


The Main Reasons for Wanting to Leave British Rule

Terms to understand




- American Revolution
- Continental Congress
- Declaration of Independence
- Loyalists
- Patriots
- principles

What problems did the colonists have with the British government?

For many years, the British government let the colonists govern themselves. Britain was busy fighting wars with other European countries. In the 1760s, however, Britain began to tighten its control. The British government passed new laws taxing the colonists and controlling their

trade. The colonists became alarmed. They felt their rights were not being protected. The colonists did not have the right to vote for people to represent them in the British government. Some argued that the British government had no right to tax them. They said, "No taxation without representation!"

Great Britain felt it had the right to tax the colonies and control their



▶ What does this picture show about the way the British government treated the colonies at first?

40

trade. People in Britain were paying high taxes to support and defend the American colonies. They thought the colonists should pay their fair share of taxes since they received the benefits of being a part of Great Britain. Many Americans became angry about the new trade laws and taxes.

What prompted the American Revolution?

In 1774, twelve colonies sent representatives to a meeting in Philadelphia. This meeting was called the **First Continental Congress**. The Congress tried to find ways to get the British to change the laws. It sent a protest to the British government. Congress then ordered that the buying and selling of British goods be stopped. It also began to

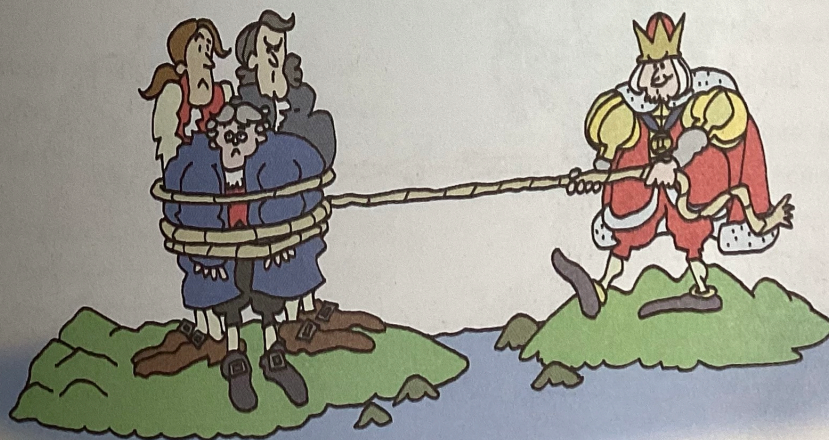
organize a citizens' army. Soon there was talk of fighting the British.

In April 1775, the British sent soldiers to look for some colonists that they thought were rebels. When the sides met near Boston, they began shooting at each other. War between Britain and the American colonies had begun. The **American Revolution** was underway, but the colonists had not yet declared their independence.

Why did the Founders write the Declaration of Independence?

The colonists sent delegates to the **Second Continental Congress** after the first incident of the Revolution. They were still thinking about ways to get Britain to change its policies. Soon, however, they were conducting the war.

In the spring of 1776, more and more colonists were in favor of



independence. Congress wanted to wait until all the states agreed before it declared independence. In the meantime, Congress appointed a committee to write a declaration. The declaration would explain to the world why the colonists were declaring independence and why they had a right to do so. The committee asked one of their members, Thomas Jefferson, to write the declaration. Jefferson was known to be an excellent writer. The **Declaration of Independence** that he wrote describes the basic principles of the new nation. **Principles** are rules or beliefs about how to behave. The Congress voted to accept the Declaration on July 4, 1776.

What ideas about government are in the Declaration of Independence?

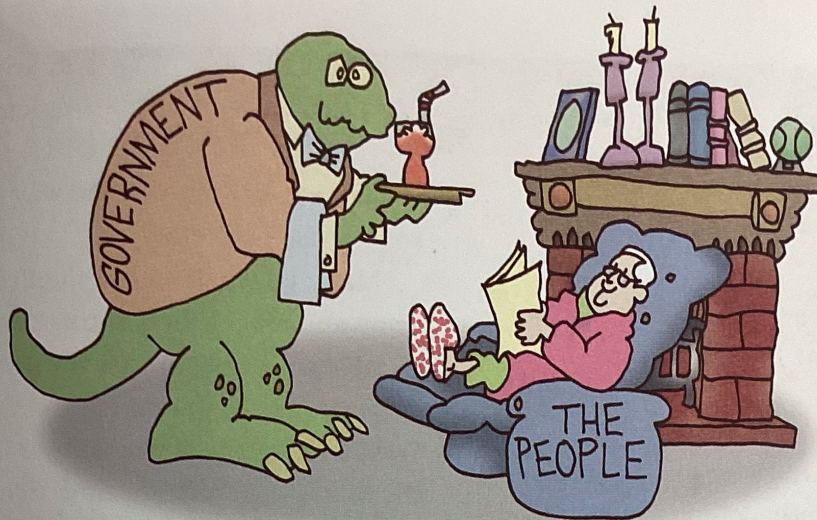
In writing the Declaration, the Founders used some of the main ideas you have studied to explain why they wanted to be free from Great Britain. The Declaration of Independence has three parts:

1. Basic ideas about people and government
2. Reasons why the Founders thought they had the right to be free from British rule
3. Complaints against the British king

These parts of the Declaration are so important that it is worth learning more about them.



▶ What caused the colonies to declare their independence from Great Britain?



► What did the Founders think about the role of government?

1. Basic ideas about people and government

These include the idea that all people are “created equal.” They are born with certain rights that no one can take away. Among these rights are rights to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” The purpose of government is to protect these rights.

2. Reasons why the Founders thought they had the right to be free from British rule

The Declaration also says that the power of government comes from the consent of the people. People are the masters of government and not the other way around. If a government violates the rights of its people, the people can change the government or get rid of it and create a new one.

3. Complaints against the British king

To prove that the king had violated their rights, the Founders included a long list of complaints against him. The complaints are based on the idea that government should protect the rights of the people and serve the common good.

- He refused to approve laws made by the colonists that were necessary for their common good
- He closed the colonists’ legislatures when they opposed his violation of the rights of the people
- He kept a standing army in the colonies even though there was no war
- He stopped the colonists’ trade with other countries

- He taxed the colonists without their consent
- He took away the colonists' right to a trial by jury

Why did some colonists reject the idea of independence?

John Adams was one of the Founders who strongly supported the Declaration of Independence. He said that not everyone wanted the colonies to become independent from Great Britain. At the time the Declaration was written, he said that about one-third of the colonists wanted independence. They were called the **Patriots**. They agreed with the ideas and arguments in the Declaration of Independence.

Adams said that about one-third of the colonists had not made up their minds about independence. Finally, about one-third of the colonists did not want to become independent. They were called **Loyalists** because they believed the colonies should stay loyal or faithful to the king.

Many Loyalists were large landowners or wealthy merchants. They thought their businesses would be hurt. Other Loyalists had been appointed to their jobs by the king. If the colonies became independent, they would lose their jobs. Even if the

Loyalists did not like British taxes and other limits on their freedom, they did not think that breaking with Great Britain was the way to solve those problems.

Many Loyalists joined the British army and fought for the king. Some Loyalists moved back to Great Britain. Others went to Canada or to the West Indies. Those who stayed in the colonies had a hard time. Sometimes their property was taken from them. Some Loyalists were treated cruelly or put in jail.



► Why did the Loyalists oppose independence?

