

The Declaration of Independence: Revolution Justified

Mary Fang

Grade 12

The Declaration of Independence: Revolution Justified

Imprisonment and chaos can plant opportunities for freedom and peace. One of the most significant catalysts of America's sovereignty from the oppressive rule by Britain is embodied in a 1400 word document – the Declaration of Independence. Thomas Jefferson's writing encompasses more than just an announcement to the world that explains the numerous forms of abuse committed by King George III; it entails a mosaic of philosophies, of which have lasting impact even centuries after the date of publication, July 4th, 1776. Paramount and emotion-stirring principles that heavily contributed to the effectiveness of the document are the unalienable rights and the exploitation of them. The juxtaposition of the innate rights that people should have against how life actually was under the rule was a pioneering, firm establishment of an idea that was spoken of but disregarded by the government. The structure and composition of the memorandum well fits its function – to proclaim America's liberty, supported by reasons and portrayals of why claiming freedom is justifiable.

A concern revolving around any revolution is how one can convince and ignite people en masse to support the cause and rebel. Thomas Jefferson and the Committee ensured that revolting in order to obtain independence would be in the best interest of the colonies by stating what has been infringed and how. A government can be overthrown only if it becomes tyrannical; otherwise, uprisings would not benefit the majority of the people, and in fact, exacerbate life under the rule by having even more rights stripped away after the failed mutiny (Jayne 49). A key symptom that diagnoses tyranny is the desecration of the unalienable rights – life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In a religious and nonreligious sense, people are born with these rights, and since they were not given by any mortal, no one has the right to abuse or take away these intrinsic rights; furthermore, “no government can properly claim jurisdiction

over such rights...any government that tampers with...inalienable rights is necessarily tyrannical and vulnerable to revolution” (Smith, *George H. Smith on the Moral Right to Resist Authority*).

From a religious viewpoint, the unalienable rights are given and proclaimed by the Divine God, and people have a duty to respect the laws of nature, and in turn, respect God, the Creator. In order to strike the heartstrings of various groups of people, regardless of their religious beliefs, the Declaration does not delineate a specific God, and the word “God” is only mentioned once in the entire text. Secularly, it is human nature for people to want not only to survive, but to thrive in a way favorable to themselves and those associated with them; videlicet, as stated by Danielle Allen:

When any given group finds a way to survive that does not endanger the survival of anyone else, [others] should respect their right to organize their survival for themselves...If [people] do not respect the right of others to organize their survival for themselves, [they] will bring war on [themselves] and jeopardize [their] own projects of survival. (134)

Regardless of whether the origin of the inborn rights is religious or not, it is clear that people have possessed these rights even before the establishment of government. However, King George III breached countless means in order to achieve his desires. He sought to control all aspects of life and all the colonies, and he further abused his powers by exterminating anything that would obstruct his wants. Therefore, King George III neglected and suppressed all the people’s rights for his own empowerment. People did not have full access to their inherent civil liberties; nor could they try to obtain their rights without having another abuse thrown in their way (Maier). Additionally, they could not pursue their happiness because life was lived in fear and succumbing to a tyrant in hopes of not aggravating their lives. Despite their efforts to

appease King George III, he would always find new ways to feed his crave for power, which unfortunately repressed the people's lives even more. People did not have freedom to use their time, skills, and resources to follow directions in their lives that they deemed would bring them the most satisfaction and benefit (Smith).

A pledge to create a government that represented and benefitted the general population was made by the founders of America. They believed that the purpose of government is to protect people's natural rights, and it would rule according to what will grant a better life for the people. As emphasized in the Declaration itself, when a government fails to protect those rights, people have the right and duty to overthrow the government, and replace it with one that will protect those rights (Hazelton 172). Multiple grievances caused by King George III's actions upon the colonies were described in the 1000 worded paragraph following the preamble. This section provides evidence to the people of the colonies and of the world how their rights have been violated. According to American history teachers Paul Frankmann and Amy Krupa, the violations committed by King George III fall into twelve categories:

Enforcing unfair taxation, cutting off trade, abolishing good and helpful laws, making arbitrary laws himself, creating new government departments with officials that harass the people, depriving colonists of trial by jury, protecting his own officials that were murderers, attempting to establish military rule, hiring mercenaries to harass and kill colonists, capturing and forcing colonists to fight against their fellow colonists or be killed, fostering domestic uprisings in the colonies, and disallowing or not hearing any appeals for justice.

The document convinced that life would progressively corrode and that the intensity of King George III's encroachments will multiply if the people continue submitting to his order. It proves

to not only the people in the colonies of King George's III's wrongs, but also to the entire world. As recorded by the Declaration, government should not be overthrown for trivial reasons. Jefferson and the Committee wanted to show the world that America has suffered under tyranny and that it has a just reason to rebel (Becker 7). The framers wanted to demonstrate to the world that once they become free, independent states, they will strive to avoid repeating a despotic rule and protect people's rights. Furthermore, they wanted to inspire any other nations that face such oppression.

Enduring the sacrifice and usurpation of unalienable rights under tyranny made people more fervent to win back the rights they should've had all along – the part of them that was inexcusably stolen. The damage caused by the disastrous hurricane left America even stronger than before, as independent states that blossomed from dependent colonies, with a government more carefully constructed by the people, for the people, to protect their guaranteed rights.

Works Cited

- Allen, Danielle. *Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality*. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2014. Print.
- Becker, Carl L. *The Declaration of Independence: A Study in the History of Political Ideas*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1922. Print.
- Frankman, Paul and Amy Krupa. "The Declaration of Independence – 9 Concepts." *Wikispaces.com*. Wikispaces for Educators. Apr. 2009. Web. 28 Dec. 2014.
- Jayne, Allen. *Jefferson's Declaration of Independence: Origins, Philosophy, and Theology*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998. Print.
- Hazelton, John H. *The Declaration of Independence: Its History*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1950. Print.
- Maeir, Pauline. *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence*. New York: Knopf, 1997. Print.
- Smith, George H. "George H. Smith on the Moral Right to Resist Authority." *Libertarianism.org*. n.p. 20 Jul. 1996. Lecture.