



CHAPTER 2

Americans Declare Their Independence

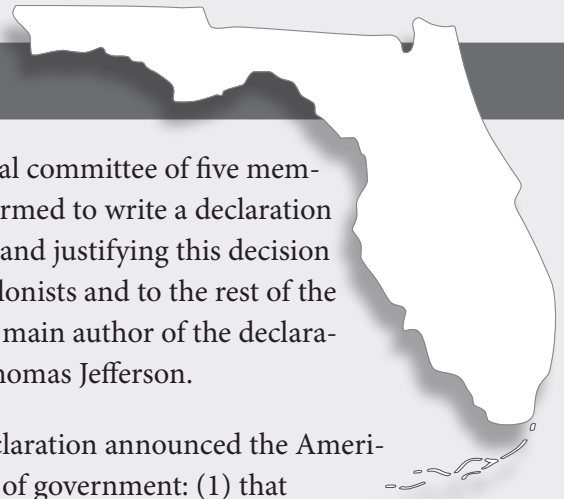
SS.7.C.1.3 Describe how English policies and responses to colonial concerns led to the writing of the Declaration of Independence.

SS.7.C.1.4 Analyze the ideas (natural rights, role of government) and complaints set forth in the Declaration of Independence.

Names and Terms You Should Know

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|-----------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| King George III | Patriot | Natural rights |
| French and Indian War | Continental Congress | Unalienable rights |
| Stamp Act | Mercenary | “Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness” |
| Townshend duties | George Washington | Despotism |
| Boycott | Thomas Paine | Usurpation |
| Quartering troops | John Adams | Tyranny |
| Boston Tea Party | Thomas Jefferson | Allegiance |
| Intolerable Acts | Declaration of Independence | |
| Petition | Grievances | |

Florida “Keys” to Learning



1. British policies after the French and Indian War and colonial responses led to the American Revolution.

2. After the French and Indian War, the British government was deeply in debt. It had borrowed large sums of money to pay for the war. Parliament passed a series of laws to tax the colonists, but made no attempt to obtain colonists' consent (agreement). The British passed the Stamp Act, but repealed it after colonial protests. Then it passed the Townshend duties, taxing glass and other goods, but repealed those. Finally, it passed the Tea Act.

5. Colonists objected that these taxes were all forms of “taxation without representation.” Colonial assemblies sent petitions to Parliament to change these laws, and colonists boycotted British goods in protest.

6. To prevent colonial unrest, the British government sent more troops to North America. The government quartered these troops in colonists' homes.

7. The “Boston Tea Party” was a protest to the Tea Act. A group of colonists, dressed as Indians, boarded British ships at night and threw its chests of tea into Boston Harbor. The British government was outraged at this destruction of property and passed the “Intolerable Acts,” closing Boston Harbor and suspending the colonial legislature.

9. British troops and armed colonists fired on one another at Lexington and Concord in April 1775. The American Revolution had begun.

10. On July 6, 1775, the Continental Congress issued a “Declaration on the Necessity of Taking up Arms.” They explained that they did not seek independence but wanted the British to change their policies. King George III refused to compromise with the colonists.

11. In January 1776, Thomas Paine published his pamphlet, *Common Sense*, urging the colonists to seek independence.

12. In June 1776, John Adams persuaded the Second Continental Congress to support Richard Henry Lee's Resolution proposing independence.

13. A special committee of five members was formed to write a declaration explaining and justifying this decision to other colonists and to the rest of the world. The main author of the declaration was Thomas Jefferson.

14. The Declaration announced the American theory of government: (1) that people have certain “unalienable rights”—the “right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”—that cannot be taken away; (2) that governments are created to protect these rights; (3) that when a government tries to destroy these rights, its people have the right to change that government—even by force if necessary; and (4) that nevertheless, people should not change their government lightly.

15. Much of the Declaration is taken up by its list of colonial grievances—or complaints—against George III, which justify their decision to declare independence. These grievances include the fact that the King taxed them without their consent, quartered his troops in their homes, suspended their legislature, cut their trade, and waged war on the colonists.

16. The colonists were therefore declaring their independence, and announced their right as a sovereign nation to declare war and make alliances. This cleared the way for the Americans to conclude alliances with France and Spain to help them in the war against the British.

17. The Declaration has had a global impact, influencing other peoples who wanted to liberate themselves from imperial rule. Its promise of equality for all peoples, while not realized at the time, helped inspire later reform movements, including abolitionism, women's fight for the right to vote, and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

In the last chapter, you learned how England established thirteen colonies in North America. These colonists enjoyed the same rights as people in Great Britain. They had all the rights given by Magna Carta and the English Bill of Rights. The colonists also

enjoyed some unique powers of self-government. Each colony had its own legislature, which resolved many local problems. The colonies were simply too far from England for many important decisions to be made there.

The French and Indian War

In 1754, Britain went to war with France. This conflict became known in America as the **French and Indian War**. France eventually lost the war and was forced to surrender its colonies in North America. Canada and the Ohio River Valley came under British rule.

The American colonists were pleased with this outcome. They no longer had to worry about defending themselves against the French and their Indian allies. On the other hand, the British government found itself deeply in debt. It had borrowed large sums of money to pay for the war.

Taxation without Representation

People living in Britain were already paying more in taxes than the colonists in North America. The British government therefore decided that the colonists should pay more towards their own defense. Parliament passed a series of laws to tax the colonists. Since the colonies were so far from London, no attempt was made to obtain their **consent** (*agreement*).

The first of these laws was the **Stamp Act**, passed in 1765. This act required every official document, newspaper or pamphlet in the colonies to have an expensive government stamp.

The colonists were greatly angered by the Stamp Act. They objected that this was “taxation without representation.” Colonists held marches and rallies against the Stamp Act. Colonial assemblies sent **petitions** (*formal requests*) to Parliament to change the law. Colonists **boycotted** (*refused to buy*) British goods. Protestors held a special “Stamp Act Congress” in New York City. Some angry colonists even captured government tax collectors and poured hot tar and placed feathers on them.

The British government was taken by surprise by the number of protests against the Stamp Act. Parliament acted quickly to **repeal** (*cancel; withdraw*)

the law. But the British government still needed to collect money from the colonists. Parliament therefore passed a series of new taxes, known as the **Townshend duties**. These placed a new tax on paper, paint, glass, lead and tea. These common goods were shipped to the colonies from Britain.

Once again, Parliament passed these duties without the consent of the colonists. Members of Parliament still felt that the colonists were just too far away to consult with them.

Could the colonists have had their own representatives in Parliament? At a time when crossing the Atlantic was slow, any colonial representatives in London would soon have been out of touch with the colonists they represented. Colonial leaders did not want to be represented in Parliament. Instead, they wanted to make their own laws, including those on taxation, in their own colonial assemblies.



Colonists harrassing a British tax collector

The colonists formed special committees to protest against the Townshend duties. To prevent unrest, the British government sent more troops to North America. More than 4,000 soldiers were sent to Boston alone. The government **quartered** these troops in colonists' homes. To "**quarter**" means to send soldiers to live in private citizens' homes. The homeowner was expected to provide food and lodging to each soldier free of charge.

Parliament finally repealed the hated Townshend duties. However, it passed a new tax on tea in their place. A British ship carrying tea arrived in Boston Harbor in December 1773. A group of colonists, dressed as American Indians, boarded the ship at night and threw its chests of tea into the harbor in protest. This event became known as the "**Boston Tea Party**."

The British government was greatly outraged at this destruction of property. Parliament passed the



Colonists dressed as Indians throw tea into Boston Harbor

Intolerable Acts. Boston Harbor was closed. The Massachusetts legislature was suspended (*temporarily closed*). The British government assumed the power to appoint all officials in Massachusetts until the tea was paid for. Royal officials would no longer be tried for crimes in the colonies, but in Great Britain.

The Outbreak of the Revolution

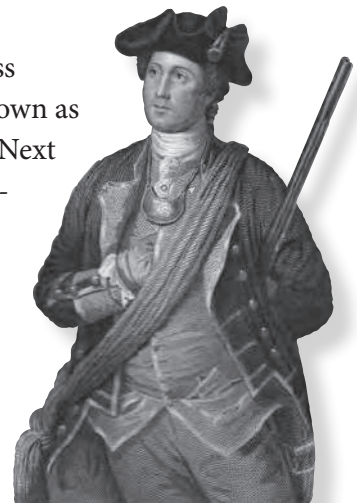
Twelve of the thirteen colonies sent representatives to Philadelphia to meet as a "**Continental Congress**" in September 1774. The Congress assembled, sent protests to Britain, and agreed on a colonial boycott of British goods. Its members decided that another Continental Congress should be held in May 1775. Then they went home.

Meanwhile, American "Patriots" organized in Boston. They collected guns and ammunition. The Governor of Massachusetts sent soldiers to seize colonial leaders and arms just outside Boston. British troops and armed colonists fired on one another at **Lexington** and **Concord** in April 1775. The American Revolution had begun!

The **Second Continental Congress** was about to meet. Many of the delegates to the Second Continental Congress were already on their way to

Philadelphia. The Second Continental Congress began its meetings on May 10, 1775. Most of the delegates from the other colonies strongly supported the decision of Massachusetts to resist the British. They encouraged the other colonies to join in the struggle.

The Continental Congress formed its own army, known as the "Continental Army." Next it chose George Washington, a Virginian, to command it. Washington was an experienced commander from the French and Indian War.



George Washington, age 40

The Question of American Independence

Even after the outbreak of fighting, most colonists still wanted to remain as British subjects. Many of them had relatives in Great Britain. Others traded goods with Britain. Most saw themselves as loyal subjects of the King, who were resisting the unfair policies of his ministers.

On July 6, 1775, the Continental Congress issued a “Declaration on the Necessity of Taking Up Arms.” The purpose of this document was to explain why the colonists were resisting the British government. The declaration contained a long list of colonial grievances. But it emphasized that the colonists were not seeking independence: “We have not raised armies with ambitious designs of separating from Great Britain and establishing Independent States.” Two days later, the Continental Congress sent a petition to the King of Great Britain. The colonists asked the King for reconciliation and peace.

King George III refused to receive the colonists’ petition. Instead, he told Parliament that the colonies were in open rebellion. The King accused the colonists of planning to separate from Britain. Parliament passed an act prohibiting all trade with the colonists until the rebellion was crushed. The King declared the rebellious colonists to be outside of the scope of his protection. All American ships, ports and sailors became subject to capture and forfeit.

The King also sent more troops to America to fight the colonists. His forces included foreign **mercenaries**—hired soldiers—from Germany. These steps greatly infuriated the colonists.



In January 1776, Thomas Paine published his pamphlet, *Common Sense*. As you learned in the last chapter, Paine argued that the colonists received little benefit from their connection with

Great Britain. Paine urged the colonists to seek independence.

In March 1776, General Washington and his troops drove the British out of Boston. Washington then moved his army to New York City. However, with the help of their fleet of ships, the British were able to land troops on nearby Long Island. Washington lost battles on Long Island and in New York City that summer and fall. Washington retreated across the Delaware River, but was able to defeat British forces in December 1776 at the Battle of Trenton.

Most colonists now felt that Britain had abused them. They disliked British taxes, placed on them without their consent. Even more, they resented the use of armed force. More and more colonists agreed with Thomas Paine that they should end their connection with Great Britain. They wanted to free themselves from British rule.

Many colonists also believed that they could not obtain **allies** (*countries that agree to act together*) in Europe so long as they remained subjects of the British King. Only by becoming independent could they ever hope to conclude alliances with foreign powers, like France and Spain. They needed the help of these foreign powers to win the revolutionary war.

The Second Continental Congress began debating the question of American independence early in 1776.

John Adams, a lawyer from Massachusetts, was the strongest voice for independence. Adams persuaded many of the other delegates to vote in favor of separating from England.



John Adams

In June 1776, Richard Henry Lee, a Virginian, introduced a resolution proposing independence:

Resolved, That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved.

Word Helper



absolve = to release or set free

allegiance = loyalty to a superior

British Crown = the King

connection = a link or formal association

dissolved = ended or eliminated

A special committee of five members was formed to write a declaration explaining and justifying this decision to other colonists and to the rest of the world. A young Virginian, **Thomas Jefferson**, was the main author of the first draft of the Declaration. Two other members of the committee were John

Adams and Benjamin Franklin. Jefferson wrote the first draft of the Declaration using parts of other documents he had written earlier for Virginia and the Continental Congress. The Declaration was later revised by the committee and then by the Continental Congress itself.

The Active Citizen

Imagine it is early in 1776. Your class should be divided into different groups, representing the different colonies at the Second Continental Congress. Hold a debate on whether or not the colonies should declare their independence from Great Britain. Then take a class vote.

The Declaration of Independence

You probably have already heard of the Declaration of Independence. It was signed on July 4th—still our national holiday. Every year we celebrate the signing of the Declaration with parades, speeches and fireworks. But what makes this document so very special to Americans?

The Declaration of Independence actually accomplished five things:

1. It declared American independence. It boldly stated that the colonies were no longer part of the British Empire, and that the former colonists were no longer subjects of King George III.
2. It proclaimed a theory of government based on natural law and the protection of individual rights.
3. It listed the grievances of the colonists against King George III and the British government.
4. It justified the conduct of the colonists, both to their fellow countrymen and to the rest of the world.
5. It announced the arrival of the United States as an independent and equal member of the international community, able to wage war and to make alliances. This cleared the way for the former colonies to conclude alliances with France and Spain.