

Finding Answers with Founding Documents...

The Declaration of Independence
by Thomas Jefferson (principal author)

Social Studies: 10th/11th Grade United States History

Essential Questions:

- What did the Declaration of Independence declare?
- What was the impact or legacy of the Declaration of Independence to qualify it as one of the most important founding documents?

Standards:

1. ACOS 10th Grade U.S. History I, Standard #3
 - Trace the chronology of events leading to the American Revolution, including the French and Indian War, passage of the Stamp Act, the Boston Tea Party, the Boston Massacre, passage of the Intolerable Acts, the Battles of Lexington and Concord, the publication of Common Sense, and the signing of the Declaration of Independence.
 - Summarizing major ideas of the Declaration of Independence, including the theories of John Locke, Charles de Montesquieu, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau
2. ACOS 10th Grade U.S. History I, Standard #11
 - Evaluate the impact of American social and political reform on the emergence of a distinct culture.
 - Explaining the influence of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Dorothea Lynde Dix, and Susan B. Anthony on the development of social reform movements prior to the Civil War
3. ACOS 10th Grade U.S. History I, Standard #15

- Compare congressional and presidential reconstruction plans, including African-American political participation.
 - Summarizing post-Civil War constitutional amendments, including the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments
4. ACOS 11th Grade U.S. History II, Standard #2
 - Evaluate social and political origins, accomplishments, and limitations of Progressivism.
 5. ACOS 11th Grade U.S. History II, Standard #14
 - Trace events of the modern Civil Rights Movement from post-World War II to 1970 that resulted in social and economic changes, including the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the desegregation of Little Rock Central High School, the March on Washington, Freedom Rides, the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing, and the Selma-to-Montgomery March.
 - Tracing the federal government's involvement in the modern Civil Rights Movement, including the abolition of the poll tax, the nationalization of state militias, Brown versus Board of Education in 1954, the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965
 6. ACOS 12th Grade U.S. Government, Standard #2
 - Summarize the significance of the First and Second Continental Congresses, the Declaration of Independence, Shays' Rebellion, and the Articles of Confederation of 1781 on the writing and ratification of the Constitution of the United States of 1787 and the Bill of Rights of 1791.
 7. ACOS 12th Grade U.S. Government, Standard #14
 - “Describe the role of citizens in American democracy, including the meaning, rights, and responsibilities of citizenship...”
 8. ACOS Appendix C, Literacy Standards #1, #2, #4, and #5

- “Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.”
- “Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.”
- “Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social studies.”
- “Analyze how a text uses structure to emphasize key points or advance an explanation or analysis.”

Objectives:

1. Identify and explain the ideals and principles expressed by The Declaration of Independence.
2. Establish the context for the Declaration and determine how it relates to America’s founding and where it falls on the historical timeline relative to other pivotal founding documents.
3. Trace the legacy of The Declaration of Independence by identifying major democratic triumphs of the 19th and 20th centuries that were founded on the principles expressed by the Declaration.
4. Summarize what the central principles of the Declaration means through the eyes and word of students.

Materials:

1. Bell Ringer Activity: Printed or projected copy of The Declaration of Independence annotated document page
2. Before Activity: Printed copies of the “Putting the Declaration in Context” activity sheet.
3. During Activity: Printed copies of “The Steps of Progress and the Legacy of the Declaration” fill-in-the-blank activity sheet.

4. After Activity: Printed copies of the “What Does the Declaration Mean to You” activity sheet.

Procedures:

1. Bell Ringer strategy: Bell Ringer Question based on a selected Declaration of Independence excerpt
 - a. Students will analyze the selection and annotations from The Declaration of Independence document and answer the question at the top: “What does the Declaration actually declare?”
2. Before strategy: “Putting the Declaration in Context”
 - a. After studying the content of the document on the Bell Ringer sheet, students read over the list of founding American documents associated with The American Revolution. The students should then match the description that correctly summarizes each document. The descriptions provide enough detail and context clues to help the students determine the correct match, but they may use a textbook or other academic resources to help them.
 - b. Then, using the context clues within the descriptions, the students will determine when each document was signed or ratified and write the names of all six documents next to the appropriate year or years (Articles of Confederation) on the timeline at the bottom of the page.
3. During strategy: “The Steps of Progress and the Legacy of the Declaration” fill-in-the-blank activity
 - a. Using the provided Word Bank on the left-hand side of the page, the students will fill in all the blanks by writing in the correct word from the bank.
 - b. Students should begin at the bottom with the “Before the Declaration” section in order to identify the state of society and

government before the drafting of The Declaration of Independence.

- c. Students should then move up the “steps” of progress to learn about the legacy of the Declaration.
 - d. The purpose of this activity is not only to demonstrate the limitations that existed before the drafting of the Declaration but also to remind students that the signing of the document did NOT automatically extend the words and ideals to everyone. Thus, the Declaration is a living document that continues to inspire democratic reforms, extend more liberties, and spread the principles of equality to more people.
 - e. The students should be able to find the correct word using the context clues, but they may use a textbook or other academic resources to help them.
 - f. Each blank has only ONE correct answer and each word will only be used ONCE.
4. After strategy: “What Does the Declaration Mean to You?”
- a. Instruct students to read each famous statement from the Declaration and then share what each statement/principle/ideal personally means to them in their own thoughts and words.
 - b. The students should write their responses in the spaces provide under each statement.
 - c. Encourage students to write 2-3 sentences for each statement.
 - d. Encourage students to use relevant, modern, and real-world examples if it helps them express their interpretations.

Background Information

The Declaration of Independence

"Let the annual return of this day forever refresh our recollections of these rights, and an undiminished devotion to them."

—Thomas Jefferson

"I have said that the Declaration of Independence is the ring-bolt to the chain of your nation's destiny; so, indeed, I regard it. The principles contained in that instrument are saving principles. Stand by those principles, be true to them on all occasions, in all places, against all foes, and at whatever cost."

— Frederick Douglass

There are so many layers and applications within the words of The Declaration of Independence. There are so many stories associated with its creation and living, breathing implementations of its founding message as the central and ongoing narrative of democratic society, not just here in the United States, but the world over. This document was the crowning achievement of almost 100 years of Enlightenment thought and the living legacy of liberty, equality, and self-government that continues to inspire change.



The Enlightenment ideals championed by John Locke (natural rights...life, liberty, property), the social contract theory furthered by Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and the ideas of placing checks or limitations on governing authorities as supported by philosophes like Baron de Montesquieu all contributed to the education of our Founding Fathers and the drafters of The Declaration of Independence. More directly, the principles expressed by Thomas Paine's "Common Sense" from 1775-1776 captured and expressed a growing spirit of independence felt throughout the Thirteen American Colonies of Great Britain. For over a century, Great Britain harvested the resources of the North American continent along its eastern seaboard as proprietors, companies, and the government invested in the potential of the New World. Along the way, settlements, farms, plantations, towns, and cities grew

with a semblance of localized rule and the perception that the rights of British citizens were extended into the British colonies. The French and Indian War (1754-1763) ended Parliament's period of salutary neglect and the enormous debt generated by the war effort was passed on to the Thirteen Colonies in the form of taxation.

The excessive taxation sounded the cry of "No taxation without representation," led to organized resistance, and united the colonies in the common ideals echoed by the students of the Enlightenment who were now positioning themselves as the agents of change and the fervent delegates rising to lead their respective colonies. After initial plans were made at the First Continental Congress in 1774, events accelerated in New England as the bloodshed at Lexington and Concord provoked the Congress to reassemble, beginning in 1775, as the Second Continental Congress. As the Congress prepared for war and appointed General George Washington as Commander-in-Chief of the newly created Continental Army, the conflict remained in a state of rebellion. Then, as Paine's pamphlet made its way around the colonies, the colonists and the Congress realized that King George III was not their rightful sovereign. The time had come to move beyond grievances and rebellion and towards revolution.



Virginia delegate Richard Henry Lee issued a resolution for independence on June 7, 1776. The Congress created a committee to draft an official document to declare independence from Great Britain. This committee consisted of John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman, Robert Livingston, and Thomas Jefferson...a highly educated and eloquent Virginia planter and statesman. Many historians credit Adams with recognizing

Jefferson's gift of prose and urging him to be the principal author. After Jefferson's initial drafts were read, debated, and edited for multiple days, the final draft was finally agreed upon and signed on July 4, 1776, thus marking the birth of the United States of America.

Although most attention is given to the principles expressed in the introduction, preamble, and conclusion of the Declaration, most of the content is actually found within the "indictment" portion of the document wherein Jefferson specifically

lists the long train of abuses and usurpations that justify the separation and the boldness of the Declaration.

The rest is history and democracy. The United States had to “earn” its independence with a victory in the War for Independence before Great Britain



and the world would recognize the U.S. as a sovereign nation which ultimately occurred with the Treaty of Paris of 1783 to officially end the war and recognize American independence. The Declaration’s impact was felt worldwide in places like France, Haiti, and eventually most of the planet.

Unfortunately, it took quite some time and sacrifice for the ideals and principles expressed in the Declaration to protect all American citizens with the inalienable rights and equalities they were told to believe in. Initially, only the white, wealthy, property-owning, males fully enjoyed the promises of the Declaration. One of the ongoing themes of the American history narrative has been the story and struggle of countless Americans to extend those principles and ideals to everyone, regardless of class, race, color, gender, or national origin. In fact, many would agree that we are still trying to realize the full promise of that hallowed document. This founding document is a living document with sacred ideals that identify us, unite us, and inspire us to become better versions of ourselves.

Bell Ringer:

What does the Declaration actually declare?

Selections from...

The Declaration of Independence (1776)

by Thomas Jefferson (principal author)

To introduce the most famous passage from the Declaration, the values expressed are not framed as theories or beliefs...but rather **OBVIOUS TRUTHS**

One of the most quoted ideals in America...all are equal because they were all created having the same rights...but it's more of an ideal we continually strive to implement. Case in point, this ideal did not apply to several minority groups and lower socioeconomic classes in 1776; their struggles for equality became a major part of the American story.

Founding American Principle: *Life, Liberty, Pursuit of Happiness are Natural and Fundamental Rights of Mankind*

"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 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**. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But **when a long train of abuses and usurpations**, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to **reduce them under absolute Despotism**, it is *their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government*, and to provide new Guards for their future security."

Natural
Universal
Fundamental

Wrongfully
taking
someone's
power or
property

Absolute Power
or Tyranny

The People Create the Govt. to Serve **the People**... Power is Granted to the Government by **the People**

Thus, when the Government fails to protect and secure the fundamental rights identified above...the People have the Right to change or abolish the Government and replace it with a better government.

In fact, according to the 2nd Continental Congress, when a long line of government abuses (not "light and transient" or small, trivial, and short-term) creates a state of tyranny, the People have a right and DUTY to change the government. Within the context of 1776, this was the justification for declaring independence from Great Britain. Jefferson then went on to list these specific abuses in the next part of the Declaration commonly referred to as the Indictment.

Before Activity: Putting the Declaration in Context

Directions: Many Americans often get confused when distinguishing between America's founding documents. For instance, some people don't realize there's a big difference in time, place, and purpose when comparing the Declaration of Independence and the Preamble of the Constitution.

This activity contains a matching component and a timeline to be completed at the bottom:

- *For the matching component, use what you've learned in school and any academic resources allowed by your teacher to match each founding document to its correct description by simply writing the letter of correct description in the blank next to the document.*
- *Then, use the information in the descriptions to help you complete the timeline. For each date or range of dates, write the founding document that was drafted/signed on that date or utilized as the binding law of the land for the range of dates.*

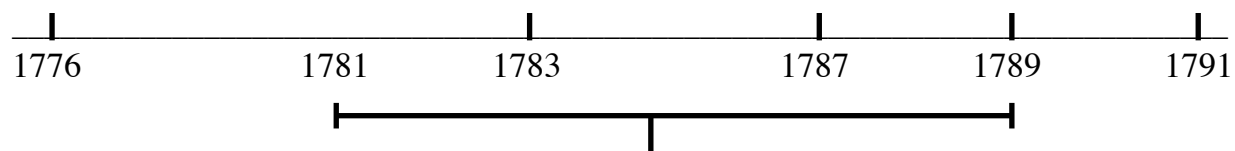
Matching

1. The Preamble of the Constitution ____
2. The Declaration of Independence ____
3. The Articles of Confederation ____
4. The Articles of the Constitution ____
5. The Bill of Rights ____
6. The Treaty of Paris 1783 ____



- a) This document actually served as the first constitution to be adopted (1777), ratified (1781), and established in force as the binding law of the United States. John Hanson became the first President of the United States UNDER this document in 1781. This document served as the first constitution until it was officially replaced in 1789.
- b) This document is the 2nd part of the greater document that has served as the basis for the United States government since 1789. The primary purpose of this document was to establish the powers and limitations of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. It includes concepts such as separation of powers and checks and balances.
- c) The signing of this document on July 4, 1776, marked the birth of the United States of America as a free and independent country even though the rest of the world was not yet ready to recognize this self-proclamation of independence by the Second Continental Congress representing the American Colonies of Great Britain.
- d) This document officially ended the American Revolutionary War with Great Britain and formally recognized the United States as an independent nation on the world stage.
- e) The framers of the Constitution drafted this opening paragraph in the summer of 1787 to introduce the intentions, objectives, and purpose of the Constitution ("We the people...").
- f) Proposed by the First Congress of the United States in September 1789 as the first set of amendments to the new United States Constitution, 10 amendments were officially ratified by 3/4's of the state legislatures in December of 1791 to become this sacred document designed primarily to enumerate the rights of citizens.

Timeline



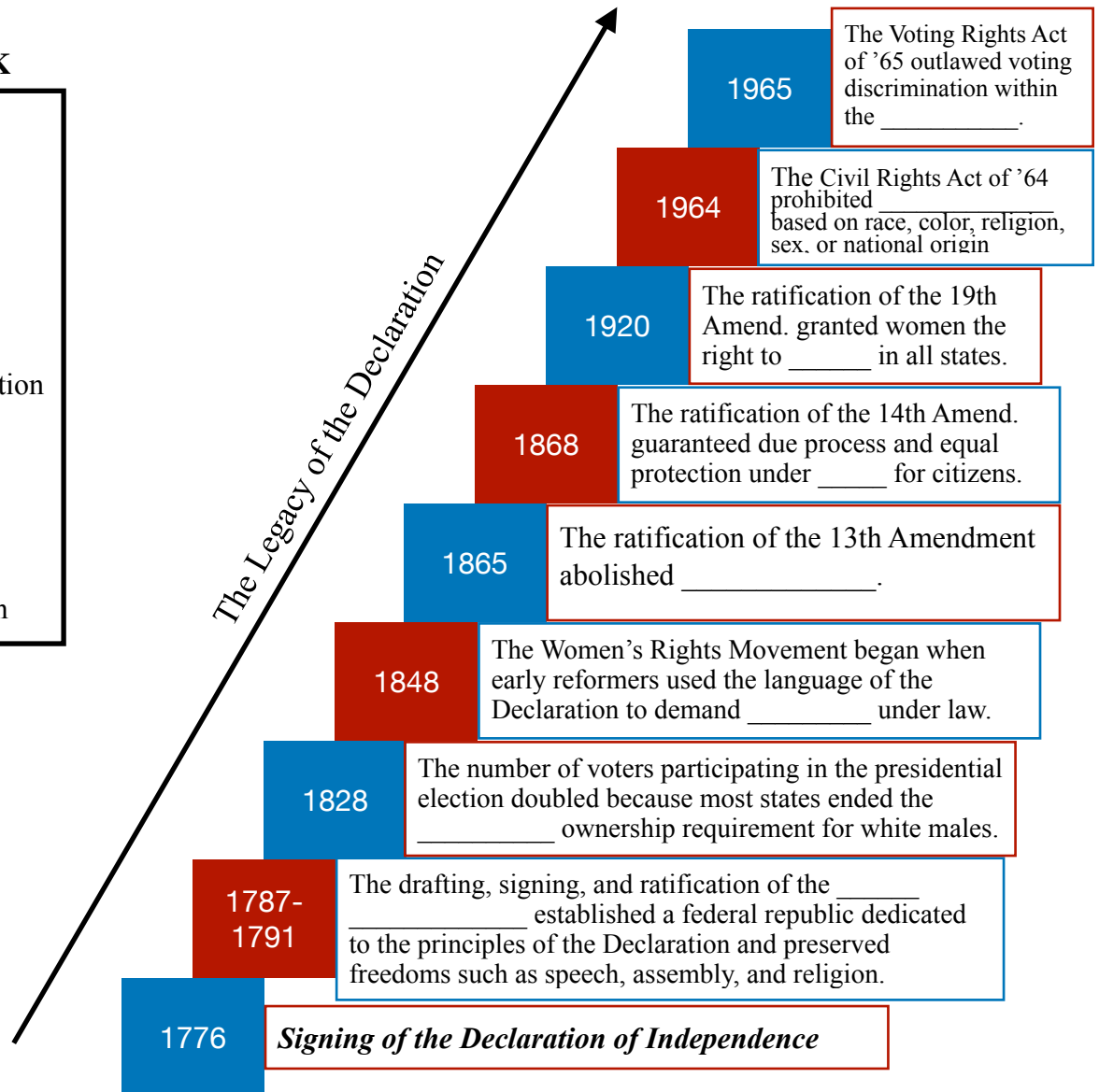
During Activity: Fill-in-the-Blank

The Steps of Progress and the Legacy of the Declaration

Directions: Fill in the blanks below by choosing a word from the word bank that best completes each sentence. Simply write the word in each blank. All words will be used and none will be used more than once. Begin at the bottom with the “Before the Declaration” section and then proceed to the descriptions in “The Legacy of the Declaration” section beside the dated steps.

WORD BANK

citizens
states
property
vote
inequality
equality
nation
U.S. Constitution
slavery
religious
monarchies
colonies
law
discrimination



Before the Declaration

- ☒ America was NOT an independent _____ but a collection of British _____.
- ☒ The ideas of racial, gender, and social _____ were widely accepted as merely part of life.
- ☒ _____ beliefs were predominantly dictated by kings or other governing authorities.
- ☒ Powerful _____ allowed elites to rule based on heredity instead of merit or popularity.
- ☒ The masses of people were not considered _____ but rather subjects, servants, or slaves.

After Activity: So What?

What Does the Declaration Mean to You?

Directions: *Based on everything you've learned in this lesson, complete the statements below by sharing in your own words what these ideals and principles expressed by The Declaration of Independence actually mean to you.*

Statement 1

"We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal"

Statement 2

"...that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness"

Statement 3

"That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed"

Bell Ringer Model Answer:

The Declaration declares a number of things: self-government, natural rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness that no government has a right to take away, the equality of mankind in creation because of those shared natural rights, the right of the people to change a government that does not protect those natural rights IF repeated and ongoing abuses on behalf of the government are not rectified.

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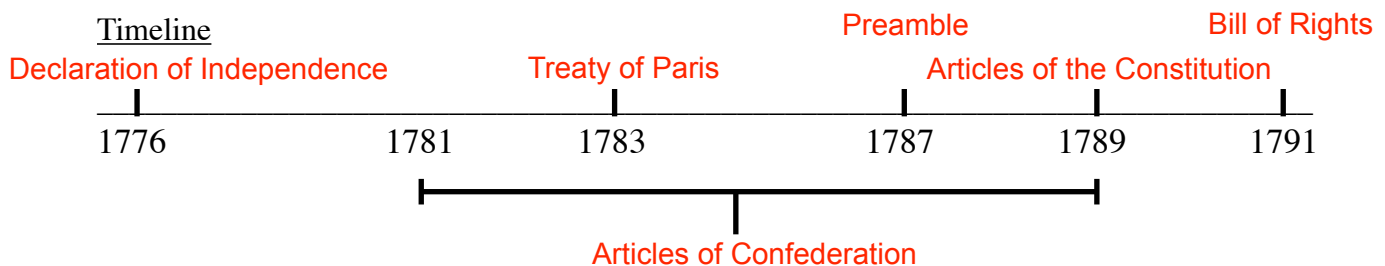
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Matching

1. The Preamble of the Constitution e
2. The Declaration of Independence c
3. The Articles of Confederation a
4. The Articles of the Constitution b
5. The Bill of Rights f
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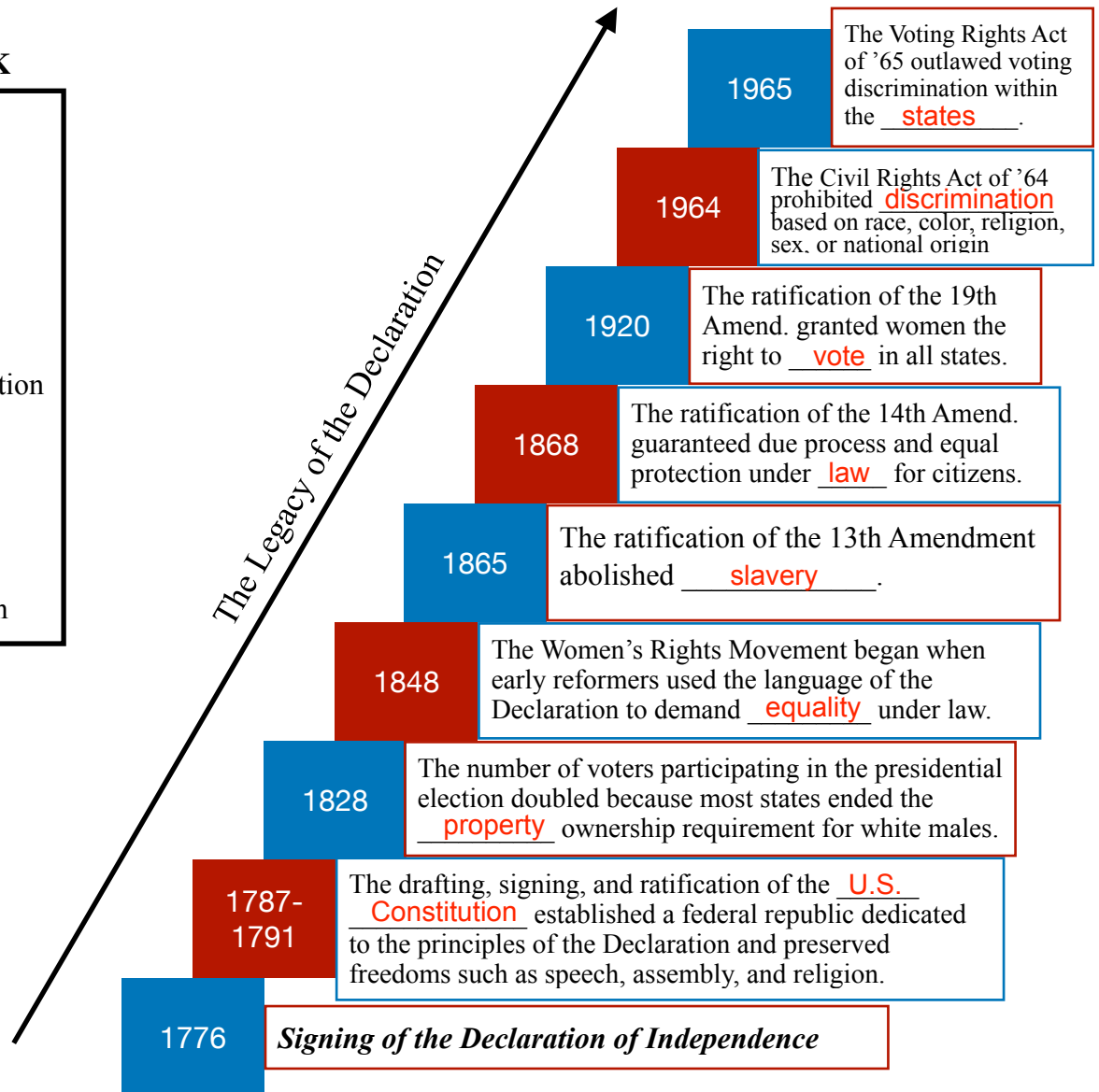
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Statement 1

"We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal"

We think, believe, and value that everyone was created to have the same opportunities and freedoms.

We believe these truths should be obvious or naturally apparent.

It should be clear to all people that everyone was born equal.

Statement 2

"...that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness"

God and/or the Creator of the universe granted natural rights that no man has the right to question or take away.

The God-given right to live, to live freely, and to pursue happiness while living cannot be taken away.

Even with all the rules, regulations, laws, and government power...God is the ultimate power who gave his creation life, liberty, and the right to pursue happiness.

Statement 3

"That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed"

Governments belong and answer to the PEOPLE!

Government was created to answer to the people it serves and not the other way around.

Governments exist for the primary reason of protecting the natural rights of citizens.

Governments were created by Men for mankind, which remains the source of government power.
