

Independence Declared

READ TO DISCOVER

1. How did the Declaration of Independence explain America's break with Great Britain?
2. How did Americans react to the Declaration of Independence?
3. What major problems did the Continental Army face?
4. What roles did different groups of people play in the war?

IDENTIFY

Patrick Henry
Thomas Paine
Common Sense
Richard Henry Lee
Declaration of Independence
Thomas Jefferson
Abigail Adams
Loyalists
Thayendanegea

WHY IT MATTERS TODAY

The Declaration of Independence established the basic principles of our individual freedom. Use CNNfyi.com or other **current events** sources to find an example of how we experience these freedoms today. Record your findings in your journal.

CNNfyi.com

EYEWITNESSES TO History “The second day of July, 1776, will be the most memorable epoch [time period] in the history of America. I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival . . . with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires and illuminations.”

—John Adams, letter to Abigail Adams, July 2, 1776

John Adams wrote these words to his wife, Abigail, describing a turning point in the Revolution. With fighting under way, the movement toward independence became irreversible. Although some colonists hesitated to make a final break with Britain, many others decided that the time for such action had come. On July 2, 1776, the Second Continental Congress voted in favor of independence. Although his fellow citizens chose to commemorate the formal Declaration of Independence that was adopted two days later, the type of celebrations predicted by Adams do continue even today.

Reasons for Independence

Many colonists favored independence for two basic reasons. First, they believed that the British government had violated their rights as British subjects. Second, some of their fellow colonists had already died defending these rights.

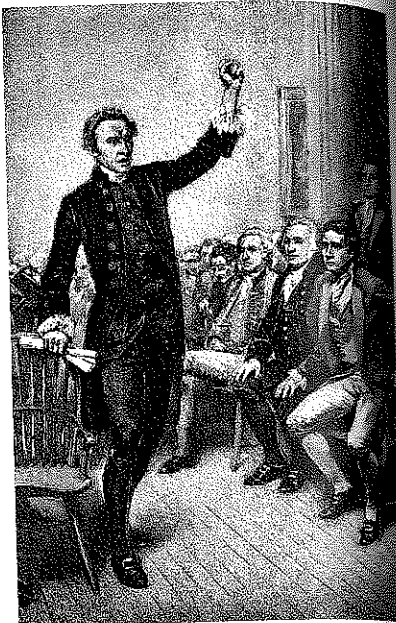
Patrick Henry and Thomas Paine emerged as powerful supporters of independence. Henry, a member of Virginia's Committee of Correspondence and a delegate to both Continental Congresses, argued that the dispute between the colonies and the Crown could not be resolved. In 1775 he reportedly delivered a speech that made his point in dramatic terms.



“Gentlemen may cry peace, peace—but there is no peace. The war is actually begun! . . . Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God!—I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death!”

—Patrick Henry, “Liberty or Death”

Thomas Paine, a recent immigrant from Britain living in Philadelphia, also promoted the Patriot cause. Published in January 1776, Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense* stirred up public support for the Revolution and called for the end of Britain's rule of the colonies. Paine argued, “Government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil; in its worst state, an intolerable one.” The passionate words of Henry and Paine inspired many colonists to support the Revolution. *Common Sense* sold some 120,000 copies in three months and helped transform a disorganized colonial rebellion into a focused movement for independence.



Patrick Henry, Virginia delegate to the Continental Congress

The Declaration of Independence

On June 7, 1776, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia introduced a resolution in the Second Continental Congress declaring “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 . . . totally dissolved.” The resolution also called for the establishment of a confederation, or loose pact, of the states.

Before voting on Lee's proposal, the Congress appointed a five-person committee to draft a formal **Declaration of Independence**. Virginia lawyer, planter, and slaveholder **Thomas Jefferson** became chair of the committee and did most of the actual writing. Jefferson drew some of the ideas in the document from the Virginia Bill of Rights, written by George Mason. On June 28 the committee presented the Declaration to the Congress.

Before turning their attention to the Declaration, the Congress debated—and quickly adopted—Lee's resolution for independence. The Congress officially declared on July 2 the new United States of America to be independent of Britain. Two days later, on July 4, the Congress formally adopted the Declaration of Independence.

The Declaration's immediate purpose was to win support for independence, both at home and abroad. To weaken loyalty to King George III, the Declaration detailed his misdeeds. It also outlined the basic principles of representative government and listed these “self-evident” truths.



“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”

—Declaration of Independence

The document also proclaimed the right of people “to alter or abolish” a government that deprives them of these “unalienable Rights.” The signers of the Declaration knew they were now traitors in the eyes of the Crown. The price for failing to win independence might well be imprisonment—or death.

✓ **READING CHECK: Analyzing Information** What contributions did Patrick Henry, Thomas Paine, and Thomas Jefferson make to the independence movement?

★ HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS ★

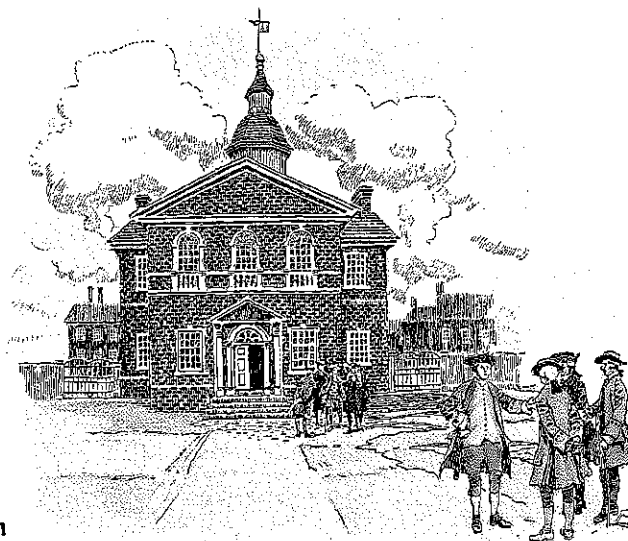
THOMAS PAINE

Common Sense

Published almost nine months after the battles at Lexington and Concord, Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* offered an impassioned argument for independence. According to Paine, who or what should be “king” in a free country?

Let a crown be placed thereon, by which the world may know that, so far as we approve of monarchy, that in America *the law is king*. For as in absolute governments the king is law, so in free countries the law *ought* to be king; and there ought to be no other. But lest any ill use should afterward arise, let the crown at the conclusion of the ceremony be demolished and scattered among the people, whose right it is.

A government of our own is our natural right; and when a man seriously reflects on the precariousness of human affairs, he will become convinced that it is infinitely wiser and safer to form a Constitution of our own in a cool, deliberate manner while we have it in our power than to trust such an interesting event to time and chance.



THE GRANGER COLLECTION, NEW YORK

Carpenter's Hall in Philadelphia was the meeting place of the First and Second Continental Congresses.

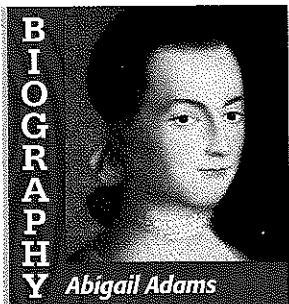
Research on the ROM

Free Find: Abigail Adams

After reading about Abigail Adams on the Holt Researcher CD-ROM, write a fictional letter from her to her husband that explains the contributions women made to the success of the American Revolution.

Reactions to Independence

The Declaration of Independence inspired mixed reactions throughout the colonies. Many Patriots rejoiced wildly—ringing “liberty bells,” singing and dancing around bonfires, and celebrating at banquets. In New York City, Patriots pulled down a huge statue of King George III. According to one independence-loving newspaper reporter, this small act of rebellion was “the just dessert of an ungrateful tyrant!” On July 13 Patriot Ezra Stiles noted in his diary that “the CONGRESS have tied a . . . knot, which the Parliament will find they can neither cut nor untie. The thirteen united Colonies now rise into an *Independent Republic* among the kingdoms, states and empires on earth.”



THE GRANGER COLLECTION, NEW YORK

Some people, such as **Abigail Adams**, had a more complex reaction to the news of independence. The daughter of a Congregational minister, Adams was born in 1744 and grew up in rural Massachusetts with little formal education. A constant reader, she taught herself French and developed remarkable letter-writing skills. In 1764 she married John Adams, with whom she raised four children—including one who later became president.

During the Revolutionary War, John Adams spent much of his time attending to government matters in Philadelphia. Back in Massachusetts, Abigail Adams cared for their young children and managed the family’s farm and business interests. She also wrote a series of letters to her husband that frequently commented on political issues. Abigail Adams strongly supported independence and women’s rights and forcefully opposed slavery. A few months before her husband was chosen to serve on the committee that would draft the Declaration of Independence, she wrote to him.



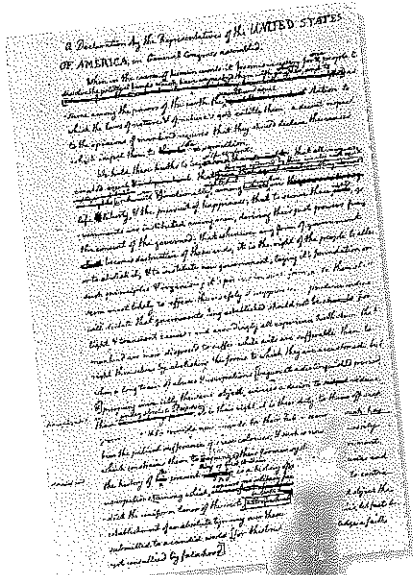
“I long to hear that you have declared an independancy—and by the way in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could.”

—Abigail Adams, letter to John Adams, March 31, 1776

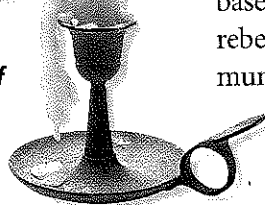
Adams was disappointed by the response this suggestion received from her husband. He claimed “I cannot but laugh” at the idea of including women in official political business. Adams continued to remark on political affairs until her death in 1818.

Other Americans opposed or simply ignored the Declaration of Independence. Among its opponents were the **Loyalists**, also known as Tories. Some Loyalists based their loyalty to Britain on the long-held belief that to resist the king was to rebel against God. “It is our duty not to disturb and destroy the peace of the community by becoming . . . rebellious subjects and resisting the ordinances of God,” explained one Anglican minister. Other Loyalists stood to lose power and wealth if royal authority ended. Still others considered loyalty to the king as important as dedication to one’s family.

As support for independence mounted, Loyalists began to fear for their safety. To many Patriots, a Loyalist was “a thing whose head is in England, and its body is



Thomas Jefferson wrote this draft of the Declaration of Independence.



in America, and its neck ought to be stretched [hanged].” Threats of violence to Loyalists and their families were more troubling. Many wealthy and influential Loyalists escaped to Canada, the British West Indies, or England. Those who remained either tried to stay out of the conflict or openly aided the British forces.

✓ **READING CHECK: Contrasting** How did Americans’ reactions to the Declaration of Independence differ?

Fighting the War

To declare independence was one thing; to fight for it and win was another. The lack of a powerful central government made the American war effort particularly difficult. The Second Continental Congress had no real authority. It could ask the states for help, but it could not force them to comply. Some colonial merchants charged high prices for shoddy goods. Many farmers sold their produce to the highest bidder, whether American or British.

Because of these problems, George Washington’s troops suffered. They endured bitter winters at Morristown, New Jersey, in 1777 and at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, in 1777–78. James Thacher, a young doctor from Massachusetts, described the hardships at Valley Forge.



“At one time nearly three thousand men were [listed] unfit for duty from the want [lack] of clothing; and it was not uncommon to track the march of the men over ice and frozen ground by the blood from their naked feet. Several times . . . they experienced little less than a famine in camp; and more than once our general officers were alarmed by the fear of a total dissolution [breaking up] of the army from the want of provisions.”

—James Thacher, quoted in *Voices of 1776*, by Richard Wheeler

Although Washington issued orders about cleanliness and hygiene, illness also plagued the camps. Poorly prepared food spread germs, and camp toilets contaminated water supplies. Dysentery caused by these unsanitary conditions killed thousands. Making matters worse, Washington faced constant troop shortages. He never had more than 26,000 Continentals available nationwide at any one time, although some 231,000 soldiers served in the Continental Army over the course of the war. Much of the problem stemmed from short-term enlistments. Most men signed on for one year—some for just three months—and the soldier-farmers in the ranks often deserted at planting or harvesting time. Such limitations made it impossible to maintain a large, well-trained fighting force.

✓ **READING CHECK: Drawing Conclusions** How might service in the Continental Army have been improved?

PRIMARY SOURCE

A Loyalist’s View of the Colonists’ Actions

Even before the Revolutionary War began, some colonists did not support protests against the British Crown or its representatives. In 1774 shortly after the Boston Tea Party, colonist Anne Hutton described how some Loyalists were treated. **Why might some colonists have attacked a custom-house official?**

“The most shocking cruelty was exercised a few nights ago, upon a poor man, a tidesman [custom-house official]. . . . A quarrel was picked with him, [and] he was afterward taken and tarred and feathered. . . . He was stript . . . on one of the severest cold nights this winter, his body covered with tar, then with feathers, his arm dislocated in tearing off his clothes. He was dragged in a cart with thousands attending, some beating him with clubs and knocking him out of the cart, then in again. . . .

Before he was taken, [he] defended himself a long time against numbers, and afterwards when under torture they demanded of him to curse his masters, the King, Governor, etc., which they could not make him do, but still he cried, ‘Curse all traitors!’ . . .

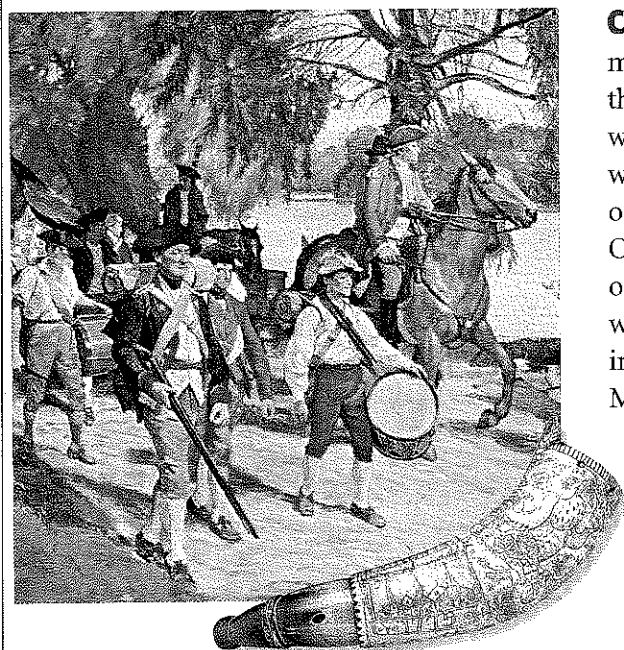
These few instances amongst many serve to show the abject [miserable] state of government and the licentiousness and barbarism of the times.”

Analyzing Primary Sources

Summarizing What hardships did soldiers face at Valley Forge?

Those Who Served

Despite their troubles, Patriot forces enjoyed two key advantages over the British. They often fought on familiar ground, and they were motivated by revolutionary zeal. Many soldiers in the Continental Army served in units recruited from their home colonies, often with men they knew. State militias, which also fought in the war, were usually composed of enlistees from the same region. Many of these soldiers drew inspiration from their belief that they were defending their homes.



INTERPRETING THE VISUAL RECORD

American troops. Minutemen march to the front lines. Some soldiers carried gunpowder in horns called powder horns.

What purpose did the drummer in the front serve?

Continental and Redcoats. Most Continental soldiers and state militiamen firmly embraced the goal of independence. Fighting against the British was difficult, dangerous, and low-paying work. While the men who performed this work came from a variety of backgrounds, most were under 23 years old, owned little or no property, and had grown up on farms. Some of these soldiers were drafted into the Continental Army. Others served as paid replacements for draftees. Still others enlisted in order to receive small cash bonuses and promises of free land after the war. A great many fought, however, because they believed they were serving a “glorious cause.” Joseph Hodgkins, a company officer from Massachusetts, explained this feeling in a letter to his wife.



“I am willing to serve my Country in the Best way & manner that I am Capable of and as our Enemy are gone from us I Expect we must follow them. . . . I would not Be understood that I should Choose to March But as I am engaged in this glorious Cause I am willing to go where I am Called.”

—Joseph Hodgkins, letter to Sarah Hodgkins, March 20, 1776

Much like those who served in the Continental Army, the soldiers in the British army were mostly young men from poor rural backgrounds. Unlike their Patriot enemies, however, Britain’s Redcoats were highly trained, well supplied, and accustomed to strict military discipline. Their professionalism helped distinguish the British army as one of the world’s most reliable fighting forces.

African Americans and American Indians. George Washington initially ordered that no black soldiers could serve in the Continental Army. Some colonial leaders feared that slaves would revolt if given weapons. Others believed that black men would not make good soldiers. In late 1775, however, the royal governor of Virginia offered freedom to slaves who would leave their owners to fight for the British cause. In a single week some 300 African Americans accepted his offer.

In response, the Continental Army began to enlist free African Americans. Some were former slaves who had been freed in exchange for entering the army. Some 5,000 African American Patriots fought in the war. One Hessian soldier noted that “no regiment is to be seen in which there are not Negroes in abundance.” Numerous black soldiers—such as Salem Poor and Peter Salem, both of whom fought at Bunker Hill—received official recognition for their courage.

American Indians also played an important role in the war. Their knowledge of the land in key locations between British and American forces could greatly aid either side. Initially, both the British and the Patriots tried to respect the Indians’ neutrality. Soon, however, the urgent need for skilled fighters led both sides to

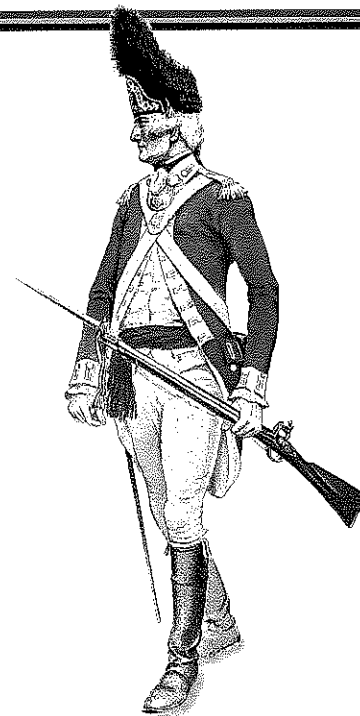
recruit Indian soldiers. This led to a split in the Iroquois League. In 1777 the League held a council to discuss the war. **Thayendanegea** (tah-yuhn-dah-ne-GAY-uh), an important Mohawk chief known to colonists as Joseph Brant, had received assurances from the British that they would protect Iroquois land rights. He was, therefore, strongly pro-British. The Cayuga, Mohawk, Onondaga, and Seneca agreed to follow Brant and fight for Great Britain. The Oneida and Tuscarora, however, did not share Brant’s confidence in the British and fought for the Patriots.

Women. Patriot women served the revolutionary cause in important ways. A few even fought in the war, while others undertook dangerous missions as spies or messengers. Deborah Sampson Gannett of Massachusetts, for example, disguised herself as a man and became the “faithful and gallant soldier” Robert Shurtleff. She was said to be as “fleet as a gazelle, bounding through swamps . . . ahead of her companions.” After she died in 1827, Congress granted her husband a pension as the “widow” of a Revolutionary War veteran.

Many other women accompanied the troops and worked as cooks, laundresses, and nurses. After one bloody South Carolina battle, women nursed injured American soldiers even as “men dared not come to minister to their wants,” according to one observer. Most Patriot women served in their communities. They supported the war effort by distributing medical supplies, making uniforms, and helping manufacture bullets. With the men off to war, women managed businesses and farms, helping to keep the colonial economy going.

Loyalist women were also involved in the war effort. Although many fled their homes or were exiled, others spied for the British army, aided British prisoners, or hid British soldiers in their homes.

✓ **READING CHECK: Categorizing** How did different groups participate in the Revolutionary War?



INTERPRETING THE VISUAL RECORD

Uniforms. British soldiers were often called redcoats because of their uniform. **How might the British soldiers’ uniforms have helped and hurt them in battle?**

SECTION 3 REVIEW

1. Identify and explain:

Patrick Henry
Thomas Paine
Common Sense
Richard Henry Lee
Declaration of Independence
Thomas Jefferson
Abigail Adams
Loyalists
Thayendanegea

2. Analyzing Information

Copy the chart below. Use it to explain the arguments that the Declaration of Independence offered in support of independence and how different groups of Americans reacted to the document.

Reasons for Independence	Reactions to Independence
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

3. Finding the Main Idea

- What did the colonists’ support for the Revolution reflect about their values?
- If you had been an adviser to General Washington, what solutions would you have proposed to resolve the Continental Army’s problems?
- Compare the experiences of common soldiers, African Americans, American Indians, and women in the war.

4. Writing and Critical Thinking

Identifying Bias Historians have noted that the Declaration of Independence was intended, in part, to convince the colonists to support the fight for independence. Explain why you agree or disagree.

Consider:

- the content of the Declaration of Independence
- how the Declaration of Independence affected colonists

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