

Module 2: The Constitution

Topic 3 Content: Virginia's Impact On American Government

Introduction



Glover Mint: Virginia and Virginians were extremely influential during the founding of America and the development of the new American government. Rick Henri is in the studio today to discuss a few of the ways Virginia impacted these new institutions.

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The Impact



Rick Henri: Thank you Glover and Demi. As you mentioned, Virginia and Virginians played a significant role in the formation of American government. The influence of Virginian's was not only exercised through their direct involvement in founding of America's government, but also through legislation they had previously written for Virginia's government. Let's focus on three particular pieces of legislation.

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Virginia Declaration of Rights

Virginia Declaration of Rights



- George Mason was a statesman from Virginia.
- He wrote the Virginia Declaration of Rights.
- This document explained the fundamental rights that should belong to all Virginians.
- It also served as the inspiration for the Bill of Rights for the U.S. Constitution.

Please Make a Selection Below

Natural Rights
and Freedom

Trial by Jury
and Due Process

Freedom of the
Press and Religion

Rick Henri: George Mason was a statesman from Virginia and one of the delegates sent to represent Virginia in the Second Continental Congress. During his time as a Virginia legislator, he wrote the Virginia Declaration of Rights, which was adopted by the Virginia Constitutional Convention in 1776. This document explained the fundamental rights that should belong to all Virginians. It also served as the inspiration for the Bill of Rights for the U.S. Constitution. Here are a few key similarities.

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Virginia Declaration of Rights: Natural Rights and Freedom

Virginia Declaration of Rights



Section 1. That all men are by nature equally free and independent and have certain inherent rights, of which...they cannot, by any compact, deprive or divest their posterity; namely, the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety.

Please Make a Selection Below

Natural Rights
and Freedom

Trial by Jury
and Due Process

Freedom of the
Press and Religion

Rick Henri: In the first section, you can see the similarity to the ideas conveyed in the Declaration of Independence. The most noteworthy are Rousseau's belief that all men are equal and Locke's belief in man's natural right to life, liberty, and property.

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Virginia Declaration of Rights: Trial by Jury and Due Process

Virginia Declaration of Rights



Section 8. That...a man has a right to demand the cause and nature of his accusation, to be confronted with the accusers and witnesses, to call for evidence in his favor, and to a speedy trial by an impartial jury...no man be deprived of his liberty except by the law of the land or the judgment of his peers.

Please Make a Selection Below

Natural Rights
and Freedom

Trial by Jury
and Due Process

Freedom of the
Press and Religion

Rick Henri: In this section, there are parallels drawn between both the U.S. Constitution and the Magna Carta. The right to a trial by a jury of your peers and due process of the law are just two examples.

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Virginia Declaration of Rights: Freedom of the Press and Religion

Virginia Declaration of Rights



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

Section 16. That religion...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...

Please Make a Selection Below

Natural Rights
and Freedom

Trial by Jury
and Due Process

Freedom of the
Press and Religion

Next

Rick Henri: In sections 12 and 16, you can see the protections for freedom of the press and the freedom of religion, respectively. These are key components of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

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Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom

Virginia Statute for Religious Freedoms

- Was passed in the Virginia General Assembly on January 16, 1786
 - Served as the foundation for the freedom of religion under the First Amendment
- No Virginian can be forced to attend a specified church or support it financially
 - Virginians are entitled to worship as they choose
 - The civil liberties of Virginians should not be dependent upon their choice of religion



Rick Henri: Thomas Jefferson accomplished many things throughout his lifetime. Interestingly, when he died he had only three of his proudest accomplishments engraved onto his headstone. Those accomplishments were the writing of the Declaration of Independence, the founding of the University of Virginia, and the writing of this document, the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom. The Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom was passed in the Virginia General Assembly on January 16, 1786. It was the foundation of the freedom of religion, which would be guaranteed by the First Amendment of the Constitution.

The statute states:

- no Virginian can be forced to attend a specified church or support it financially;
- Virginians are entitled to worship as they choose; and
- the civil liberties of Virginians should not be dependent upon their choice of religion.

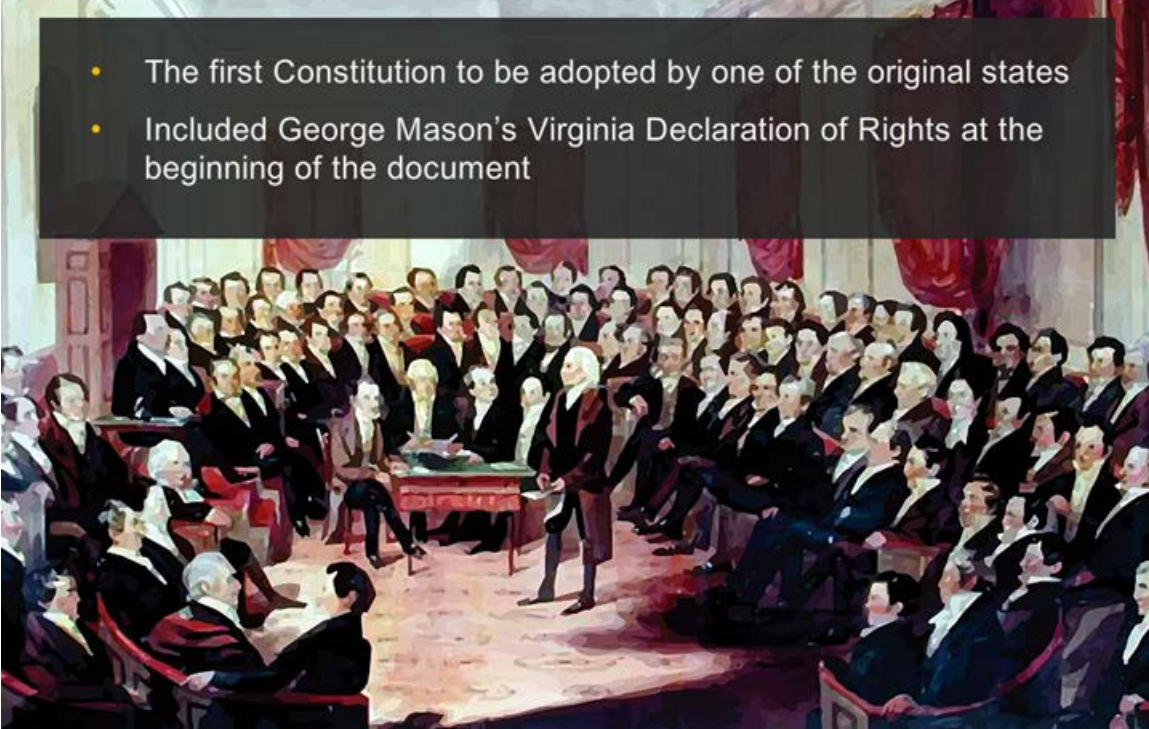
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Constitution of Virginia

Constitution of Virginia

- The first Constitution to be adopted by one of the original states
- Included George Mason's Virginia Declaration of Rights at the beginning of the document



Rick Henri: The Constitution of Virginia was technically the first Constitution adopted by one of the original thirteen states. It included George Mason's Virginia Declaration of Rights at the beginning of the document. The document itself shares similar themes to other legislation of the time, and echoes the philosophies of the great European thinkers Locke and Montesquieu.

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Constitution of Virginia II

Constitution of Virginia

"...The legislative, executive, and judiciary department, shall be separate and distinct, so that neither exercise the powers properly belonging to the other..."

"...The legislative shall be formed of two distinct branches, who together, shall be a complete Legislature...and shall be called, The General Assembly of Virginia..."

"...A Governor, or chief magistrate, shall be chosen annually...who shall not continue in that office longer than three years successively nor be eligible, until the expiration of four years after he shall have been out of that office..."

Constitution of Virginia, 1776

Rick Henri: Locke, among other things, believed that governments should be limited in their power. Montesquieu argued the importance of separating the powers of government. The Constitution of Virginia took these ideas of limited government and separation of power and incorporated them.

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"...The legislative shall be formed of two distinct branches, who together, shall be a complete Legislature...and shall be called, The General Assembly of Virginia..."

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Ending of Episode



Glover Mint: Thank you for that informative segment, Rick. Also, thanks to our viewers for joining us today at WUSG News. Have a good day!