

The background of the slide is a close-up, slightly blurred image of the American flag. The stars and stripes are visible, with the blue field of stars on the left and the red and white stripes on the right. The flag appears to be draped or hanging, creating soft folds and shadows. The overall color palette is dominated by the red, white, and blue of the flag.

Declaration of Independence

Reasons for Independence

- Over 100 years of the policy of salutary neglect by the British government (relaxed policies, allowed for self government in the colonies)
- French and Indian War
 - Series of taxes on the colonies to pay off war debt (taxation without representation)
 - Colonist not allowed to move into territory won from France

Colonists attempt reconciliation

- Protest through peaceful means (petitions, boycotts, and committees)
- Great Britain refuses to negotiate
- Boston Tea Party (March, 1774)
 - England responds with harsh punishments
 - Intolerable Acts (martial law, new taxes, quartering of soldiers, closed Boston Harbor)

Colonists' opinion about independence

- Upper class fears lower classes will have too much power
- Middle class feared continued trade restrictions would hurt their businesses
- Olive Branch Petition, last ditch effort by the Second Continental Congress at peace
 - Angers King George, declares the colonies in a state of open rebellion (more troops sent to the colonies and he hired German mercenaries)

Thomas Paine and *Common Sense*

- Thomas Paine writes a pamphlet called *Common Sense*
 - Argues that the colonists should free themselves from British Rule and establish an independent government based on the ideas of the Enlightenment
 - Written in a simple style so ALL colonists could understand it
 - 500,000 copies sold
 - Colonists support independence as a result

Reasons for Caution in Declaring Independence

- Fear of failure & trial for treason
- Fear of mob rule (anarchy)
- Ties to Great Britain – family and economic ties (trade & business)

Reasons for Declaring Independence – Why did Americans Change their Minds?

- Uncompromising attitude of British –
 - violated their rights as Englishmen
 - King called colonists “rebels” & hired Hessians
- Military necessity – lives had been lost
- Shifting attitudes of Americans –
publication of *Common Sense*

Declaring Independence

- Summer 1776, the Continental Congress appoints a committee to begin drafting a declaration stating reasons for independence
 - John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Robert Livingston, and Roger Sherman appointed to write a declaration of independence
 - Thomas Jefferson selected to write the document
 - Draft presented; 86 changes made – 2 references to God added; slavery deleted

Ideas of the Declaration

- John Locke, author of *Two Treatises on Government*:
 - Man possessed natural rights (life, liberty, and property)
 - Government exists because of a contract between the ruler and the people
 - A ruler only has power as long as he has the consent of the governed
 - A ruler cannot deny people their basic rights of life, liberty, and property)

Ideas of the Declaration.

- Jean Jacques Rousseau wrote *Social Contract*
 - People would form a community and make a contract with one another, not a ruler
 - People would give up some of their freedoms to benefit the majority
 - People would vote on decisions and live by those decisions

Ideas of the Declaration

- Baron de Montesquieu wrote *The Spirit of Law*
 - Promoted a system of checks and balances
 - Separation of powers
 - The best way to protect natural rights is to limit a governments power

Principles of the Declaration of Independence

- “natural rights”: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness
- Governments derive their power from the people and could be abolished if individuals’ “unalienable rights” (rights everyone has from birth) were trampled
- All men are created equal
- Listed how England had violated the colonists’ “unalienable rights”

Independence Declared

- July 2, 1776 - delegates voted that America was free
- July 4, 1776 - the Declaration of Independence was officially adopted by Congress

Parts of the Declaration of Independence

1. Preamble – legal and philosophical justification for the revolution and colonial independence
2. Declaration of rights - governments can't trample a man's rights; if it does, it can be over thrown.
3. List of grievances – outlines how King George had violated the colonists rights
4. Statement of independence

Declaration of Independence

- Overall purpose: to win public support and justify right of people to revolt
- 3 specific purposes:
 - Preamble → reasons for separation – when and under what circumstances should government be changed?
 - present new theory of government based on certain democratic principles
 - issue formal declaration of war

Declaration of Independence as Propaganda

- Longest portion of document lists abuses
 - Who is the “he” so often referred to?
 - What is the purpose of this portion of the document?
- Which charges are valid / accurate?
- Which are exaggerated?

Practical Advantages of Formal Declaration of War?

As newly declared “free and independent states” Americans claimed power to:

1. Levy war
2. Conclude peace
3. Contract alliances
4. Establish commerce

Significance of the Declaration

1. clarified Americans' goals in the war
2. rallied support from other countries
3. provided inspiration to other people in the world to throw off tyrannical governments
 - French Revolution
 - slave revolts
 - Tiananmen Square (China 1989)
 - inspiration for people to seek full political rights (ie: women, African-Americans)
4. framework for American government – influenced state constitutions and U.S. Constitution / Bill of Rights