Student Handouts

Primary Sources and Source Analysis Tools for:
Jewish Voices in Early America: Religious Liberty and Civic Participation

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Source 1: Pennsylvania 1776 State Constitution

Pennsylvania's original state constitution from 1776 included three key sections: the preamble, a declaration of rights, and a plan of government. For this lesson, you will examine short excerpts from the plan of government.

From the **Plan or Frame of Government for the Commonwealth or State of Pennsylvania**

SECTION 10. And each member [of the house of representatives], before he takes his seat, shall make and subscribe the following declaration:

I do believe in one God, the creator and governor of the universe, the rewarder of the good and the punisher of the wicked. And I do acknowledge the Scriptures of the **Old and New Testament** to be given by Divine inspiration.

And no further or other religious test shall ever hereafter be required of any **civil officer** or **magistrate** in this State.

SECTION 45. And all religious societies or bodies of men **heretofore** united or incorporated for the advancement of religion or learning, or for other pious and charitable purposes, shall be encouraged and protected in the enjoyment of the privileges, immunities and estates which they were accustomed to enjoy, or could of right have enjoyed, under the laws and former constitution of this state.

GLOSSARY

Old Testament: The Christian term for the first part of the Christian Bible, which is comprised of books from the Jewish Hebrew Bible. Jews and Christians hold these texts sacred, though they are translated and interpreted differently and serve different functions in each religion.

New Testament: The second part of the Christian Bible. Judaism does not accept the New Testament as sacred.

civil officer: an employee of the government

magistrate: a civil officer who is responsible for administering the law

heretofore: before now

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Source 2: Maryland 1776 State Constitution

Maryland's original state constitution from 1776 included the Declaration of Rights and The Constitution. The following excerpts come from both parts.

From **A Declaration of Rights**

33. That, as it is the duty of every man to worship God in such manner as he thinks most acceptable to him; all persons, professing the Christian religion, are equally entitled to protection in their religious liberty; wherefore no person ought by any law to be **molested** in his person or estate on account of his **religious persuasion** or profession, or for his religious practice; unless, under **colour of religion**, any man shall disturb the good order, peace or safety of the State, or shall infringe the laws of morality, or injure others, in their **natural**, civil, or religious rights.

35. That no other test or qualification ought to be required, on admission to any office of trust or profit, than such oath of support and **fidelity** to this State, and such oath of office, as shall be directed by this Convention or the Legislature of this State, and a declaration of a belief in the Christian religion.

From **The Constitution, or Form of Government**

55. That every person, appointed to any office of profit or trust, shall, before he enters on the execution thereof, take the following oath: "I, A. B., do swear, that I do not hold myself bound in allegiance to the King of Great Britain, and that I will be faithful, and bear true allegiance to the State of Maryland" and shall also subscribe a declaration of his belief in the Christian religion.

GLOSSARY

molested: in its older meaning, to molest is to cause trouble, bother, or harass another person

religious persuasion: a personal religious belief system

color of religion: for the purpose of religion

natural rights: rights all people are born with and that cannot be taken away; rights that should be protected by the government

fidelity: faithfulness or loyalty

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Source 3: North Carolina 1776 State Constitution

North Carolina's original state constitution from 1776 included two sections: the "Declaration of Rights" and "The Constitution, or Form of Government". The following excerpts come from "The Constitution, or Form of Government", and includes the introduction as well as sections 32 and 34.

From **The Constitution, or Form of Government**

Wherefore, in our present state, in order to prevent anarchy and confusion, it becomes necessary that government should be established in this State; therefore we, the Representatives of the **freemen** of North Carolina, chosen and assembled in Congress for the express purpose of **framing** a Constitution, under the authority of the people, most **conducive** to their happiness and prosperity, do declare that a government for this State shall be established, in manner and form following:

32. That no person, who shall deny the being of God or the truth of the Protestant religion, or the divine authority either of the Old or New Testaments, or who shall hold religious principles **incompatible** with the freedom and safety of the State, shall be capable of holding any office or place of trust or profit in the civil department within this State.

34. That there shall be no establishment of any one religious church or **denomination** in this State, in preference to any other; neither shall any person, on any presence whatsoever, be compelled to attend any place of worship contrary to his own faith or judgment.

GLOSSARY

freemen: referring to people who have the full rights of citizenship

framing: constructing or developing

conducive: describing conditions that are likely to make something happen

incompatible: describing things that are not suitable for working together

denomination: a subgroup of a particular religion

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Pennsylvania State Constitution Graphic Organizer

Read the document twice: once for comprehension, and then again for further analysis. Follow the order indicated on the guiding questions below.

	First Read	**Second Read**	**Second Read**
	1. What **requirements** does this state have for an individual to **hold public office**? Use evidence to support your answer. *Annotate to support your reading – underline or highlight the evidence you find on your document.	2. How do these requirements **limit** certain groups' abilities to participate in government?	3. Does this excerpt represent **religious tolerance** or **religious liberty**? Explain
Source: **Pennsylvania 1776 State Constitution**			

State Constitutions Jigsaw Graphic Organizer

Read your document twice: once for comprehension, and then again for further analysis. Follow the order indicated on the guiding questions below.

	First Read 1. What **requirements** does this state have for an individual to **hold public office**? Use evidence to support your answer. *Annotate to support your reading – underline or highlight the evidence you find on your document.	**Second Read** 2. How do these requirements **limit** certain groups' abilities to participate in government?	**Second Read** 3. Does this excerpt represent **religious tolerance** or **religious liberty**? Explain
Source 1: **Pennsylvania 1776 State Constitution**			
Source 2: **Maryland 1776 State Constitution**			
Source 3: **North Carolina 1776 State Constitution**			

Source A: Jonas Phillips to George Washington, 1787

The following is a letter written by Jonas Phillips, a Jewish resident of Pennsylvania, to George Washington and the Continental Congress on September 7, 1787. The Continental Congress had begun the process of writing the United States Constitution. In his letter, Phillips describes his concerns about restrictions that would prevent religious minorities, like Jews, from running for office.

Sirs,

1 I, the subscriber, being one of the people called Jews of the City of Philadelphia, a people scattered and dispersed among all nations, do behold with concern that among the laws in the Constitution of Pennsylvania there is a Clause Sect 10 [which reads:] **"I do believe in one God the Creator and governor of the universe, the Rewarder of the good and the punisher of the wicked—and I do acknowledge the scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be given by divine inspiration."** To swear and believe that the New Testament was given by divine inspiration is absolutely against the religious principle of a Jew and is against his conscience to take any such oath. By the above law a Jew is deprived of holding any public office or place of Government which is **contradictory** to the [Pennsylvania] Bill of Rights Sect. 2 [which reads:]

2 > "That all men have a natural and **inalienable** right to worship almighty God according to the dictates of their own conscience and understanding…nor can any man who acknowledges the being of a God be justly deprived or abridged of any civil right as a citizen on account of his religious sentiments."

3 It is well known among all the citizens of the 13 United States that the Jews have been true and faithful **whigs**; and during the late **contest** with England they have been foremost in aiding and assisting the states with their lives and fortunes, they have supported the cause, have bravely fought and bleed for liberty which they cannot enjoy.

4 Therefore if the honourable Convention shall in their wisdom think fit and alter the said oath and leave out the words — "and I do acknowledge the scriptures of the new testament to be given by divine inspiration" – then the **Israelites** will think themself happy to live under a government where all religious societies are on an equal footing.

Your most devoted obedient servant,
Jonas Phillips

GLOSSARY

Old Testament: The Christian term for the first part of the Christian Bible, which is comprised of books from the Jewish Hebrew Bible. Jews and Christians hold these texts sacred, though they are translated and interpreted differently and serve different functions in each religion.

New Testament: The second part of the Christian Bible. Judaism does not accept the New Testament as a sacred text.

contradictory: opposed to, or inconsistent with

inalienable: unable to be taken away

whigs: patriots, or those who supported independence from Britain

contest: the Revolutionary War

Israelites: Jews

1st Read: Read and annotate for any ideas related to **religious liberty**.

2nd Read –Text-Based Questions: Reread the source and answer the following questions to support your understanding.

1. In paragraph 1, why does Phillips say that the Jewish people are concerned? What does he say would be against the "conscience" of a Jew?
2. Why does Phillips quote a separate passage from the Pennsylvania Bill of Rights in paragraph 2? What point does he make by referencing this section?
3. Why does Phillips describe the participation of Jews in the Revolutionary War in paragraph 3? How might this appeal to his audience?
4. In paragraph 4, what action does Phillips suggest that will allow "all religious societies" to live on "equal footing"?
5. Phillips wrote this letter to the Framers of the United States Constitution, citing the Jewish community's issues with the Pennsylvania Constitution. What does he hope to achieve?

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Source B: Exchange between Moses Seixas and George Washington, 1790

*On August 17, 1790, Moses Seixas (pronounced SAY-SHUSS), a leader of the Jewish Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island, wrote a letter to George Washington asserting that the United States had been founded on the principle of **religious liberty**, and that Jews – and all people – had the right to all of the same freedoms. Four days later, on August 21, Washington replied. In his response, he expressed America's commitment to freedom of conscience and **religious liberty** for all.*

Moses Seixas's Letter to President George Washington

Sir:

1 Permit the **children of the stock of Abraham** to approach you with the most cordial affection and esteem for your person and merits — and to join with our fellow citizens in welcoming you to Newport.

2 Deprived as we heretofore have been of the **invaluable** rights of free Citizens, we now with a deep sense of gratitude to the Almighty, disposer of all events, behold a Government, erected by the Majesty of the People — a Government, which to **bigotry** gives no sanction, to **persecution** no assistance — but generously affording to all Liberty of conscience, and immunities of Citizenship: — deeming every one, of whatever Nation, tongue, or language equal parts of the great **governmental Machine** — This so ample and extensive **Federal Union** whose basis is philanthropy, mutual confidence and public virtue, we cannot but acknowledge to be the work of the Great God.

3 For all these Blessings of civil and religious liberty which we enjoy under an equal and **benign** administration, we desire to send up our thanks to the Ancient of Days, the great preserver of Men.

Done and Signed by order of the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island August 17th, 1790.

GLOSSARY

Children of the stock of Abraham: Jews

invaluable: extremely important; priceless

bigotry: prejudice against a person or people based on their group identity

persecution: targeting or maintaining hostility towards a person or people based on their identity

governmental Machine: the government of the United States

Federal Union: referring to the newly established United States

benign: gentle and kind

Ancient of Days: God

George Washington's Response

Gentlemen.

1 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 was by 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, requires only that they who live under its protection should **demean** themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.

2 It would be inconsistent with the frankness of my character not to avow that I am pleased with your favorable opinion of my Administration, and fervent wishes for my **felicity**. 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 figtree, and there shall be none to make him afraid**. May the father of all mercies scatter light and not darkness in our paths, and make us all in our several vocations useful here, and in his own due time and way everlastingly happy.

Go: Washington

GLOSSARY

natural rights: rights all people are born with and cannot be taken away; rights that should be protected by the government

demean: to behave or act in a particular way

felicity: happiness

"while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and figtree, and there shall be none to make him afraid": Here, Washington references a Bible verse from the book of Micah, which is part of both the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament. The verse describes people living safely in peace and free from violence.

*Disclaimer: For readability and comprehension purposes, ICS has updated the spellings, capitalizations, formatting, and some punctuation in these documents to reflect the modern standard. We have shortened each text to help students focus on main ideas. Please visit the George Washington Institute for Religious Freedom for each of the full letters.

1st Read: Read and annotate for any ideas related to **religious liberty**.

2nd Read –Text-Based Questions: Reread the source and answer the following questions to support your understanding.

Seixas's Letter to Washington

1. In paragraph 1, who does the "children of the stock of Abraham" refer to?
2. In paragraph 2, Seixas says that the government to "bigotry gives no sanction" and "persecution no assistance." In one sentence, explain what this means.
3. According to Seixas, in paragraph 2, who should be able to be part of the "great governmental Machine"?
4. In paragraph 3, what does Seixas hope the Jewish people will enjoy under Washington's administration?

Washington's Letter to Seixas and the Newport Congregation

1. In paragraph 1, Washington echoes Seixas's references to "liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship." What might these terms mean?
2. In paragraph 1, what claim does Washington make about "toleration"?
3. In paragraph 1, what does Washington state is the only thing that the government requires of its citizens to secure its full support?
4. In paragraph 2, what is Washington's purpose in referencing the biblical passage?

Source C: Jacob Cohen on the Act for the Relief of the Jews in Maryland, 1818

Maryland was one of the states that kept religious requirements for citizens holding public office even after the federal Constitution was adopted, preventing Jews and other religious minorities from office. Jacob Cohen, along with other Jewish citizens of Maryland, worked together for many years for these restrictions to be removed. The following source is an excerpt from a letter that Cohen wrote in 1818 to state delegate Ebenzer S. Thomas about the efforts to pass a piece of legislation known as the "Jew Bill," which would allow Jews to hold public office in Maryland. The bill eventually passed in 1826 with the help of delegate Thomas Kennedy, who is named in the letter below. Cohen was elected the same year to the Baltimore City Council.

Dear Sir:

1 Noticing the proceedings of the present legislature of [Maryland], I observe a committee has been appointed in the **house of Delegates** to bring in a **Bill** "to extend to persons professing the Jewish Religion the same civil privileges that are enjoyed by other religious sects" and that yourself with Mr. Kennedy, by whom the motion was made, and Mr. Breckenridge compose that committee.

2 You cannot be aware Sir from not having felt the pressure of religious intolerance, of the emotions excited in the breast of an **Israelite** whenever the theme of liberty of conscience is **canvassed**. The subject of religion being the nearest and most vital to the soul of every **sectarian**, it awakens every spark of feeling in support of those **unalienable rights** which the very nature of man forbids a transfer. On the question of the extension of religious freedom to any sect or denomination, the Jew feels with **solicitude** for a **Brother sufferer**.

3 The grievance complained of and for which **redress** is asked is that part of the Constitution of Maryland, which requires a declaration of belief in the Christian Religion, prevents a Jew accepting any office his fellow men might elect him to or think him deserving the enjoyment of. He is thus **incapacitated** because he cannot **abjure** the principles instilled in him of worshipping the Almighty according to the dictates of his own conscience and take an oath of belief in other tenets, as if such a declaration of Belief made him a better man or one more capable of exercising the duties of the office which the **want** of the declaration would deprive him of because he maintains his unalienable rights with a steadfast and upright hand.

I am, dear sir, yours with great respect,
J.I. Cohen

GLOSSARY

House of Delegates: a group of state representatives

Bill: a proposal for a new law, or to change an existing law

Israelite: a Jew

canvassed: raised as a subject

secretarian: referring to followers of different religions

unalienable rights: rights that cannot be taken away

solicitude: care and concern

Brother sufferer: followers of other religions who are also suffering

redress: to set something right

incapacitated: unable to do something; in this case, unable to take office

abjure: to renounce, to give up

want: lack

1st Read: Read and annotate for any ideas related to **religious liberty**.

2nd Read –Text-Based Questions: Reread the source and answer the following questions to support your understanding.

1. What is the purpose of the bill Cohen describes in paragraph 1?
2. In paragraph 2, how does Cohen describe the feelings a "liberty of conscience" inspires in Jews and other religious people?
3. In the beginning of paragraph 3, what "grievance" does Cohen describe?
4. As paragraph 3 continues, how does Cohen describe the way that Jews are affected by the requirement in the Maryland Constitution?
5. In paragraphs 2 and 3, Cohen mentions "unalienable rights". What right(s) might he be referring to?

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Exit Ticket: 3-2-1 Notes

Primary Source Exploration: How did the Jewish community work to expand **religious liberty** and civic participation in early United States history?

3 **KEY IDEAS** These can be related to: **religious liberty**, civic participation, the lasting impact of this document, etc.	
2 **SIGNIFICANT QUOTES** that relate to **religious liberty** and/or civic participation	
1 **QUESTION** What else do you want to know about this document or its author?	

Creative Extension Option #1 – One-Pager

Use this template to record the key ideas, positive impacts, important quotes, and other relevant content from your primary source in order to show what your document's author hoped to achieve through their actions.

SPACE FOR VISUALS, ADDITIONAL QUOTES, VOCABULARY WORDS, OR OTHER CREATIVE CONTRIBUTIONS

2 KEY IDEAS	WHAT DID THE AUTHOR HOPE FOR?
QUOTE THAT REPRESENTS **RELIGIOUS LIBERTY**	
WHAT THE QUOTE MEANS TO YOU	IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT AUTHOR

Creative Extension Option #2 – Diary Entry

Compose a one-page diary entry from the perspective of the author of your document.Through their voice, explain and include:

1. What motivated them to take action
2. How they understand religious liberty
3. What they hoped to change or achieve through their actions
4. At least one direct quote from your primary source document into the diary entry

Date of Entry:

Diary Entry of _____

Possible sentence starters for the author of your document's perspective – the following are optional supports and do not need to be used in this order:

It came to my attention that…	Introduce the situation or context
I wrote in my letter, "…"	Introduce a quote from your document
I needed to take action because…	Show the author's motivation
This was important to me because…	Emphasize what the author values
*To me, **religious liberty** means…*	Explain what **religious liberty** means to the author
I believe civic participation is important because…	Additional important context
I want to make sure that…	Explain what the author hoped to achieve
We need to change…	Explain what the author hoped to change
Ultimately, I hope that…	Conclude the entry