

Declaration of Independence





Second Continental Congress

- Delegates had been convened in Philadelphia since May 1775.
- Even though the Colonies were in a state of war with Great Britain, Congress still hoped for reconciliation with the “mother country.”
 - Many delegates felt that America had no chance of winning a prolonged war with Britain.
 - Many still felt somewhat loyal to Britain.
 - Those in favor of independence did not have a majority in the Congress.
 - John Dickinson (PA) was the leader of those in favor of reconciliation with Britain.

Rumblings of Independence



King George III

- Events in late 1775 and early 1776 began to change people's minds about independence.
 - King's rejection of the Olive Branch Petition-October 1775
 - Prohibitory Act
 - Blockaded American ports
 - Stopped all trade
 - Declared all American ships to be enemy vessels
 - Britain began recruiting mercenaries to strengthen their military force
 - Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*

Common Sense

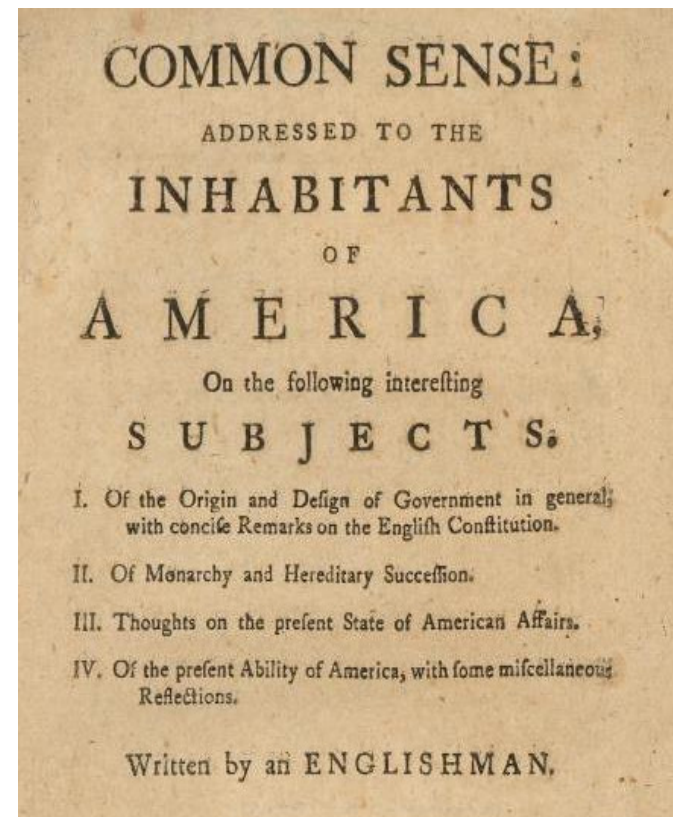
- Thomas Paine published *Common Sense* Jan. 1, 1776
 - 47 page pamphlet
 - Sold 500,000 copies in the first year
 - Enormous influence on American thinking
 - Everyone had read it or knew about it
 - Donated profits to Continental Army
- Explained why America ought to declare independence.



Thomas Paine

Common Sense

- Written in a style that everyone could understand
 - “The sun never shined on a cause of greater worth...there is something very absurd, in supposing a continent to be perpetually governed by an island.
 - In no instance hath nature made the satellite larger than its primary planet, and [with respect to] England and America...it is evident they belong to different systems: England to Europe, America to itself.
 - “...the most powerful of all arguments, is, that nothing but independence, i. e. a continental form of government, can keep the peace of the continent and preserve it inviolate from civil wars...”



The Independence Movement

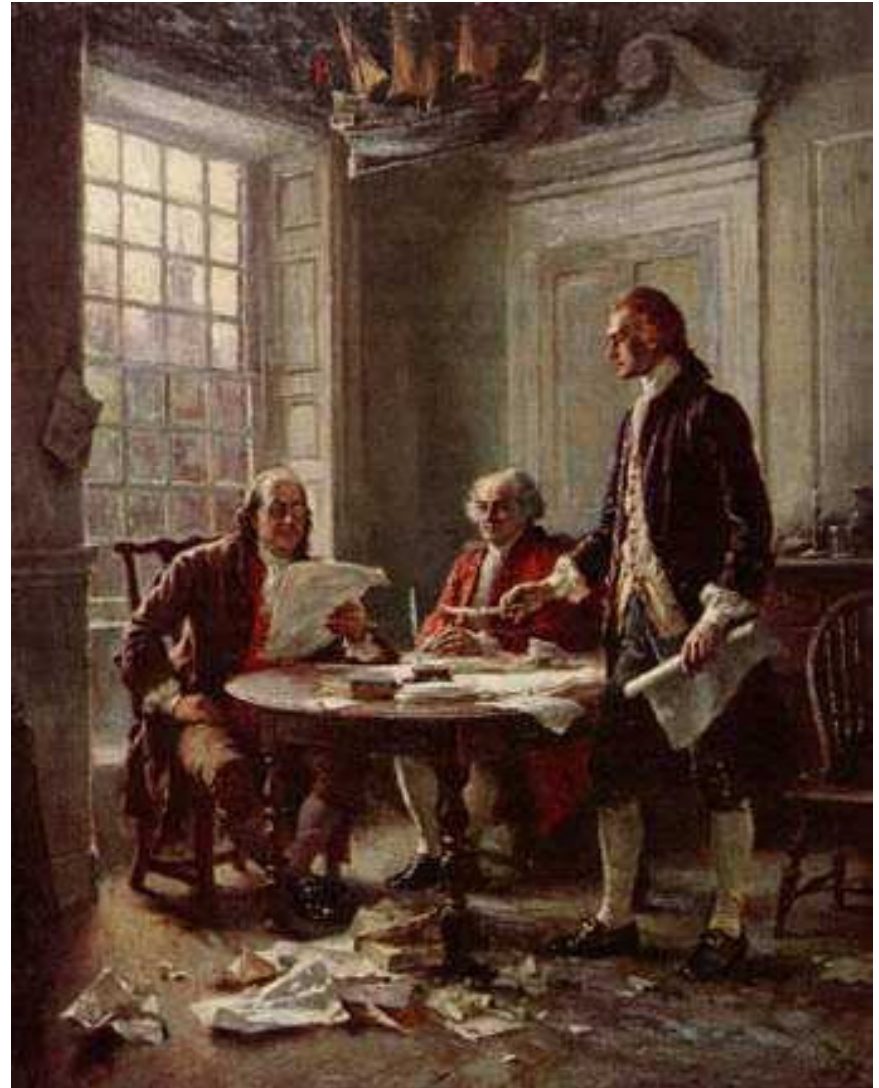
- John Adams spearheaded the effort in Congress to declare independence
 - Tirelessly campaigned for a final separation with Britain
 - Supported by some delegates, including Ben Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Hancock, and Roger Sherman
 - Richard Henry Lee returned to Virginia to persuade the House of Burgesses to pass a resolution for independence
 - Lee Resolution submitted to Congress on June 7, 1776.

“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.”



Committee of Five

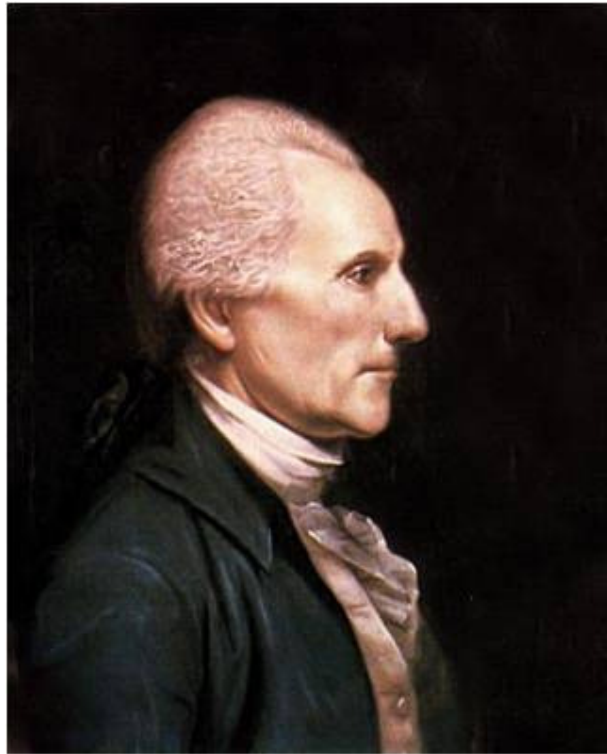
- Congress decided to postpone the vote on independence for 20 days.
- Committee of Five formed to draft a document that outlined the reasons for declaring independence.
 - John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Roger Sherman (CT) and Robert Livingston (NY)
 - Jefferson is assigned the task of writing the document
 - More than 2 weeks





The Declaration of Independence (1817) by John Trumbull

Vote on the Lee Resolution



Richard Henry Lee

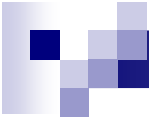
- After the Declaration was formalized, Congress resumed debate on Virginia's Resolution on Independence on July 1st
 - Agreed that the vote must be unanimous.
 - No colony should be forced to separate from Britain against their will.
 - Each colony would have one vote.
 - Delegates from each colony would vote among themselves.
 - Some colonies, such as Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Delaware, were split, unsure, or without instructions.

July 2, 1776

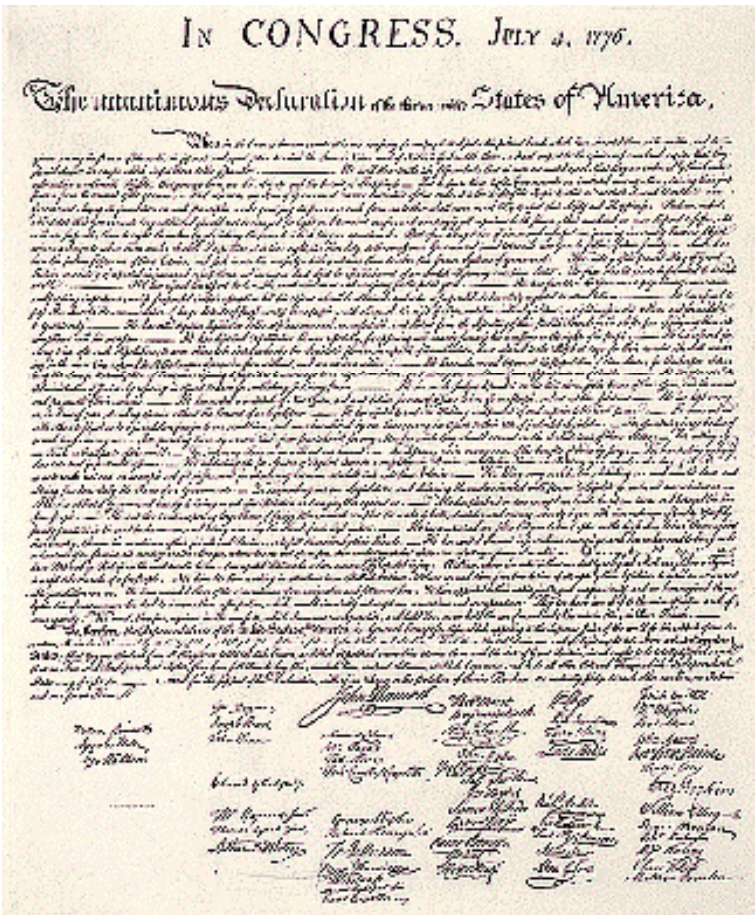
- Caesar Rodney (DE) rode through the night from Delaware to arrive in Philadelphia, breaking Delaware's tie, and voting for independence.
- Edward Rutledge (SC) realized the need for unanimity and voted for independence
- John Dickinson (PA) did not want to be the one holding America back from Independence and was not present for the vote, breaking Pennsylvania's tie and allowing them to vote for Independence
- The Lee Resolution passed on July 2, 1776 and the Colonies declared their independence
 - The second day of July, 1776, will be the most memorable epoch in the history of America. I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival...It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations, from one end of this continent to the other, from this time forward forever more



- John Adams



The Debate on the Declaration



- Over the next two days, Congress debated the wording of the Jefferson's draft
 - Deleted over one-fourth of the text , including a passage condemning the slave trade
- Finally, on July 4th Congress approved the Declaration
 - Sent to printer, John Dunlap, for publication
 - Dunlap Broadside
 - Final document not signed until August 2, 1776
 - Had to be printed
 - Needed all members present



The Declaration of Independence

- Introduction (preamble)—states the purpose for writing the document:
 - To “declare the causes” that forced the colonists to separate from England.
 - Jefferson said that it was intended to be “an expression of the American mind.”



The Declaration of Independence

- Ideas and beliefs (philosophy):
 - “...all men are created equal...”
 - Natural Rights – unalienable rights given to everyone by their Creator
 - “...life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness...”
 - government’s purpose is to protect those natural rights
 - Popular Sovereignty—governments obtain their “just powers from the consent of the governed.”
 - the people give their permission to the government to make and enforce laws



The Declaration of Independence

- Ideas and beliefs about the rights of man:
 - “...all men are created equal...”
 - Natural Rights – unalienable rights given to everyone by their Creator
 - “...life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness...”
 - “That to secure these rights,” governments are begun to make sure natural rights of man are protected
 - Popular Sovereignty—governments obtain their “just powers from the consent of the governed.”
 - the people give their permission to the government to make and enforce laws



The Declaration of Independence

- Arguments: Why do the Colonies think that they are justified in breaking away from the King?
 - When governments deny or disrupt the rights to which the people are entitled, it is the people's right to change or abolish that form of government.
 - "...A long train of abuses" by the King has proven him to be a despot and a tyrant—an oppressive ruler; therefore,
 - "...it is [the people's] right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security."—form a new government to secure their rights.



The Declaration of Independence

- Complaints against the King and Parliament (28):
 - Suspended or interfered with the operation of the colonial legislatures
 - Unfair taxes
 - Interfered with colonial trade/commerce and economy
 - Standing armies in the time of peace
 - Obstructed the colonial courts (justice)
 - Quartering Acts
 - Petitions to King repeatedly rejected—evidence of his tyranny



The Declaration of Independence

- We, therefore...
 - Declare the colonies “to be Free and Independent States” – quoted directly from the Lee Resolution
 - Claim the rights and powers due to free states with respect to war and peace, alliances and commerce
 - In support of the Declaration, the delegates pledge to each other “...our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.”