

“Declaring Independence”

Author: Thomas Jefferson

Where: Philadelphia, PA

*** Based on the ideas of English philosopher John Locke**

What made the Declaration of Independence revolutionary?

- 1. Revolutionary - bringing about fundamental or major changes.**
- 2. The idea that all (white & land owning) men were created equal.**
- 3. People had inalienable (Government can't take away) rights & freedoms: Life, Liberty, Pursuit of happiness (Property)**
- 4. Rights & Freedoms should not be violated by the government**
- 5. The government receives power from the “consent of the governed. (Power comes from the PEOPLE)**
- 6. When government abuses rights & freedoms, “ it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it.” (Revolution)**
- 7. A colony was declaring independence from its founding country.**

Declaration of Independence

- A. Most Americans did not desire independence; proud to be British citizens
- B. Reasons for shift of loyalty
 - 1. Hiring of Hessians
 - 2. Burning of Falmouth & Norfolk
 - 3. Governor of Virginia promised slaves who would fight for the British would be freed.
-- Impact: persuaded many southern elite to join New England in the war effort.
- C. **Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*** (published early 1776)
 - 1. Became an instant best-seller in the colonies; effective propaganda
 - 2. Main ideas:
 - a. Colonial policy was inconsistent; independence was the only course
 - b. Nowhere in the physical universe did a smaller heavenly body control a larger one. Why should tiny England control huge North America?
 - c. King was nothing more than the "Royal Brute of Great Britain."
 - d. America had a sacred mission; moral obligation to the world to set up an independent, democratic republic, untainted by association with corrupt monarchical Britain.
 - 3. Persuaded Congress to go all the way for independence
 - a. Could not hope for aid from France unless they declared independence
 - b. France not interested in colonial reconstruction under Britain
- D. **Declaration of Independence** had three major parts:
 - 1. Preamble (heavily influenced by John Locke)
 - a. Stated the rights of colonists to break away if natural rights were not protected: Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (property)
 - b. All men are created equal
 - 2. List of grievances of the colonies (seen by Congress as most important part)
 - a. Underwent the most changes from the original draft -- 24 changes
 - b. Charged the King with imposing taxes w/o consent, eliminating trial by jury, abolishing valued laws, establishing a military dictatorship, maintaining standing armies in peacetime, cutting off trade, burning towns, hiring mercenaries, inciting Indian violence upon colonies
 - 3. Formal declaration of independence
 - a. Officially broke ties with England
 - b. "United States" officially an independent country
 - 4. Result: Foreign aid could now be successfully solicited