

Declaration of Independence

The following pages present the actual text of the Declaration of Independence on the right-hand side, with a summary and explanation of the text on the left-hand side.

SUMMARY & EXPLANATION

Paragraph 1 The Colonists Explain

The colonists felt that they should explain to the world why they were severing their ties to Great Britain.

Paragraph 2 The Colonists' Belief in Natural Law

The rights of all people are based on "natural law," which is a higher law than that created by people. People establish governments to protect these natural rights. Government derives its power from the consent of the governed. If the government violates their natural rights, the people have the power to abolish their government and form a new one. Governments are not changed for minor reasons. However, a government must be changed when it becomes "tyrannical" like that of King George III, who has a long record of abuse of power.

Paragraphs 3-15 An Enumeration of the Abuses of Power by King George III

He has unjustly used power.

He has refused to approve laws that are needed.

He has attempted to control colonial legislatures.

He has attempted to control the legislatures by wearing them out.

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

WHEN in the Course of human Events, it becomes necessary for one People to dissolve the Political Bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the Powers of the Earth, the separate and equal Station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent Respect to the Opinions of Mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the Separation.

We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights; that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness; That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed, that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these Ends it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its Foundation on such Principles, and organizing its Powers in such Form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient Causes; and accordingly all Experience hath shown, that Mankind are more disposed to suffer, while Evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the Forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long Train of Abuses and Usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object, evinces a Design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their Right, it is their Duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future Security. Such has been the patient Sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the Necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The History of the present King of Great Britain is a History of repeated Injuries and Usurpations, all having in direct Object the Establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid World.

He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public Good.

He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing Importance, unless suspended in their Operation till his Assent should be obtained, and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has refused to pass other Laws for the Accommodation of large Districts of People, unless those People would relinquish the Right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them, and formidable to Tyrants only.

He has called together Legislative Bodies at Places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the Depository of their public Records, for the sole Purpose of fatiguing them into Compliance with his Measures.

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SUMMARY & EXPLANATION

Paragraphs 3-15 con't.

He has dissolved legislatures, e.g., Massachusetts.

He has refused to allow settlers to move West.

He has prevented the carrying out of justice.

He has sent many customs officials to create problems for colonists.

He has enacted new, unwarranted laws for the colonies.

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He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly Firmness his Invasions on the Rights of the People.

He has refused for a long Time, after such Dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative Powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise, the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the Dangers of Invasions from without, and Convulsions within.

He has endeavored to prevent the Population of these States; for that Purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners, refusing to pass others to encourage their Migrations hither, and raising the Conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.

He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary Powers.

He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone for the Tenure of their Offices, and the Amount and Payment of their Salaries.

He has erected a Multitude of new Offices, and sent hither Swarms of Officers to harass our People and eat out their Substance.

He has kept among us, in Times of Peace, Standing Armies, without the consent of our Legislatures.

He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil Power.

He has combined with others to subject us to a Jurisdiction foreign to our Constitution, and unacknowledged by our Laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation:

Paragraphs 16-24

An Enumeration of the Wrongs of Parliament:

It has forced the housing of British soldiers and protected them from the law.

It has blockaded American ports.

It has imposed taxation without representation.

It has deprived people of the right of trial by jury.

It has expanded its power over neighboring territory to make it easier to rule the colonies.

It has voided colonial charters.

For quartering large Bodies of Armed Troops among us;

For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from Punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States;

For cutting off our Trade with all Parts of the World;

For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent;

For depriving us, in many Cases, of the Benefits of Trial by Jury;

For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended Offenses;

For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary Government, and enlarging its Boundaries, so as to render it at once an Example and fit Instrument for introducing the same absolute Rule into these Colonies;

For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments;

For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with Power to legislate for us in all Cases whatsoever.

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SUMMARY & EXPLANATION

Paragraphs 25-29

An Enumeration of the Warlike Acts of the King

He has made war on them.

He has incited domestic insurrections.

He has forced sailors into service against the colonists.

He has encouraged the Indians from the frontiers to attack us.

Paragraphs 30-31

The Colonists' Repeated Pleas to Redress Their Grievances

The colonists have continually petitioned the king to come to terms with their concerns and have always been rebuffed, despite their protestations of loyalty. The colonists have even appealed to the British people, but to no avail. Therefore they were forced to separate.

Final Paragraph: The Declaration

As the representatives of the United States, they declared their independence from Great Britain and are henceforth "free and independent states." They are no longer responsible to or loyal to the king of England. They can rule as a sovereign nation, making war, signing treaties, or establishing trade relations with other nations. The signers of the Declaration of Independence were relying on "Divine Providence" to guide them in their fight for independence, promising their lives, money and honor.

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.

He has plundered our Seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our Towns, and destroyed the Lives of our People.

He is, at this Time, transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat the Works of Death, Desolation, and Tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty and Perfidy, scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous Ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized Nation.

He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the Executioners of their Friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.

He has excited domestic Insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the Inhabitants of our Frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known Rule of Warfare is an undistinguished Destruction of all Ages, Sexes and Conditions.

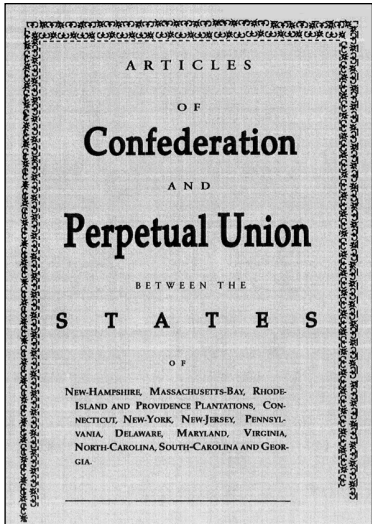
In every stage of these Oppressions we have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble Terms. Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated Injury. A Prince, whose Character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the Ruler of a free People.

Nor have we been wanting in Attentions to our British Brethren. We have warned them from Time to Time of Attempts by their Legislature to extend an unwarrantable Jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the Circumstances of our Emigration and Settlement here. We have appealed to their native Justice and Magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the Ties of our common Kindred to disavow these Usurpations, which would inevitably interrupt our Connections and Correspondence. They too have been deaf to the Voice of Justice and of Consanguinity. We must therefore acquiesce in the Necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of Mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace, Friends.

We, therefore, the Representatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in GENERAL CONGRESS, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World for the Rectitude of our Intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly Publish and Declare 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; and that as FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which INDEPENDENT STATES may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm Reliance on the Protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.

Structure of Government Under the Articles of Confederation

	Articles of Confederation	United States Constitution
Adopted	1777	1787
Ratified	1781	1791
Legislative	unicameral Congress Delegation from each state has one vote.	bicameral Congress Senate: 2 representatives from each state House: representatives determined by population
Powers of Congress	determine value of coins fix standards of weights and measures establish and regulate post office appoint all U.S. military officers supervise Indian affairs make decisions on all cases arising among states 9 of 13 states' approval needed to enact legislation unanimous vote for amendments to Articles	determine value of coins fix standards of weights and measures establish and regulate post office appoint all U.S. military officers supervise Indian affairs make decisions on all cases arising among states simple majority of both Houses with presidential approval needed to enact legislation If 3 of 4 states ratify an amendment, it is added to the Constitution. declare war impose and collect taxes regulate trade between states and with foreign nations coin money raise and support armies establish courts inferior to the Supreme Court make all laws which shall be necessary.
Executive	not provided for	President
Judicial	not provided for	Supreme Court



Strengths & Weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation

Strengths & Accomplishments

Government signed a treaty of alliance with France in 1778.

Government successfully waged a war for independence against the British.

Government negotiated an end to the American Revolution in the Treaty of Paris, signed in 1783.

Government granted the free inhabitants of each state "all the privileges and immunities of free citizens in the several states."

Government provided for the eventual admission of Canada into the Confederation.

Government passed the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, which allowed the Northwest Territories to organize their own governments. It allowed the eventual admission to the Union of no more than five states, and no fewer than three, "on an equal footing with the original states." The Ordinance also banned slavery from the region.

Government established the Departments of Foreign Affairs, War, Marine, and Treasury.

Weaknesses

Congress had no power to coin money, therefore each state developed its own currency.

Congress was unable to regulate interstate and foreign commerce; some states refused to pay for goods they purchased from abroad.

Congress was unable to impose taxes; it could only borrow money on credit.

No national court system was established to protect the rights of U.S. citizens.



No executive branch was established to enforce laws.

Amendments could be added only with the approval of all 13 states.

Approval of 9 of 13 states was required to pass a law in Congress.

One vote was allotted for each state, despite the size of its population.

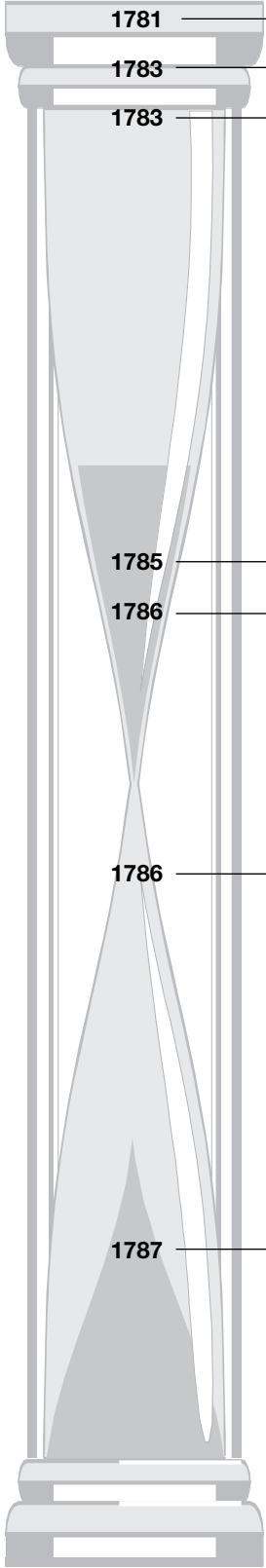
It was just a "firm league of friendship."

So long as any individual state has power to defeat the measures of the other twelve, our pretended union is but a name, and our confederation a cobweb.

Noah Webster, ca. 1780

The establishment of the Northwest Territories was a significant accomplishment of the U.S. government under the Articles of Confederation, given the weakness of its central decision-making power. This map shows the original territories in relation to present-day state boundaries.

Steps Leading to a New Constitution

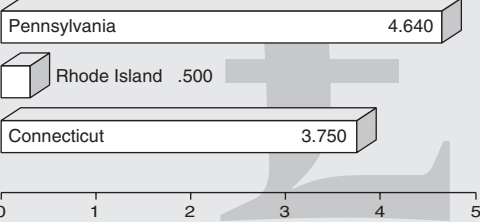


1781 — **End of the American Revolution; Ratification of Articles of Confederation**

1783 — Treaty of Paris signed between Great Britain and United States.

1783 — Ten states, excluding Connecticut, New Jersey, and Delaware, pass measures against British shipping or imports to protect their fragile economies.

Debt Held by Selected States
in millions of pounds



State	Debt (millions of pounds)
Pennsylvania	4.640
Rhode Island	.500
Connecticut	3.750

Pennsylvania was in debt 4,640,000 pounds

Rhode Island was in debt 500,000 pounds

Connecticut was in debt 3,750,000 pounds

1785 — Maryland and Virginia meet at Alexandria, Virginia, for a conference on trade disputes.

1786 — **Annapolis Convention**

Five of 13 states attend to discuss conflicts between states over trade and boundary issues. James Madison of New York and Alexander Hamilton of Virginia convince the other delegates to call for another meeting to be held:

at Philadelphia on the second Monday of May next, to take into consideration the situation of the United States, to devise such further provisions as shall appear to them necessary to render the constitution of the Federal Government adequate to the exigencies of the Union.

1786 — **Shays's Rebellion**

Under the leadership of Daniel Shays, over 2,000 angry farmers armed with pitchforks attempt to take over the state arsenal in Springfield, Massachusetts. They are protesting against state taxes, which force them into debt. Many property owners are frightened, even though the state militia puts down the rebellion. The national government has no army to help quell the rebellion. In response, Henry Knox, the Secretary of War, writes to George Washington:

This dreadful situation has alarmed every man of principle and property in New England. [People wake] as from a dream and ask what has been the cause of our delusion. What [will] give us security against the violence of lawless men? Our government must be [strengthened], changed, or altered to secure our lives and property.

1787 — **Federal Convention**

Fifty-five delegates from 12 of the 13 states meet in Philadelphia to revise the Articles of Confederation, hoping to strengthen the national government. Rhode Island does not attend. By this time, the national government is in debt 40 million dollars to foreign governments and to soldiers who had fought during the Revolutionary War.

**Debt Notice to
U.S. Government**

December 31, 1787

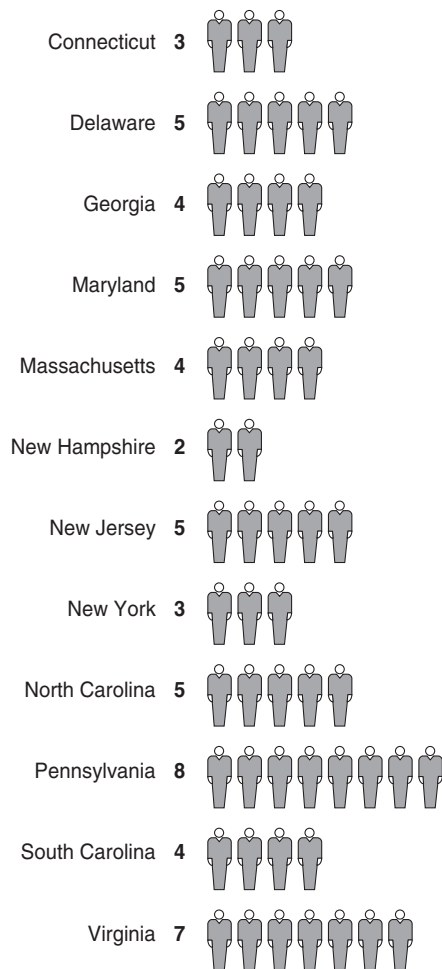
Amount: 40 million dollars

Owed to: Governments of foreign countries and
Soldiers of the American Revolution

Constitutional Convention: Overview & Characteristics of the Delegates

- Who:** 74 delegates were appointed, 55 went to Philadelphia.
2 delegates of the 55 arrived very late, 7 left early, 39 actually signed the Constitution.
- What:** Federal Constitutional Convention of 1787
- Where:** Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- When:** Preliminary meetings began on May 14, 1787; the Constitution was signed on September 17, 1787.
North Carolina was the last state to ratify the Constitution on November 21, 1789.
- Why:** The delegates met to draft a new document of government to replace the Articles of Confederation.

Number of Delegates from Each State Attending the Convention



Characteristics of the Delegates A Resume

Personal Information

- All 55 delegates were men.
- Average age was 42.

Professional Experience

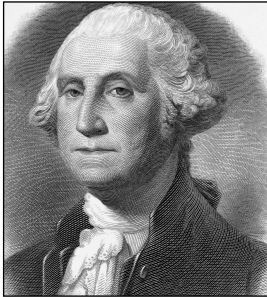
- Most played important roles in the Revolution.
- Three-quarters had served in the Congress under the Articles of Confederation.
- Some were wealthy, most were of moderate means; none were poor.
- Eight signed the Declaration of Independence.
- Five signed the Articles of Confederation.
- Many had helped write the constitutions of their states.
- Seven had served as governors of their states.

Educational and Academic Experience

- Thirty-one had attended college in a period when higher education was difficult to obtain.
- Two were college presidents.
- Three were college professors.

Constitutional Convention: Key Delegates and Key Concepts

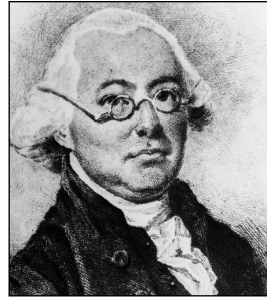
Key Delegates



George Washington

55 years old at the time of Convention, was chosen to preside over the Convention. He was the most revered delegate. Retired to his Virginia plantation, he only agreed to participate after others convinced him that his presence might mean the success of the Convention.

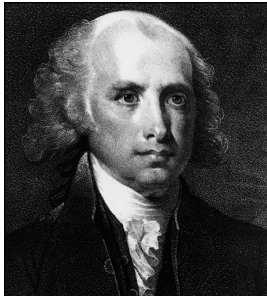
He contributed mostly in the informal discussions and did not participate in most of the open debates.



James Wilson

45 years old at the time of Convention, was the most influential delegate from Pennsylvania. He served in Congress under the Articles of Confederation and also signed the Declaration of Independence. Wilson had a reputation as one of the most capable attorneys of his time.

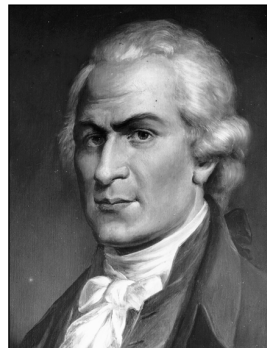
He later served as a justice on the U.S. Supreme Court. He was very learned in government and contributed to many of the formal debates at the Convention.



James Madison

36 at the time of Convention, is known as the "Father of the U.S. Constitution" for his many contributions to its writing. He was reputed to be the most scholarly man in the U.S. at that time. Very active in Virginia politics and in Congress under the Articles of Confederation, he was an

outspoken supporter of the Constitution. He kept a detailed diary of the proceedings; this diary, published 50 years after the Convention after all the participants had died, has been a key source for Constitutional scholarship.

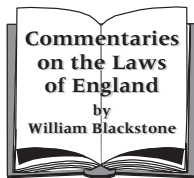


Alexander Hamilton

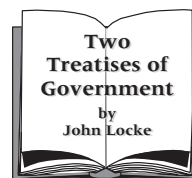
31 years old at the time of Convention, was one of the youngest delegates. He was instrumental in calling the Convention; however, he did not attend all sessions. His Federalist writings helped to convince many to ratify the Constitution, especially in his home state of New York, which was important in the ratification process.

Key Concepts

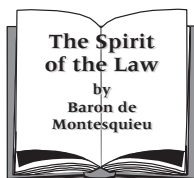
The following sources were used to support some of the key concepts used by the framers in drafting the Constitution.



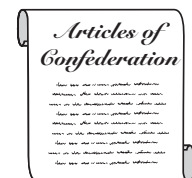
Checks and Balances
Separation of Powers



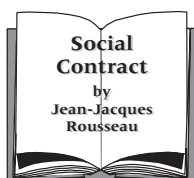
Popular Sovereignty
Judicial Review



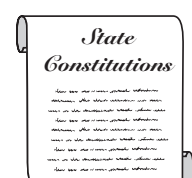
Popular Sovereignty
Limited Government



Limited Government
Separation of Powers



Popular Sovereignty
Limited Government



Checks and Balances
Separation of Powers