

The decision to declare independence came only after all other options had been exhausted.

The Second Continental Congress

SS.8.A.1.6, SS.8.A.3.3, SS.8.A.3.6, SS.8.A.3.7

How did individuals and events impact efforts for independence?

In 1774 the Continental Congress agreed to meet again if the British did not address their complaints. In fact, as the battles at Lexington and Concord in 1775 showed, the dispute between the British and the colonies had worsened.

Distinguished Leaders

The Second Continental Congress met on May 10, 1775. The delegates included some of the greatest leaders in the colonies. Among them were John and Samuel Adams, Patrick Henry, Richard Henry Lee, and George Washington—all delegates to the First Continental Congress. Several new delegates came as well.

Benjamin Franklin, one of the most respected men in the colonies, had been a leader in the Pennsylvania legislature. In 1765 he represented the colonies in London and helped win repeal of the Stamp Act. John Hancock of Massachusetts was a wealthy merchant. He funded many Patriot groups, including the Sons of Liberty. The delegates chose Hancock to be president of the Second Continental Congress. Thomas Jefferson, only 32, was also a delegate. He served in the Virginia legislature. Jefferson was already known as a brilliant thinker and writer.

The delegates at the Second Continental Congress had much to discuss. Though American and British blood had been spilled, they were not ready to vote for a break from Britain. It would be another year before Jefferson would write the Declaration of Independence.

Key Actions

The Continental Congress did take steps to begin governing the colonies. It authorized the printing of money and set up a post office, with Franklin in charge. The Congress also formed committees to handle relations with Native Americans and foreign countries. Most important, it created the Continental Army. Unlike local militias, such a force could form and carry out an overall strategy for fighting the British. The Congress unanimously chose George Washington to command this army. Washington was an experienced soldier and a respected Southern planter. He left Philadelphia at once to take charge of the forces in Boston.

The delegates then offered Britain a last chance to avoid war. They sent a **petition**, or formal request, to George III. Called the Olive Branch Petition, it assured the king that the colonists wanted peace. It asked him to protect the colonists' rights. The king rejected the petition. Instead, he prepared for war. He hired more than 30,000 German troops, called Hessians (HEH • shuhnzh), to fight alongside British troops.

The War Heats Up

Congress learned that British troops in Canada were planning to invade New York. The Americans decided to strike first. A unit of Patriots marched north from Fort Ticonderoga and captured Montreal. However, an American attack on Quebec, led by Benedict Arnold, failed.

Washington reached the Boston area in July 1775, a few weeks after the Battle of Bunker Hill. The British held Boston, but Patriot militia ringed the city. Although the size of the colonial force grew every day, Washington realized that the men were disorganized and lacked **discipline**—the ability to follow strict rules and procedures. Washington began the task of turning armed civilians into soldiers.

Washington also needed weapons. He arranged to have dozens of cannons hauled 300 mile(483 km) from Fort Ticonderoga. Moving the heavy guns was a huge effort.

In March 1776, Washington believed his army was ready to fight. Under the cover of darkness, he moved soldiers and cannons into position overlooking Boston, while the redcoats slept.

The move surprised the British, who realized they were now within easy reach of Washington's big guns. British General William Howe commanded his soldiers to board ships and withdraw from Boston. On March 17, Washington led his jubilant troops into the city. They watched as the British troops sailed away to Halifax, Nova Scotia, a part of Canada.

Moving Toward Independence

Many colonists held on to hope that the colonies could remain part of Great Britain. Still, support for independence was growing. It was inspired in no small part by writer Thomas Paine. Paine arrived in the colonies from England in 1774. He soon caught the revolutionary spirit. In January 1776, he published a pamphlet called *Common Sense*. In bold language, Paine called for a complete break with British rule.

"Every thing that is right or reasonable pleads for separation. The blood of the slain, the weeping voice of nature cries, 'TIS TIME TO PART."

Common Sense listed powerful reasons why Americans would be better off free from Great Britain. The pamphlet greatly influenced opinions throughout the colonies.

Explaining What was the significance of the Olive Branch Petition?

Declaring Independence

SS.8.A.1.6, SS.8.A.3.3, SS.8.A.3.6, SS.8.A.3.7, SS.8.C.1.2, LA.8.1.6.1

Why did the American colonies declare independence?

The Second Continental Congress was filled with spirited **debate**: Should the colonies declare themselves an independent nation or stay under British rule? In June 1776, Virginia's Richard Henry Lee offered a bold resolution:

"That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States . . . and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved."

—Richard Henry Lee, resolution for independence, 1776

The Congress debated Lee's resolution. Some delegates still thought the colonies should not form a separate nation. Others argued that war had already begun and they should be free from Great Britain. Still others feared Britain's power to crush the rebellion.

Writing the Declaration

While delegates debated, Congress chose a committee to write a declaration of independence. John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Robert Livingston, and Roger Sherman formed the committee. Adams asked Jefferson to write the first draft. Jefferson hesitated, but Adams persuaded him, saying:

"Reason first—You are a Virginian, and a Virginian ought to appear at the head of this business. Reason second—I am obnoxious, suspected, and unpopular. You are very much otherwise. Reason third—you can write ten times better than I can."

—from *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 1822

Jefferson agreed that he would do the writing for the great project. He drew on ideas from English philosopher John Locke to explain why the 13 colonies were proclaiming their freedom. In the 1690s Locke expressed the idea that people are born with certain natural rights to life, liberty, and property. Locke wrote that people form governments to protect those rights, and that a government interfering with those rights could rightfully be overthrown. Jefferson and other Patriots agreed with Locke.

On July 2, 1776, the Second Continental Congress voted on Lee's resolution for independence. Twelve colonies voted for independence. New York did not vote but later announced its support.

Next, the delegates discussed Jefferson's draft of the Declaration of Independence. After making some changes, delegates approved the document on July 4, 1776. John Hancock signed the Declaration first. He remarked that he wrote his name large enough for King George to read without his glasses. Eventually 56 delegates signed the document announcing the birth of the United States.

Copies of the Declaration of Independence were printed and sent out to people in the newly declared states. George Washington had the Declaration read to his troops in New York City on July 9. In Worcester, Massachusetts, a public reading of the Declaration of Independence led to "repeated [cheers], firing of musketry and cannon, bonfires, and other demonstrations of joy."

The Declaration of Independence

The Declaration has four major sections. The **preamble**, or introduction, states that people who wish to form a new country should explain their reasons for doing so. The next two sections of the Declaration list the rights that the colonists believed they should have and their complaints against Great Britain. The final section proclaims the existence of the new nation.

John Adams expected the day Congress voted on Lee's resolution for independence to be celebrated as a national holiday. He wrote, "The Second Day of July 1776 . . . ought to be solemnized with Pomp and Parade . . . and Illuminations from one End of this Continent to the other." Instead, July 4, the date the delegates actually adopted the Declaration of Independence, is celebrated as Independence Day.

The Declaration of Independence states what Jefferson and many Americans thought were universal principles—that is, principles that apply to all people in all situations. It begins by describing what had long been viewed as basic English rights:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable [not to be denied] Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

The Declaration states that government exists to protect these rights. If government fails, "it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it and to institute new Government." The document goes on to list grievances against the king and Parliament. These include "cutting off our trade with all parts of the world" and "imposing taxes on us without our consent." Americans had "Petitioned for Redress" of these grievances. The British had ignored or rejected these petitions.

Finally, the Declaration announces America's new **status** (STAY • tuhs). Pledging "to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor," the Americans declared themselves a new nation. The struggle for independence—the American Revolution—had begun.

Summarizing According to John Locke, what is the purpose of government?

Florida CONNECTION

Florida Loyalists

The colonists of East and West Florida did not share the anger of other colonists. Florida stayed loyal to British rule throughout the debate for independence. Many Loyalists from Georgia and South Carolina fled to Florida to escape the fighting. When news of the Declaration of Independence reached St. Augustine, people burned effigies of Hancock and Adams in the public square.

LESSON 4 REVIEW

Review Vocabulary

1. Use the term *petition* in a sentence about the colonists' struggles with Britain.

LA.8.1.6.1

2. Use *preamble* in a sentence that helps explain its meaning.

LA.8.1.6.1

Answer the Guiding Questions

3. **Explaining** What actions did the Second Continental Congress take to begin governing the colonies?

SS.8.A.3.6

4. **Summarizing** What grievances against King George III were included in the Declaration of Independence?

SS.8.A.3.7

5. **Interpreting** Reread the Primary Source quote from the Declaration of Independence above. Rewrite this quote in your own words and explain its significance.

SS.8.A.3.7

6. **EXPOSITORY WRITING** Who did the most to promote the cause of independence: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, or Thomas Paine? Give reasons for your choice.

SS.8.A.3.3