuous’ and insisting on the necessity of government support of Christian denominations to support that virtue.”

Additional resources that the teacher may want to consider

Jefferson Timeline

<https://www.monticello.org/site/jefferson/timeline-jeffersons-life>

The Statue for Religious Freedom

<http://classroom.monticello.org/kids/gallery/image/275/Statute-of-Virginia-for-Religious-Freedom/>

Draft of the Statute of Religious Freedom

<http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/presidents/thomas-jefferson/draft-for-a-bill-for-establishing-religious-freedom-1779.php>

Audio of Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom

<http://classroom.monticello.org/kids/resources/download/26/Audio-of-the-Statute-of-Virginia-for-Religious-Freedom-mp3/>

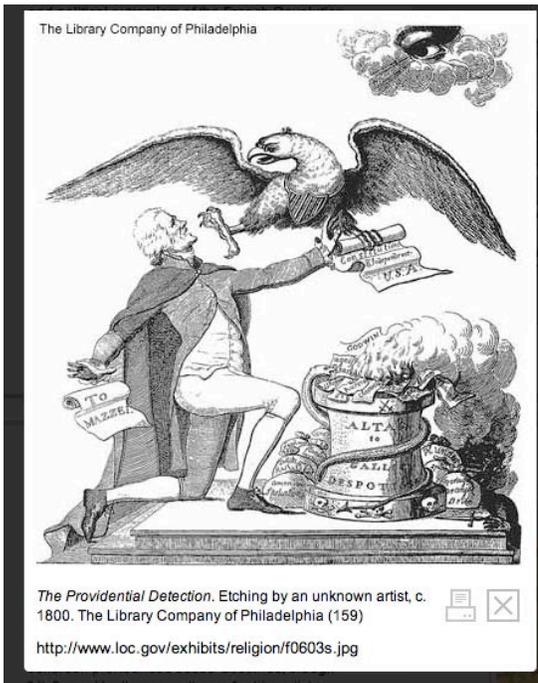
Podcast on Virginia Dissenters and the Statute of Religious Freedom

<https://www.monticello.org/site/multimedia/archive-monticello-podcasts>

Memorial and Remonstrance

<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-08-02-0163>

Document #11



During the presidential campaign of 1800, the Federalists attacked Thomas Jefferson as an infidel, claiming that Jefferson's intoxication with the religious and political extremism of the French Revolution disqualified him from public office. In this cartoon, the eye of God has instigated the American eagle to snatch from Jefferson's hand the "Constitution & Independence" of the United States before he can cast it on an "Altar to Gallic Despotism," whose flames are being fed by the writings of Thomas Paine, Helvetius, Rousseau, and other freethinkers. The paper, "To Mazzei," dropping from Jefferson's right hand, was a 1796 letter that was interpreted by Jefferson's enemies as an indictment of the character of George Washington.

<https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel06-2.html>

Document #12

Treaty of Tripoli, Article 11. November 4, 1796 Treaty is ratified

Author: Signed by John Adams to protect trade interests in the Mediterranean from the Barbary Powers.

“As the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion, - as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion or tranquility of Musselmen, -and as the said States never have entered into any war or act of hostility against any Mehomitan nation, it is declared by the parties that no pretext arising from religious opinions shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries.

Document # 13

Source: Jefferson's letter to his nephew, Peter Carr. 1787

Author: Thomas Jefferson

"... shake off all the fears and servile prejudices, under which weak minds are servilely crouched. Fix reason firmly in her seat, and call to her tribunal every fact, every opinion. Question with boldness even the existence of a God; because, if there be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason, than that of blindfolded fear."

Document #14

Source: "Religion in Virginia" published 1977. Pages 184-85

Author: Thomas Buckley

By the mid-nineteenth century, Protestant Christianity increasingly assumed the characteristics of a functional establishment with ever increasing state support for, and endorsement of, religion in general (since) Virginians believed that religion encouraged public virtue they regarded as essential for republican government."

Document 15

Source: Runkel v. Winemiller, 1799

Author: Samuel Chase, Supreme Court Justice appointed by George Washington

"By our form of government, the Christian religion is the established religion; and all sects and denominations of Christians are placed upon the same equal footing, and are equally entitled to protection in their religious liberty."

