THE AMERICAN JOURNEY FROM RELIGIOUS TOLERATION TO RELIGIOUS LIBERTY ANSWER KEY

**Handout A: The American Journey from Religious Toleration to Religious Liberty**

Summary: The American colonies offered limited religious toleration in which the government granted the right to worship. Moreover, several colonies had established churches that all citizens were required by law to attend and pay taxes to support. Most colonies had religious tests for office. The principles of individual liberty and limited government in the American Revolution and Founding shaped a new approach as freedom of conscience as an inalienable natural right became the new understanding of religious liberty. Key Founding documents supporting religious liberty include the Virginia Declaration of Rights, the Declaration of Independence, the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, the Constitution, and the First Amendment.

**Handout B: Religious Toleration**

1. John Locke supports the idea that people can worship freely in any church in society independent of the belief of the leader.
2. The Maryland Toleration Act grants toleration to all Christians and promises that they will not suffer civil penalties for their belief and can worship freely. Non-Christians were not protected.
3. The Pennsylvania Charter offered toleration to all inhabitants who would enjoy the right to worship freely and not to suffer civil penalties. It placed a religious test on holding office for Christians only.
4. George Mason's draft of religious liberty in the Virginia Declaration of Rights protected freedom of worship but not freedom of conscience as an unalienable right.
5. The 1780 Massachusetts Constitution offered religious toleration free from civil burdens but provided a caveat that exercising that right, citizens could not disturb the public peace or interfere with others’ worship.

**Handout C: Religious Liberty**

1. Thomas Jefferson's Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom asserts freedom of conscience as a natural right and disestablished the official church in Virginia because religious beliefs could not be restrained in any way by government.
2. George Washington shares his belief that religious and civil liberty are among the most important outcomes of the American Revolution for the American people to enjoy their rights in a free society.
3. James Madison established the principle of freedom of conscience rather than just religious toleration or freedom of worship in the Virginia Declaration of Rights.
4. The Declaration of Independence established that humans have rights from their Creator from which they cannot be alienated. Freedom of conscience was one of those rights.
5. The First Amendment asserted that all Americans would enjoy freedom of conscience and that the Congress could not restrain their religious liberty.
6. Isaac Backus defends the idea that religious liberty is a basic right of all people and that government exists to protect that right.

7. James Madison argues that freedom of conscience is a fundamental right and cannot be controlled in any way by government.

8. James Madison argues that humans have a property in their essential rights. He calls freedom of conscience the most important of those rights and that government cannot violate it.

**Handout D: Religious Liberty or Religious Toleration**

**Cards related to Religious Toleration**

1. Maryland Legislature, 1649: Religious toleration because the government granted freedom of worship only to Christians.

2. George Mason, Draft of the Virginia Declaration of Rights, 1776: Religious toleration because it guaranteed the toleration of all expressions of religion rather than asserting a right.

**Cards related to Religious Liberty**


4. Massachusetts Constitution, 1780: Religious liberty because it asserts freedom of conscience; however, the state also had a limited establishment of religion and a few stated limits on that liberty.

5. James Madison, Memorial and Remonstrance, 1785: Religious liberty because it asserted conscience is the most sacred right and is a natural right.


7. First Amendment, 1791: Religious liberty because it guaranteed that Congress could not pass laws interfering with the free exercise of religion.

**Handout E: Letters to the Congregations: George Washington and Religious Liberty**

   
   Blue/Religious Liberty: “If I could have entertained the slightest apprehension that the Constitution framed in the Convention, where I had the honor to preside, mightpossibly endanger the religious rights of any ecclesiastical society, certainly I would never have placed my signature to it; and if I could now conceive that the general government might ever be so administered as to render the liberty of conscience insecure, I beg you will be persuaded that no one would be more zealous than myself to establish effectual barriers against the horrors of spiritual tyranny, and every species of religious persecution.”

   Yellow/Good Citizenship and Republican Government: “For you, doubtless, remember that I have often expressed my sentiment, that every man, conducting himself as a good citizen,”

   Blue/Religious Liberty: “and being accountable to God alone for his religious opinions, ought to be protected in worshipping the Deity according to the dictates of his own conscience.”
   Green/Virtue: “While I reiterate the professions of my dependence upon Heaven as the source of all
   public and private blessings; I will observe that the general prevalence of piety, philanthropy, honesty,
   industry, and economy seems, in the ordinary course of human affairs, particularly necessary for
   advancing and conforming the happiness of our country.”
   Blue/Religious Liberty: “While all men within our territories are protected in worshipping the Deity
   according to the dictates of their consciences;”
   Yellow/Good Citizenship and Republican Government: “it is rationally to be expected from them in
   return, that they will be emulous of evincing the sanctity of their professions by the innocence of their
   lives and the beneficence of their actions; for no man, who is profligate in his morals, or a bad member
   of the civil community, can possibly be a true Christian, or a credit to his own religious society.”

   Blue/Religious Liberty: “The liberty enjoyed by the people of these states of worshipping Almighty God
   agreeably to their consciences, is not only among the choicest of their blessings, but also of their rights.”
   Yellow/Good Citizenship and Republican Government: “While men perform their social duties
   faithfully, they do all that society or the state can with propriety demand or expect;”
   Blue/Religious Liberty: “and remain responsible only to their Maker for their religion, or modes of
   faith, which they may prefer or profess.”

   Green/Virtue: “The prospect of national prosperity now before us is truly animating, and ought to excite
   the exertions of all good men to establish and secure the happiness of their country, in the permanent
   duration of its government, and the cultivation of manners, morals, and piety, cannot fail of attaining
   an uncommon degree of eminence, in literature, commerce, agriculture, improvements at home and
   respectability abroad.”
   Yellow/Good Citizenship and Republican Government: “As mankind become more liberal they will
   be more apt to allow that all those who conduct themselves as worthy members of the community are
   equally entitled to the protection of civil government.”
   Blue/Religious Liberty: “I hope ever to see America among the foremost nations in examples of justice
   and liberality. And I presume that your fellow-citizens will not forget the patriotic part which you took
   in the accomplishment of their Revolution, and the establishment of their government; or the important
   assistance which they received from a nation in which the Roman Catholic faith is professed.”

   Yellow/Good Citizenship and Republican Government: “If we have wisdom to make the best use of
   the advantages with which we are now favored, we cannot fail, under the just administration of a good
   government, to become a great and happy people.”
Blue/Religious Liberty: “The citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy – a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of as if it were the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights, for, happily, the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance,”

Yellow/Good Citizenship and Republican Government: “requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens in giving it on all occasions their effectual support . . . .”

Blue/Religious Liberty: “May the children of the stock of Abraham who dwell in this land continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants – while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree and there shall be none to make him afraid.”