



# *Colonial Williamsburg*

THE BOB AND MARION WILSON  
TEACHER INSTITUTE

## **Rights, Controversies, and the American Revolution**

### **Introduction**

Many events occurred in the years leading up to the Revolutionary War that may have swayed individuals for or against Great Britain—the Proclamation Line of 1763, the Stamp Act, the Townshend Acts, the formation of local associations and committees, and the Boston Tea Party, to name a few. Each of these events altered the course of history. They harmed some individuals and groups, while benefiting others. These events ultimately led the colonists to declare their independence from Great Britain in 1776, an action applauded by some and mourned by others.

This lesson provides the framework to help students understand the difficult decisions and choices made by individual stakeholders in the colonies and whose voices were or were not heard at the eve of the Revolution. Participants will have a more thorough understanding of the difficult choices individuals made prior to the start of the Revolution and will advocate for loyalists, patriots, and undecided people of many backgrounds in a debate to decide whether Virginia will remain a colony of Great Britain or break away from the Mother Country to become independent.

This lesson works best as an evaluation of the students' understanding of the events that led up to the Revolution and the impact of those events on various populations within Virginia society.

### **Background Information**

In late May of 1776, word reached Philadelphia that Britain's largest and wealthiest North American colony had passed the Virginia Resolution for Independence. This action prompted the delegates to the Continental Congress to more seriously consider independence, and they soon voted to draft and later adopt the Declaration of Independence.

That vote in Virginia, on May 15, 1776, was held at the Capitol building in Williamsburg. After a debate in the Hall of the House of Burgesses, a group of unelected gentry men voted unanimously in favor of the Virginia Resolution for Independence. Most of the men were former Burgesses (the Burgesses had recently been "dissolved"—fired—by the Royal Governor). A few were their invited friends and family members. Their vote in favor of independence was unanimous. Public opinion was not. It is important for students to understand that the American population was deeply divided over the issue of independence, whether they were allowed to vote or not. Their opinions were driven by issues far more personal than simply "taxation without representation." As today, people were motivated by complex intersections of economics, family concerns, moral and religious beliefs, hope and fear, self-interest and more.

When the vote was taken, who was invited to be included in that room? Whose voices were not heard or considered? The loyalist former Burgesses were not there, yet they had made up a significant portion of the House before it was dissolved. In their eyes, because the Burgesses had been dissolved the May 15 meeting was extralegal (unofficial). Loyalist members would have seen the meeting as illegitimate, unwise, inflammatory, and possibly even illegal. So, their voices were not heard that day.

There were no free white tradesmen, merchants or laborers in that room, despite the hazards to their lives and livelihoods. The property requirements to vote and hold elected office were more than most free white men could muster. The land owning, wealthy gentry men chose the lawmakers, made the laws, and invited each other to extralegal meetings.

In fact, in order to hold the franchise (vote) in eighteenth-century Virginia, in addition to property ownership you needed to be a free, white man, who was over the age of twenty-one and a member of the Church of England.

So, there were no women in the room either, although they certainly had opinions about whether or not to declare independence— their husbands and sons might be maimed or killed in the inevitable war; they and their daughters would be at risk of violence, disease and famine. Some believed it was worth taking those risks, while others did not, but neither did they have a voice in the decision.

There were almost certainly enslaved people in that room, serving as personal valets, tavern hands, or messengers, yet their opinions were not thought of as they were legally considered property by the law. However, there is no doubt that they were well aware of the issues being discussed and wondered whether independence would change anything for them. This talk of independence coincided with the Somerset Case, a landmark court case that signaled the end of slavery on the island of Great Britain. If the colonies remained British, would slavery soon be banned in America, too? Or were the liberty-minded Americans more likely to free them? A number of enslaved people heeded Dunmore's Proclamation and other British offers of freedom, but did that make them loyalists or simply freedom seekers?

Free Black people must have wondered how their delicate status might be affected by American independence. A war might mean more business for a free Black tradesperson, who may be able to make their fortune if they provide a service that an army needs, like shoemaking, tailoring, laundry or cooking. But a newly independent nation might make new laws that threaten their free status. There was no way to know.

There were also no Indigenous people in the room to act as ambassadors for their nations. The many Indigenous independent nations that had treaties with the British government would certainly be affected by the colonists' separation from their Mother Country. They knew they would probably be forced to take sides. But how could they predict which side was more likely to respect their sovereignty and to benefit them economically? They were certainly stakeholders, but they were not invited into that room.

How might the discussion regarding the vote for independence been different if these voices were directly represented at the debate?

### Objectives

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:

- List several events leading to the American Revolution.
- Identify a variety of colonial viewpoints and socio-economic levels of decision-makers.
- Identify stakeholders who were included in the decision-making process and stakeholders who were not.
- Determine how personal experiences and viewpoints affected people's decisions, and therefore exerted influence on important events.
- Articulate why Americans faced difficult decisions on the eve of the Revolution and appreciate that the Revolution was not inevitable.
- Formulate an argument based on a certain position and defend that position.

### Materials

- Situation Cards
  - Patriots, to be photocopied on blue paper and cut into cards.
  - Loyalists, to be photocopied on pink paper and cut into cards.
  - Neutral or Undecided, to be photocopied on white paper and cut into cards.
  - If more cards are needed, additional cards can be copied and distributed, as long as the class contains roughly one-third each color of card.
- Timeline of Events Leading to the Declaration of Independence (background material)
- Primary Source Packet 1
- Primary Source Packet 2
- Rights, Controversies, and the American Revolution: Debate Talking Points (can be used as a teacher answer key or a student handout)
- Script for Opening the Debate
- Script for Roll Call (Vote on the Resolution)

### Strategy

#### *Part 1 - Background*

1. Engage students in a discussion about Virginia's stakeholders on the eve of the Revolution (refer to background information, above). Talk through who was allowed to participate in government decision making, and who was excluded. You may brainstorm with the students the various reasons that each disenfranchised group might support or oppose independence.

#### *Part 2 - Activity Set Up*

1. Divide the class into three equal groups, corresponding to the three sets of Situation Cards.
2. Inform students that they will use their knowledge of the events leading up to the American Revolution in a debate activity, in which they will advocate for a specific population group and political viewpoint.
3. Distribute the Situation cards to the groups, taking care to give the exact number of cards per student in each group.
4. Each group can examine their cards, and each choose one to research and advocate for.

- a. Choice is key to enabling students to self-select a situation that they feel comfortable advocating for.
- b. If a student feels they cannot advocate for any of the cards offered, they can take it up with the teacher directly on a case-by-case basis.
- c. Explain that the cards are specifically written to be gender neutral, and that students may choose to advocate for any gender.

### *Part 3 – Prep for Debate*

1. You may wish to review the Timeline of Events with students to help set a context for the debate. For a focus on primary sources, use Primary Source Packet 1 which features sources that connect with these events.
2. Hand out Talking Points for students to review or review it as a group.
  - a. If appropriate for students' reading level, have students examine Primary Source Packet 2, featuring sources in favor of and opposed to independence, as well as sources about groups who may have been neutral or undecided.
  - b. Have them note the reasons that might resonate with the type of person for whom they are advocating (population group and political views).
3. Students should already be grouped with the same color cards together. Inform students that they will brainstorm why someone from their chosen political group supports independence from Great Britain, wants to remain loyal to Britain, or wants to remain neutral or is undecided on the question of independence. Have them make notes to prepare for the debate.
  - a. You may wish to prompt this discussion with guiding questions, or have students create questions of their own for the other two groups. This may help stimulate the debate for students who need to practice speaking skills.
  - b. Remind students to focus on making their reasoning persuasive.
4. Regroup students according to population groups. For example, all students holding a “Tradesperson” card make up a group. There will be at least one “patriot,” one “loyalist,” and one “undecided” in each group. Have these small groups debate the issue from their assigned political perspectives in preparation for a full-class debate. Remind students to focus on making their reasoning persuasive. This allows students the opportunity to discuss independence with others who disagree with their assigned viewpoint.
5. Allow students time to develop their arguments for or against independence, or for remaining neutral.

### *Part 4 – The Debate*

1. Before beginning the debate, arrange the classroom to have two rows of chairs (desks, tables) to each side, lined up and facing one another. The speaker and clerk will need to sit in chairs between the rows.
2. Inform students that, while the vast majority of people in Virginia were not allowed to participate in the actual debate in 1776, in today's version everyone has a voice. While women, enslaved people, free Black people, Indigenous people and Loyalists were not in the room for the debate and vote on Virginia Independence, we are considering their perspectives today.
3. You may wish to set rules for the debate. Robert's Rules of Order is an excellent resource you may find helpful.
4. Remind the students that they are not portraying someone from their chosen population group but advocating for them. For example, “A vote for independence would be bad for women, because they would be left alone on their farms, and they would have to do all of the heavy farm work by themselves.”

5. Inform students that they must argue from their assigned political perspective. “Undecided” students may either ask for more information about specific issues that have not been adequately addressed, or state arguments on both sides.
6. Let students know that they may vote with whichever side made the most convincing arguments, regardless of which side they debated, and that the undecided should also vote.
7. To start the debate, assume the role of the “speaker” in the Script for Opening the Debate. If possible, have a teacher’s aide or another adult assume the role of “clerk.” (You may also choose a student to read the part.)
8. After the debate (and rebuttal, if desired), use the Script for Roll Call to tally the students’ votes and announce the outcome.

### *Post Debate*

1. If the vote for independence fails, indicate that the vote shows that the students really thought about the issues and the risks involved, and made up their own minds. Let them know that perhaps the diversity of the people for whom they advocated made them see how complex the issue really was. Remind them that independence wasn’t inevitable, and that even in the eighteenth century, the vote could have resulted in reconciliation with Great Britain.
2. Reflect on the stakeholders who would not have been present nor participated while the resolution was debated and voted upon. What concerns (immediate and long-term) would the marginalized voices have when they received the news of the Fifth Virginia Convention Resolution vote?
3. To conclude the lesson, remind students that the Virginia gentlemen who met on May 15, 1776 voted unanimously for independence. Those who would have voted against independence either didn’t attend the debate or decided to abstain. This enabled the vote to be completely in support of independence. Discuss why a unanimous vote was important—to show strength of resolve and present a united front to Britain and the other North American colonies, and to give confidence to people who were about to face a war. The same situation occurred at the Continental Congress. Emphasize that the American Revolution was not inevitable or a foregone conclusion but was the result of decisions made by individuals.

### **Assessment**

Students can be graded during the debate on their participation and knowledge. Refer to the Rights, Controversies, and the American Revolution: Debate Talking Points for sample arguments from each side.

### **Extensions/Strategies for Deeper Thought**

Introduce this lesson when you discuss the events that led up to the Revolutionary War. In each part of the unit, have your students think about the choices individuals would have to make. Distribute the Situation Cards before you begin your unit. Have the students keep a journal of each event discussed and how their chosen population group or political group may have reacted to the event. Be sure to include the various perspectives in your discussions to help guide the students in their writing.

For a focus on primary sources, introduce these documents as they arise in the lesson plan, or as you review the timeline of events:

- Patrick Henry’s Stamp Act Resolutions
- A Day of Fasting, Humiliation, and Prayer
- The Nonimportation Association of 1774
- Call for the First Continental Congress
- Excerpt of a Letter from Lord Dunmore, Royal Governor of Virginia, to the Earl of Dartmouth
- Patrick Henry’s “Liberty or Death” Speech
- Patrick Henry Defies Royal Law and Government
- The Virginia Resolution for Independence, May 15, 1776
- Robert’s Rules of Order

## Timeline of Events Leading to the Declaration of Independence

- 1754** A skirmish between French troops (supported by Indians) and American colonists on the western frontier begins the French and Indian War, also known as the Seven Years' War, a worldwide contest for empire between Great Britain and France and their respective allies.
- 1760** George III becomes King of England and ruler of the British Empire. He favors new political leaders and advisors who follow a stricter policy toward the colonies.
- 1763** The Treaty of Paris ends the Seven Years' War. France gives up most of its claims to North American territory. Britain gains Canada and all of French Louisiana east of the Mississippi.
- 1764** Parliament passes the Sugar Act to raise money from the colonies through import taxes. In response, Boston merchants refuse to buy English luxury goods.
- 1765** The Stamp Act, the first tax to affect all the colonies equally, becomes law, levying taxes on a wide variety of everyday items. The Quartering Act requires all the colonists to provide lodging for British troops.
- Virginia's House of Burgesses adopts Patrick Henry's Stamp Act Resolves, which protest taxation without representation. In response, Governor Francis Fauquier dissolves the General Assembly. Angry mobs force stamp distributors to resign, and many merchants and others agree not to import British goods.
- Representatives of nine colonies meet in New York in what becomes known as the Stamp Act Congress. The delegates reject Parliament's right to tax the colonies.
- 1766** Bowing to pressure from British merchants, Parliament repeals the unsuccessful Stamp Act, but reaffirms its supreme authority over the colonies.
- 1767** The Townshend Acts impose duties on glass, tea, and other items imported into the colonies. Colonists react by adopting nonimportation agreements and refusing to buy British goods.
- 1768** Virginia's House of Burgesses petitions the king, House of Lords, and Parliament of Great Britain for the repeal of the Townshend Duties.
- The Massachusetts General Assembly is dissolved for refusing to assist with the collection of taxes.
- 1769** Virginia's House of Burgesses restates its exclusive right to tax Virginians and condemns British actions. The new governor of Virginia, Lord Botetourt, dissolves the General Assembly.
- 1770** British soldiers, sent to support local British officials, fire into an angry Boston crowd and kill five people. This incident soon becomes known as the Boston Massacre.
- Realizing that the Townshend Acts are discouraging the purchase of British goods, Parliament repeals all the taxes except that on tea, which cannot be grown in North America.
- Lord Botetourt dies.

**1771** The new royal governor of Virginia, John Murray, fourth Earl of Dunmore, arrives in Williamsburg.

**1772** Samuel Adams forms a Committee of Correspondence in Massachusetts, to keep citizens and other colonies' leaders informed of events.

**1773** A Committee of Correspondence is formed in Virginia.

The Tea Act gives the British East India Company a monopoly on sales. In protest, Patriots in New York and Philadelphia force ships to return to England without unloading their cargoes of tea.

Patriots dressed as Indians board ships in Boston harbor and destroy more than 300 chests of tea to prevent its unloading and sale. (This event became known only in the 1830s and 1840s as the "Boston Tea Party.")

**1774** Parliament passes the Coercive Acts (known widely in the colonies as the "Intolerable Acts") including, as punishment for the destruction of the tea, the Boston Port Act, which closes the harbor to all seaborne trade.

Virginia's House of Burgesses supports Boston by observing a day of "fasting, humiliation and prayer." Virginia calls for a unified colonial response through a boycott of British goods. In response, Governor Dunmore, the new governor of Virginia, dissolves the House of Burgesses. Eighty-nine former Burgesses meet at the Raleigh Tavern in Williamsburg to continue discussions. They form a non-importation association—a boycott of tea and other British imports—and issue a call for a congress with representatives from every colony.

The First Continental Congress meets in Philadelphia and declares that Americans are entitled to the rights of "life, liberty, and property." It forms the Continental Association, an agreement calling on the colonies to stop all imports from Britain and providing for local committees to enforce its provisions.

Yorktown residents board the ship *Virginia* and dump chests of tea into the York River to prevent their sale.

Throughout the colonies, local leaders prepare military resistance and develop new political institutions to replace British authority, such as county committees that later become known as Committees of Safety. They also meet in the first Continental Congress.

**1775** The Second Virginia Convention meets at St. John's Church in Richmond. Following Patrick Henry's "Give me liberty or give me death" speech, delegates adopt an ordinance for assembling and training an independent militia.

Parliament declares Massachusetts in a state of rebellion. British General Gage is authorized to use force to subdue the colony.

British troops, attempting to capture colonial military supplies at Concord, exchange gunfire with Massachusetts "minutemen" (so called because of their willingness to be ready to fight at a minute's notice) at Lexington and Concord.

Lord Dunmore seizes the colony's store of gunpowder at Williamsburg.

**1775** *cont.* The Second Continental Congress, which includes delegates from all thirteen colonies, meets in Philadelphia. Peyton Randolph is re-elected president of the Congress. On June 15, George Washington is appointed commander-in-chief of American defense forces, soon to be known as the Continental Army. Congress enacts Articles of War.

On June 8, Lord Dunmore flees Williamsburg with his family. Lady Dunmore and their children sail for Britain at the end of June. Lord Dunmore remains aboard the British warship H.M.S. Fowey off Norfolk.

British troops win a battle against American colonists at Bunker and Breed's Hills in Boston but suffer heavy losses.

King George III declares the American colonies in rebellion.

Governor Dunmore issues a proclamation calling upon all Virginians loyal to the king to arm themselves and join Dunmore's forces. He offers freedom to the indentured servants and slaves of rebels if they agree to fight for the king.

An American assault on Quebec, led by Generals Richard Montgomery and Benedict Arnold, is repulsed and Canada remains under British control.

**1776** Virginia colonists burn Norfolk to prevent its use as a British base of operations.

France begins secretly sending money and military supplies to Britain's rebellious North American colonies.

The Fifth Virginia Convention declares independence, then passes George Mason's Declaration of Rights, the first bill of rights to be adopted in America.

**July 4**  
**1776** The Second Continental Congress approves the final version of the Declaration of Independence.

**1776—**  
**1783** The American War of Independence, also known as the Revolutionary War, is fought throughout the colonies.

The Treaty of Paris is signed, whereby Britain recognizes the United States as an independent nation. European powers agree that the new nation will possess the land between the Florida and Canadian borders, stretching west to the Mississippi River.

<b>Rights, Controversies, and the American Revolution: <i>Debate Talking Points</i></b>		
	<b>Loyalist</b>	<b>Patriot</b>
<b>Taxes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is right for us to help pay for the French and Indian War. It was fought, in part, to protect us.</li> <li>• Any government needs taxes to operate. In fact, after separation from England, the taxes may be even higher (start-up costs).</li> <li>• We pay on average one third of the taxes of those who live in Britain. We should be thankful, not complaining.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parliament may ask our legislatures to raise necessary revenue, but it should fall to those legislatures to decide how to raise the money.</li> <li>• By lowering the taxes on tea but still forcing us to pay them, (in the repeal of the Townshend Duties, as a bail-out for the East India Company), Parliament is trying to trick us into admitting that Great Britain can tax us directly.</li> </ul>
<b>Military Might</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strength and security come from being part of the most powerful empire on earth.</li> <li>• Great Britain won't just let us go, and we can't possibly beat the greatest army and navy in the world.</li> <li>• If we succeed, will we have the strength to protect ourselves in the future? Spain has territories so close, and France is surely still brooding over its losses from the Seven Years' War—we will be at risk from attack by both of those nations.</li> <li>• Do we have the resources to pay for our own army and navy? Where will we get our military supplies?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have the home-ground advantage; it will be easier for us to supply our troops, and our soldiers will fight harder because they will be defending their homes and families.</li> <li>• We can mobilize troops and supplies much quicker, because we don't have to ship them across an ocean to get here.</li> <li>• We may be able to convince other European countries to come to our aid.</li> </ul>
<b>Human Cost</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anyone who signs resolutions for independence will be guilty of treason and eligible for gruesome execution if caught.</li> <li>• Not only will our young men die, but our women and children will suffer deprivation and abuses at the hands of the British army and navy.</li> <li>• Are a few pence in taxes and a big idea worth killing over, or dying, or seeing your children die?</li> <li>• An imperfect but decent situation is easier to face than a complete unknown.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our rights are being stripped from us piece by piece. If we don't take a stand, we will end up utterly subjugated. We must take this step for our children. In spite of the short-term risks and deprivations, our descendants will, in the long run, be better off.</li> <li>• Britain continues to send us its criminals through exportation as a legal punishment.</li> </ul>

<b>Rights, Controversies, and the American Revolution: <i>Debate Talking Points</i></b>		
	<b>Loyalist</b>	<b>Patriot</b>
<b>Trade</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is right for us to help pay for the French and Indian War. It was fought, in part, to protect us.</li> <li>• Any government needs taxes to operate. In fact, after separation from England, the taxes may be even higher (start-up costs).</li> <li>• We pay on average one third of the taxes of those who live in Britain. We should be thankful, not complaining.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parliament may ask our legislatures to raise necessary revenue, but it should fall to those legislatures to decide how to raise the money.</li> <li>• By lowering the taxes on tea but still forcing us to pay them, (in the repeal of the Townshend Duties, as a bail-out for the East India Company), Parliament is trying to trick us into admitting that Great Britain can tax us directly.</li> </ul>
<b>Political Theory</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Britain allows its citizens more rights and privileges than any other nation on earth. Who knows what kind of government a new American nation would have? Would we have as many rights and privileges as we now enjoy?</li> <li>• The King is chosen by God. If God intended someone else to hold the throne, someone else would. If God intended Britain to have some other form of government, Britain would have it. Treason against the King is treason against God.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have not been asking for change, but for a return to the time when we were granted the full rights and privileges of British citizenship. We want to be treated like the Englishmen we are.</li> <li>• We have repeatedly appealed for redress of our grievances, but Parliament continues to trample on our rights. The King, who is supposed to be our protector, refuses to act on our behalf.</li> <li>• Government is a contract. The King has failed to uphold his end of the contract. We are therefore released from the contract to pay our allegiance to him.</li> <li>• Our basic rights are being eroded—we are no longer guaranteed trials at the place of the crime, and troops are being quartered in our homes.</li> <li>• The Church of England needs no longer to be the controlling religion, as many other denominations are becoming more popular with the residents of these colonies.</li> </ul>

## Script for Opening the Debate

**Speaker** The Virginia Convention will now come to order. Will the clerk please rise and read the resolution?

**Clerk** Resolved, that the delegates appointed to represent this colony in General Congress be instructed to propose to the respectable body TO DECLARE THE UNITED COLONIES FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES absolved from all allegiance to or dependence upon the Crown or Parliament of Great Britain.

Resolved, that a committee be appointed to prepare A DECLARATION OF RIGHTS, and such a plan of government as will be most likely to maintain peace and order in this colony, and secure substantial and equal liberty to the people.

**Speaker** The debate on the resolution for independence is now open. The delegates wishing to speak will raise their hands and be recognized.

*(when a student raises his/her hand) You sir, please state your name and then your views on the matter.*

*(Delegates should not directly address each other. All arguments should be addressed to the Speaker, e.g., "Mr. Speaker, I disagree with my learned colleague because...." The Speaker should encourage the debate to continue by occasionally asking "Is there anyone else who wishes to speak?" When no one else wishes to, or when each student has spoken, the Speaker should close the debate by announcing "The debate is now closed.")*

## Script for Roll Call (Vote on the Resolution)

**Speaker** The Virginia Convention will now come to order. Will the clerk please rise and read the resolution once more?

**Clerk** Resolved, that the delegates appointed to represent this colony in General Congress be instructed to propose to the respectable body TO DECLARE THE UNITED COLONIES FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES absolved from all allegiance to or dependence upon the crown or parliament of Great Britain.

Resolved, that a committee be appointed to prepare A DECLARATION OF RIGHTS, and such a plan of government as will be most likely to maintain peace and order in this colony, and secure substantial and equal liberty to the people.

**Speaker** We will now vote on the resolution. All those in favor of declaring independence from Great Britain signify by raising your hand.

*(Clerk counts hands)*

All those in favor of remaining a colony of Great Britain, signify by raising your hand

*(Clerk counts hands)*

Will the clerk please announce the results of the vote?

**Clerk** The resolution in favor of declaring independence from Great Britain has [passed/failed].

## Situation Cards: Loyalists

<p><b>Large Landowners</b></p> <p>Some large landowners are gentleman farmers who studied in Britain. They may have family still in Great Britain.</p>	<p><b>Free Black People</b></p> <p>War changes everything. They are concerned about how this decision will impact themselves and their families. Great Britain has just ended the slave trade to its shores. If Great Britain wins the war, perhaps similar action will be taken in the colonies.</p>	<p><b>Small Landowners</b></p> <p>Small landowners may be afraid of change. They may have done well under the British government and see both colonial and Parliament's taxes as a necessary nuisance.</p>	<p><b>Enslaved People</b></p> <p>Lord Dunmore has offered freedom to people who are enslaved by patriots and are willing to side with the British. Could that be their opportunity for freedom? The Philipsburg Proclamation went even further, guaranteeing freedom and land to the enslaved.</p>	<p><b>American Indians</b></p> <p>They have successful treaties with Great Britain who have, up to this point, kept the colonists from encroaching upon their lands.</p>
<p><b>Small Landowners</b></p> <p>Some small landowners are just getting started here in the colonies. They may have recently arrived from Great Britain and purchased a small farm. They want to make their fortunes and return to Great Britain.</p>	<p><b>Merchants</b></p> <p>Some successful merchants rely solely on British-made goods. They are afraid they will lose money if the Continental Congress's Association continues to prohibit the importation of goods from England. Some hope to return to Great Britain someday.</p>	<p><b>Tradespeople</b></p> <p>Some tradespeople may have recently arrived in the colonies. They fear the power of the British and do not want to be called traitors. To be considered a traitor is an act of treason according to British law.</p>	<p><b>Tavernkeepers</b></p> <p>Some taverns are frequently visited by guests who are loyal to the king. They are worried about losing business and their livelihoods.</p>	<p><b>Members of the Clergy</b></p> <p>The official church of Virginia is the Anglican Church of the Church of England. Naturally, they would support the king, who is head of the church.</p>

## Situation Cards: Patriots

<p><b>Large Landowners</b></p> <p>Some landowners have owned a small farm for years. They've read a little about the issues and think Parliament's "taxation without representation" and the Declaratory Act are wrong.</p>	<p><b>Free Black People</b></p> <p>They fear losing their freedom and their ability to earn wages to support their families. This land is their home, and they will fight to protect it and their freedom.</p>	<p><b>Large Landowners</b></p> <p>Some have received a classical education where they studied the Roman republic and Greek democracy and would like to see those ideas put into motion here.</p>	<p><b>Enslaved People</b></p> <p>They fear losing family connections, in addition to revenge from enslavers. Some may even be pressed into military service for their enslavers. However, the patriots are fighting for liberty, so some believe fighting for the patriots may bring freedom if they win.</p>	<p><b>Tavernkeepers</b></p> <p>There are several successful taverns in town. Most of their clients support the rebellion. Tavernkeepers may want to support the people of Boston and hope Virginia does not suffer the same unfair treatment caused by the Coercive Acts and closure of Boston Harbor.</p>
<p><b>Small Landowners</b></p> <p>Some families have been in Virginia for five generations and have no remaining ties to Great Britain. They want more say in how Virginia is taxed and governed and are upset about what is happening in Boston due to the Intolerable Acts.</p>	<p><b>Members of the Clergy</b></p> <p>Several churches exist prior to the Revolution, including Baptists. Some are excited about the changes that are taking place and hope breaking with Great Britain will bring more religious freedom.</p>	<p><b>Merchants</b></p> <p>Merchants worry about selling items forbidden by the Committees of Safety. Some loyalist merchants have had their stores broken into. Perhaps it is time to seek new markets in Europe and elsewhere rather than be dependent on British goods.</p>	<p><b>Tradespeople</b></p> <p>Many trades are found in the city, including blacksmiths. Many own their Blacksmiths businesses and would likely resent the 1750 Iron Act and think the colonies should be allowed to manufacture their own iron.</p>	<p><b>American Indians</b></p> <p>While the British have upheld the current treaties, the patriots are the ones with whom they worked and traded. If they are successful in defeating the British, might the Patriots offer more favorable terms in treaties?</p>

## Situation Cards: Undecided

<p><b>Members of the Clergy</b></p> <p>Quakers are living in Virginia prior to the Revolution. Quakers are pacifists and do not tolerate violence of any kind. They will take no side which promotes violence.</p>	<p><b>Large Landowners</b></p> <p>Some large landowners have acquired more and more land, increasing their holdings. They have worked hard and do not want to lose what they have gained. The best way to stay safe is to take no side.</p>	<p><b>Small Landowners</b></p> <p>The government in Williamsburg has rarely had the interest of the small landowners in mind. Why should a small landowner care about what is going on? To them, there is little difference between the loyalists and the patriots.</p>	<p><b>Free Black People</b></p> <p>Free Black people want to stay free. What will war mean? Could their freedom be revoked? Which side is likely to safeguard their liberty?</p>	<p><b>Merchants</b></p> <p>Some merchants are afraid that they will go out of business. Conflict and the Committees of Safety continuing to prohibit merchants from importing goods from England put their business at risk. They hope for a compromise.</p>
<p><b>Small Landowners</b></p> <p>There are many small landowners living on the western frontier who are more concerned about survival. It may not make any difference to them who makes the laws.</p>	<p><b>American Indians</b></p> <p>American Indians are independent nations. Why should they side with anyone? This is not their fight.</p>	<p><b>Tradespeople</b></p> <p>Several tradespeople are immigrants, not necessarily from England. They worry about how to provide for their family, not who is governing.</p>	<p><b>Tavernkeepers</b></p> <p>There are tavernkeepers who are immigrants from places other than Great Britain and the affairs of Great Britain do not concern them. Most of their guests do not seem to care what is going on.</p>	<p><b>Enslaved People</b></p> <p>Some of their friends and family are fleeing to Lord Dunmore but others are staying behind. War will divide the families they know and love? Why should they risk their lives for the British or the patriots?</p>

# Primary Source Packet 1

## Primary Sources Related to Major Events

### Resolutions of the Stamp Act Congress

19 October 1765

The members of this congress, sincerely devoted, with the warmest sentiments of affection and duty to his majesty's person and government, inviolably attached to the present happy establishment of the protestant succession, and with minds deeply impressed by a sense of the present and impending misfortunes of the British colonies on this continent; having considered as maturely as time would permit, the circumstances of said colonies, esteem it our indispensable duty to make the following declarations of our humble opinions, respecting the most essential rights and liberties of the colonists, and of the grievances under which they labor, by reason of several late acts of parliament.

**1st.** — That his majesty's subjects in these colonies, owe the same allegiance to the crown of Great Britain, that is owing from his subjects born within the realm, and all due subordination to that august body, the parliament of Great Britain.

**2nd.** — That his majesty's liege subjects in these colonies are entitled to all the inherent rights and privileges of his natural born subjects within the kingdom of Great Britain.

**3rd.** — That it is inseparably essential to the freedom of a people, and the undoubted rights of Englishmen, that no taxes should be imposed on them, but with their own consent, given personally, or by their representatives.

**4th.** — That the people of these colonies are not, and from their local circumstances, cannot be represented in the house of commons in Great Britain.

**5th.** That the only representatives of the people of these colonies, are persons chosen therein by themselves; and that no taxes ever have been, or can be constitutionally imposed on them, but by their respective legislatures.

**6th.** — That all supplies to the crown, being free gifts of the people, it is unreasonable and inconsistent with the principles and spirit of the British constitution, for the people of Great Britain to grant to his majesty the property of the colonists.

**7th.** — That trial by jury is the inherent and invaluable right of every British subject in these colonies.

**8th.** — That the late act of parliament entitled, an act for granting and applying certain stamp duties, and other duties in the British colonies and plantations in America, &c., by imposing taxes on the inhabitants of these colonies, and the said act, and several other acts, by extending the jurisdiction of the courts of admiralty beyond its ancient limits, have a manifest tendency to subvert the rights and liberties of the colonists.

**9th.** — That the duties imposed by several late acts of parliament, from the peculiar circumstances of these colonies, will be extremely burthensome and grievous, and from the scarcity of specie, the payment of them absolutely impracticable.

**10th.** — That as the profits of the trade of these colonies ultimately centre in Great Britain, to pay for the manufactures which they are obliged to take from thence, they eventually contribute very largely to all supplies granted there to the crown.

**11th.** — That the restrictions imposed by several late acts of parliament, on the trade of these colonies, will render them unable to purchase the manufactures of Great Britain.

**12th.** — That the increase, prosperity, and happiness of these colonies, depend on the full and free enjoyment of their rights and liberties, and an intercourse, with Great Britain, mutually affectionate and advantageous.

**13th.** — That it is the right of the British subjects in these colonies, to petition the king or either house of parliament.

Lastly, That it is the indispensable duty of these colonies to the best of sovereigns, to the mother country, and to themselves, to endeavor, by a loyal and dutiful address to his majesty, and humble application to both houses of parliament, to procure the repeal of the act for granting and applying certain stamp duties, of all clauses of any other acts of parliament, whereby the jurisdiction of the admiralty is extended as aforesaid, and of the other late acts for the restriction of the American commerce.

**Source:** This document is part of the public domain and can be found in many different sources. Sources of Our Liberties. Ed. by Richard L. Perry under the general supervision of John C. Cooper. [Chicago:] American Bar Foundation, 1952. [https://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/a1\\_7\\_1s3.html](https://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/a1_7_1s3.html). Accessed March 22, 2023.

## The Day of Fasting, Humiliation, and Prayer

### Background Information

It was the tax on tea that would set in motion a series of events that would lead to the end of Britain's North American Empire. Early in 1773, the ministry of Lord North moved to save the East India Company from threatened bankruptcy. By the passage of a new Tea Act on April 27, the government sought to aid the company in a quick disposal of the surplus of 17 million pounds of tea stored in warehouses in England. All duties on the tea were repealed, except the tax of three pence a pound, allowing the tea to be sold in America more cheaply than ever.

But the act contained a fatal flaw. Previously the Company had been compelled to sell its tea at public auction. The purchasers would then resell the tea to other dealers or to factors in America.

The new act created a monopoly, enabling the Company to deal directly with select colonial agents. This angered many American merchants who were prospering under the old arrangement but threatened with ruin under the new act. With this change, Sam Adams and others who strongly disagreed with the act no longer had to coerce Boston merchants into association or action; and on the night of 16 December 1773, they and others threw the Company's tea into Boston harbor. (Benjamin Woods Labaree, *The Boston Tea Party*, [New York, 1964], pp. 60–61, 72–74, 87–89, 104–145)

What became known as the Boston Tea Party resulted in parliament closing the port of Boston. This news was probably known in Williamsburg before 19 May 1774, the day Purdie and Dixon printed "An Epitome of the Boston Bill" in their *Virginia Gazette*. The General Assembly was then in session, and convinced that their fellow Virginians were not taking sufficient action while dangers grew, several burgesses were determined to act.

On Monday 23 May 1774, Patrick Henry, Richard Henry Lee, Francis Lightfoot Lee, Thomas Jefferson, and three or four others, one of whom may have been George Mason, then in Williamsburg on private business, met in the vacated council chamber "for the benefit of the library in that room" (Rutland, ed., *Papers of George Mason*, I, pp. 190–191; Ford, *Works of Thomas Jefferson*, I, p. 11). There they agreed that the tactic most likely to unite people would be the passage of a resolution calling for "a day of general fasting and prayer." In quest of a precedent, they searched through an undesignated edition of John Rushworth's *Historical Collections* (first published in eight volumes, London, 1659–1701) and hitting upon an appropriate item, drafted a resolution for a day of fasting and prayer and selected the first of June, the same day the Port Act in Boston was to go into effect.

On the following morning the conferees waited on the colonial treasurer Robert Carter Nicholas and requested that he introduce the resolution in the House. Widely known for his "grave & religious character," Nicholas could scarcely decline nor could a fellow burgess very strenuously oppose him. Nicholas introduced the resolution the same day. Jefferson stated that it "passed without opposition" (Ford, *Works of Thomas Jefferson*, I, pp. 11–12). However, he wrote years later that Nicholas, referring to the event not long after it occurred, declared that there was "not above one Dissident appearing amongst near an Hundred Members." This gives cause to believe that there were two dissentients, for though one burgess apparently was bold enough to speak against the resolution, Attorney General John Randolph, who also

Both Williamsburg newspapers printed the resolution in their issues dated Thursday the 26th, but each was held open until Friday the 27th. For this reason, when Governor Dunmore summoned the House of Burgesses to attend him in the council chamber on Thursday, it was not a copy of a newspaper that he held but a broadside. His Lordship was in a snappish mood. "Mr. Speaker and Gentleman of the House of Burgesses," he said, "I have in my hand a Paper published by Order of your House, conceived in such Terms as reflect highly upon his Majesty and Parliament of Great Britain; which makes it necessary for me to dissolve you; and you are dissolved accordingly"—"as usual," added Mr. Jefferson. (Kennedy, *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1773–1776*, p. 132; Ford, *Works of Thomas Jefferson*, I, p. 12)

## The Day of Fasting and Prayer

TUESDAY, the 24th of May, 14 G E O. III. 1774

This house being deeply impressed with Apprehension of the great Dangers to be derived to British America, from the hostile Invasion of the City of Boston, in our Sister Colony of Massachusetts Bay, whose Commerce and Harbour are on the 1st Day of June next, to be stopped by an armed Force, deem it highly necessary that the said first Day of June be set apart by the Members of this House as a Day of Fasting, Humiliation, and Prayer, devoutly to implore the Divine Interposition for averting the heavy Calamity, which threatens Destruction to our civil Rights, and the Evils of civil War; to give us one Heart and one Mind firmly to oppose, by all just and proper Means, every Injury to American Rights, and that the Minds of his Majesty and his Parliament may be inspired from above with Wisdom, Moderation, and Justice, to remove from the loyal People of America all Cause of Danger from a continued Pursuit of Measures pregnant with their Ruin.

*Ordered*, therefore, that the Members of this House do attend their Places at the Hour of ten in the Forenoon, on the said 1st Day of June next, in Order to proceed with the Speaker and the Mace to the Church in this City for the Purposes aforesaid; and that the Reverend Mr. Price be appointed to read Prayers, and the Reverend Mr. Gwatkin to preach a Sermon suitable to the Occasion.

*Ordered*, that this order be forthwith printed and published.

*Ordered*, that the Reverend Mr. Gwatkin be desired to Preach before this House, at the Church in this City, upon Wednesday, the first day of June next; and that Mr. Richard Henry Lee do acquaint him therewith.

*Ordered*, that this House be called over upon this day Sevenight.

**Source:** Scribner, Robert L., ed., and William J. Van Schreeven, compiler. *Revolutionary Virginia: The Road to Independence, Vol. I, Forming Thunderclouds and the First Convention, 1763–1774*. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1973, pp. 93–94

## The Nonimportation Association of 1774

### Background

The Boston Tea Party of December 1773 resulted in swift and direct action against the people of Boston. With the Coercive Acts, Parliament closed the port of Boston and altered the Massachusetts charter in an effort to force Bostonians to bring the “Tea Party” rioters to justice. In support of Massachusetts, Virginia’s House of Burgesses declared June 1, 1774, a day of fasting, humiliation, and prayer. Virginia’s governor, Lord Dunmore, angered by the resolution, dissolved the Burgesses. Meeting as an extralegal assembly, eighty-nine members of the House of Burgesses adopted a nonimportation association on May 27, 1774, that broadened their protest against the British government.

## The Nonimportation Association of 1774

### An Association, signed by 89 members of the late House of Burgesses.

[May 27, 1774]

We his majesty’s most dutiful and loyal subjects, the late representatives of the good people of this country, having been deprived by the sudden interposition of the executive part of this government from giving our countrymen the advice we wished to convey to them in a legislative capacity, find ourselves under the hard necessity of adopting this, the only method we have left, of pointing out to our countrymen such measures as in our opinion are best fitted to secure our dearest rights and liberty from destruction, by the heavy hand of power now lifted against North America: With much grief we find that our dutiful applications to Great Britain for security of our just, antient, and constitutional rights, have been not only disregarded, but that a determined system is formed and pressed for reducing the inhabitants of British America to slavery, by subjecting them to the payment of taxes, imposed without the consent of the people or their representatives; and that in pursuit of this system, we find an act of the British parliament, lately passed, for stopping the harbour and commerce of the town of Boston, in our sister colony of Massachusetts Bay, until the people there submit to the payment of such unconstitutional taxes, and which act most violently and arbitrarily deprives them of their property, in wharfs erected by private persons, at their own great and proper expence, which act is, in our opinion, a most dangerous attempt to destroy the constitutional liberty and rights of all North America. It is further our opinion, that as TEA, on its importation into America is charged with a duty, imposed by parliament for the purpose of raising a revenue, without the consent of the people, it ought not to be used by any person who wishes well to the constitutional rights and liberty of British America. And whereas the India company has ungenerously attempted the ruin of America, by sending many ships loaded with tea into the colonies, thereby intending to fix a precedent in favour of arbitrary taxation, we deem it highly proper and do accordingly recommend it strongly to our countrymen, not to purchase or use any kind of East Indian commodity whatsoever, except saltpetre and spices, until the grievances of America are redressed. We are further clearly of opinion, that an attack, made of one of our sister colonies, to compel submission to arbitrary taxes, is an attack made on all British America, and threatens ruin to the rights of all, unless the united wisdom of the whole be applied. And for this purpose it is recommended to the committee of correspondence, that they communicate, with their several corresponding committees, on the expediency of appointing deputies from the several colonies of British America, to meet in general congress at such place annually as shall be thought most convenient; there to deliberate on those general measures which the united interest of America may from time to time require.

A tender regard for the interest of our fellow subjects, the merchants, and manufacturers of Great Britain, prevents us from going further at this time; most earnestly hoping, that the unconstitutional principle of taxing the colonies without their consent will not be persisted in, thereby to compel us against our will, to avoid all commercial intercourse with Britain. Wishing them and our people free and happy, we are their affectionate friends, the late representatives of Virginia.

**Source:** Kennedy, John Pendleton, ed., *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia*, vol. 13:1773–1776. Richmond: The Colonial Press, 1905.

## Call for the First Continental Congress

Monday the 1st of August, in the year of our Lord, 1774.

At a general meeting of Delegates from the different Counties of this Colony [Virginia], convened in the city of Williamsburg, to take under their consideration the present critical and alarming situation of the Continent of North-America:

The Honourable Peyton Randolph in the Chair:

It was unanimously resolved; that it is the opinion of this meeting, that it will be highly conducive to the security and happiness of the British Empire, that a general congress of deputies from all the Colonies, assemble as quickly as the nature of their situations will admit, to consider the most proper and effectual manner of so operating on the commercial connexion of the colonies with the Mother Country, as to procure redress for the much injured province of Massachusetts-Bay, to secure British America from the ravage and ruin of arbitrary taxes, and speedily as possible to procure the return of that harmony and Union, so beneficial to the whole Empire, and so ardently desired by all British America.

**Source:** William J. Van Schreeven, comp., Robert L. Schriener, ed., *Revolutionary Virginia: The Road to Independence*, Vol. 1, *Forming Thunderclouds and the First Convention, 1763–1774, A Documentary Record* (Charlottesville, Va., 1973), pp. 223–224.

## Excerpt of a Letter from Lord Dunmore, Royal Governor of Virginia, to the Earl of Dartmouth

December 24, 1774.

The associations first, in part, entered into, recommended by the people of this colony, and adopted by what is called the Continental Congress, are now enforcing throughout this country with the greatest rigor. A Committee has been chosen in every county, whose business it is to carry the association of the Congress into execution, which committee assumes to inspect the books, invoices, and all other secrets of the trade and correspondence of merchants, to watch the conduct of every inhabitant without distinction, and to send for all such as come under their suspicion into their presence, to interrogate them respecting all matters which, at their pleasure, they think fit objects of their inquiry; and to stigmatize, as they term it, such as they find transgressing what they are now hardy enough to call the laws of the Congress, which stigmatizing is no other than inviting the vengeance of an outrageous and lawless mob to be exercised upon the unhappy victims. Every county, besides, is now arming a company of men, whom they call an Independent Company, for the avowed purpose of protecting their Committees, and to be employed against government if occasion require. . . .

But, my Lord, every step which has been taken by these infatuated people, must inevitably defeat its own purpose. Their non-importation, non-exportation, &c., cannot fail, in a short time to produce a scarcity which will ruin thousands of families. The people, indeed, of fortune may supply themselves and their negroes for two or three years; but the middling and poorer sort, who live from hand to mouth have not the means of doing so, and the produce of their lands will not purchase those necessaries (without which themselves and negroes must starve) . . . The lower class of people too will discover that they have been duped by the richer sort, who for their part elude the whole effects of the association, by which their poor neighbors perish. What then is to deter those from taking the shortest mode of supplying themselves; and unrestrained as they are by laws, from taking whatever they want, wherever they can find it? The arbitrary proceedings of these Committees, likewise, cannot fail producing quarrels and dissensions, which will raise partisans of government; and I am firmly persuaded that the colony, even by their own acts and deeds, must be brought to see the necessity of depending on its mother country, and of embracing its authority.

**Source:** Lord Dunmore, Royal Governor of Virginia, to the Earl of Dartmouth, Dec. 24, 1774, C.O. 5/1373, 43–44, Public Record Office.

## Patrick Henry's "Liberty or Death" Speech

### Background

There are historians who consider Patrick Henry the greatest orator of the American Revolutionary movement. Yet there are no surviving texts of Henry's famous Revolutionary speeches. One of his most famous speeches that were recorded was the "Liberty or Death" speech delivered before the Second Virginia Convention at St. John's Church in Richmond, Virginia, on March 23, 1775.

## Patrick Henry's "Liberty or Death" Speech

"No man," he [Patrick Henry] said, "thought more highly than he did of the patriotism, as well as abilities, of the very worthy gentlemen who had just addressed the house. But different men often saw the same subject in different lights; and, therefore, he hoped it will not be thought disrespectful to those gentlemen, if, entertaining as he did, opinions of a character very opposite to theirs, he should speak forth his sentiments freely, and without reserve.

"This," he said, "was no time for ceremony." The question before the house was one of awful moment to the country. For his own part, he considered it nothing less than a question of freedom or slavery. And in proportion to the magnitude of the subject, ought to be the freedom of the debate. It was only in this way that they could hope to arrive at truth, and fulfill the great responsibility that they held to God and their country. Should he keep back his opinions at such a time, through fear of giving offense, he should consider myself guilty of treason toward his country, and of an act of disloyalty toward the Majesty of Heaven, which he revered above all earthly kings.

"Mr. President," he said, "it is natural to man to indulge in the illusions of hope. We are apt to shut our eyes against a painful truth—and listen to the song of that siren, till she transforms us into beasts.

"Is this," he asked, "the part of wise men, engaged in a great and arduous struggle for liberty? Were we disposed to be of the number of those, who having eyes, see not, and having ears, hear not, the things which so nearly concern their temporal salvation? For his part, whatever anguish of spirit it might cost, he was willing to know the whole truth; to know the worst and to provide for it.

"I have," he said, "but one lamp by which my feet are guided; and that is the lamp of experience. I knew of no way of judging of the future but by the past. And judging by the past, I wish to know what there has been in the conduct of the British ministry for the last ten years to justify those hopes with which gentlemen have been pleased to solace themselves and the house. Is it that insidious smile with which our petition has been lately received? Trust it not, sir; it will prove a snare to your feet. Suffer not yourselves to be betrayed with a kiss.

"Ask yourselves how this gracious reception of our petition comports with those warlike preparations which cover our waters and darken our land. Are fleets and armies necessary to a work of love and reconciliation? Have we shown ourselves so unwilling to be reconciled that force must be called in to win back our love? Let us not deceive ourselves, sir. These are the implements of war and subjugation—the last arguments to which kings resort.

“I ask gentlemen, sir, what means this martial array, if its purpose be not to force us to submission? Can gentlemen assign any other possible motive for it? Has Great Britain any enemy in the quarter of the world, to call for all this accumulation of navies and armies? No, sir, she has none. They are meant for us: they can be meant for no other. They are sent over to bind and rivet upon us those chains which the British ministry have been so long forging. And what have we to oppose them? Shall we try argument? Sir, we have been trying that for the last ten years. Have we anything new to offer upon the subject? Nothing. We have held the subject up in every light of which it is capable; but it has been all in vain. Shall we resort to entreaty and humble supplication? What terms shall we find which have not been already exhausted?

“Let us not, I beseech you, sir, deceive ourselves longer. Sir, we have done everything that could be done to avert the storm which is now coming on. We have petitioned—we have remonstrated—we have supplicated—we have prostrated ourselves before the throne, and have implored its interposition to arrest the tyrannical hands of the ministry and parliament. Our petitions have been slighted; our remonstrances have produced additional violence and insult; our supplications have been disregarded; and we have been spurned, with contempt, from the foot of the throne.

“In vain, after these things, may we indulge the fond hope of peace and reconciliation. There is no longer any room for hope. If we wish to be free—if we mean to preserve inviolate those inestimable privileges for which we have been so long contending—if we mean not basely to abandon the noble struggle in which we have been so long engaged, and which we have pledged ourselves never to abandon until the glorious object of our contest shall be obtained!—we must fight! I repeat it, sir, we must fight!!! An appeal to arms and to the God of Hosts is all that is left us!

“They tell us sir,” continued Mr. Henry, “that we are weak—unable to cope with so formidable an adversary. But when shall we be stronger? Will it be the next week or the next year? Will it be when we are totally disarmed, and when a British guard shall be stationed in every house? Shall we gather strength by irresolution and inaction? Shall we acquire the means of effectual resistance by lying supinely on our backs, and hugging the delusive phantom of hope, until our enemies shall have bound us hand and foot? Sir, we are not weak, if we make a proper use of those means which the God of nature hath placed in our power.

“Three millions of people armed in the holy cause of liberty, and in such a country as that which we possess, are invincible by any force which our enemy can send against us. Besides, sir, we shall not fight our battles alone. There is a just God who presides over the destinies of nations, and who will raise up friends to fight our battles for us. The battle, sir, is not to the strong alone; it is to the vigilant, the active, the brave. Besides, sir, we have no election. If we were base enough to desire it, it is now too late to retire from the contest. There is no retreat but in submission and slavery! Our chains are forged! Their clanking may be heard on the plains of Boston! The war is inevitable—and let it come! I repeat it, sir, let it come!!!

“It is in vain, sir, to extenuate the matter. Gentlemen may cry, peace, peace—but there is not peace. The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the North will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field! 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,” cried he, with both his arms extended aloft, his brows knit, every feature marked with the resolute purpose of his soul, and his voice swelled to its boldest note of exclamation—“give me liberty, or give me death!”

**Source:** Tucker, as quoted in David A. McCants, *Patrick Henry, the Orator* (New York, 1990), pp. 123–126.

## Patrick Henry Defies Royal Law and Government

### Background

On April 21, 1775, Virginia's royal governor, Lord Dunmore, removed gunpowder from the Magazine in Williamsburg. The colonials protested, and Patrick Henry, at the head of the Hanover Independent Company (a local militia company), demanded and received payment for the gunpowder from the colony's receiver general, Mann Page. In response, Lord Dunmore issued the following proclamation against Patrick Henry.

## Patrick Henry Defies Royal Law and Government

By His Excellency the Right Honourable John Earl of Dunmore, His Majesty's Lieutenant and Governour General of the Colony and Dominion of Virginia, and Vice-Admiral of the same,

A Proclamation.

Virginia, to wit:

Whereas I have been informed, from undoubted authority, that a certain Patrick Henry, of the County of Hanover, and a number of deluded followers, have taken up arms, chosen their officers, and, styling themselves an Independent Company, have marched out of their County, encamped, and put themselves in a posture of war; and have written and despatched letters to diverse parts of the Country, exciting the people to join in these outrageous and rebellious practices, to the great terrour of all His Majesty's faithful subjects, and in open defiance of law and Government; and have committed other acts of violence, particularly in extorting from His Majesty's Receiver General the sum of Three Hundred and Thirty Pounds, under pretence of replacing the Powder I thought proper to order from the Magazine; whence it undeniably appears that there is no longer the least security for the life or property of any man: Wherefore, I have thought proper, with the advice of His Majesty's Council, and in His Majesty's name, to issue this my Proclamation, strictly charging all persons, upon their allegiance, not to aid, abet, or give countenance to the said Patrick Henry, or any other persons concerned in such unwarrantable combinations, but on the contrary to oppose them and their designs by every means; which designs must, otherwise, inevitably involve the whole Country in the most direful calamity, as they will call for the vengeance of offended majesty and the insulted laws to be exerted here, to vindicate the constitutional authority of Government.

Given under my hand and the seal of the Colony, at Williamsburgh, this 6th day of May, 1775, and in the fifteenth year of His Majesty's reign. Dunmore God save the King

Source: Peter Force, *American Archives*, vol. 1, no. 4 (1992), p. 516.

## The Virginia Resolution for Independence—May 15, 1776

### Background

In Williamsburg, over a period of 50 days, from May 15 to July 4, 1776, the Fifth Virginia Convention of Delegates took four forceful steps that placed Virginia in the forefront of rebellion and independence. On May 15, 1776, the convention instructed its delegation at the Continental Congress to propose that the American colonies declare themselves free and independent. The convention then proceeded to adopt George Mason's resolves, 16 articles of freedom known as the Virginia Declaration of Rights, that would become the model for the Bill of Rights. The convention then developed a new independent government for Virginia and elected Patrick Henry the first governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

## The Virginia Resolution for Independence—May 15, 1776

From the proceedings of the Fifth Virginia Convention:

FOREASMUCH as all endeavours of the United Colonies by the most decent representations and petitions to the King and Parliament of Great Britain to restore peace and Security to America under the British government and a re-union with that people upon just and liberal terms instead of a redress of grievances have produced from an imperious and vindictive Administration increased insult, oppression, and a vigorous attempt to effect our total destruction. By a late act all these colonies are declared to be in rebellion and out of the protection of the British Crown, our properties subjected to confiscation, our people, when captivated compelled to join in the murder and plunder of their relations and countrymen and all former rapine and oppression of Americans declared legal and just. Fleets and armies are raised and the aid of foreign troops engaged to assist these destructive purposes: The King's representative in this Colony hath not only withheld all the powers of government from operating for our safety but having retired on board an armed ship, is carrying on a piratical and savage war against us, tempting our slaves, by every artifice, to resort to him and training and employing them against their masters. In this state of extreme danger we have no alternative left but an abject submission to the will of those over-bearing tyrants, or a total separation from the Crown and Government of Great Britain, uniting and exerting the strength of all America for defence, and forming alliances with foreign powers for commerce and aid in war: Wherefore appealing to the SEARCHER OF HEARTS for the sincerity of former declarations, expressing our desire to preserve the connection with that nation, and that we are driven from that inclination by their wicked councils, and the eternal laws of self preservation.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY, that the delegates appointed to represent this colony in General Congress be instructed to propose to that respectable body to declare the United Colonies free and independent states absolved from all allegiance to, or dependence upon, the Crown or Parliament of Great Britain and that they give the assent of this colony to such declaration, and to whatever measures may be thought proper and necessary by the Congress for forming foreign alliances, and a confederation of the colonies at such time, and in the manner, as to them shall seem best: Provided that the power of forming government for, and the regulation of the internal concerns of each colony, be left to the respective colonial legislatures.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY that a committee be appointed to prepare a DECLARATION of RIGHTS and such a plan of government as will be most likely to maintain peace and order in this colony, and secure substantial and equal liberty to the people.

Edmd. [Edmund] Pendleton P[resident]  
John Tazewell  
Clerk of the Convention

**Source:** National Archives, Washington, D. C., Records Group 360.

## Primary Source Packet 2

## Primary Sources Opposed to Independence

### Nicholas Cresswell's Journal

#### Our Common Heritage

A more pleasing and natural Connection never subsisted between any different Bodies of Men than did till of late, and ought long to continue, between Great Britain and her Colonies. The Americans are descended from the Loins of Britons, and therefore may, with Propriety, be called the Children, and England the Mother of them. We are not only allied by Blood, but are still farther united, by the extensive Trade and Commerce carried on between us. Our Manners are similar; our Religion, and Language, the same. There is not Diversity between the Laws of each Country, but such as local Circumstances have occasioned. Whilst we remain tied together by one friendly and common Band, we can preserve our Religion and Property from violation, and bid Defiance to all of the hostile Powers on Earth; but if this ligament be burst asunder, our Strength will be weakened, and our Security at an End. Despotism reigns almost every Where, but in the British Dominions . . . (p. 23)

#### Security

We have at our Backs, committing daily Massacres, a cruel, daring, and insidious Enemy; driving our anterior Inhabitants in, like Sheep, to Slaughter. There is no law in Existence sufficient to enable the Commander in Chief to repel the Attacks of these savage Invaders . . . (p. 16)

The People of England are brave, and powerful. Happy is it for us that they are so. Their Strength has been frequently exerted in our Protection. Their Treasure has been for a long Time devoted to our Use, and, until that fatal Attempt to tax the Colonies, her Deportment to us was truly parental . . . (p. 21)

I own that I feel, as an American, a Satisfaction at the Idea of that Superintencence which Great Britain exercises over us, and of which I have just now spoken...Should two neighbouring Colonies, Rivals in Trade, and reciprocally jealous of each other's increasing Greatness, engage in a Dispute; should they differ as to their Provincial Limits, and carry their Animosity so far as to proceed to Violence; what would be the Consequence, if Great Britain had not a directive Power over both? The Heat of the one, and the Obstinancy of the other . . . might precipitate them into Hostilities, and end in the Debility, perhaps the Destruction, of both. (p. 24)

#### Redress of Grievances

The Parliament of England claims a superintending Power over the Colonies, which Right they insist comprehends in it that of taxing the People of America, and regulation their Trade. The first the Americans deny; the second, I believe, is recognized by the most sanguine Opponents of Parliamentary Authority. In Exertion of the Right of Taxation, the Parliament laid a Duty on Stamps and Tea. From the Dissatisfaction occasioned by the Stamp Act, and the Remonstrances made against it, a Repeal was obtained, before it was carried into Execution. . . .

The Duty on Tea remained, has been paid by the Importers almost ever since its Enaction, and all Uneasiness on that Head seems to have subsided for some considerable Time past. The End of both Parties is answered; the Parliament's in asserting, the Americans in denying. Why should not the Dispute rest at this Point? Fresh Clamours need not be made until fresh Causes for such are given . . . (pp. 20-21)

## The Liberties of Loyalists are Threatened

Tuesday, November 1st, 1774

This evening went to the Tavern to hear the resolves of the Continental Congress. Read a Petition to the Throne and an address to the people of Great Britain. Both of them full of duplicity and false representation. I look upon them as insults to the understanding and dignity of the British Sovereign and people. Am in hopes their petitions will never be granted. I am sorry to see them so well received by the people and the sentiments so universally adopted. It is plain proof that the seeds of rebellion are already sown and have taken very deep root, but am in hopes they will be eradicated next summer. I am obliged to act the hypocrite and extol these proceedings as the wisest productions of any assembly on Earth, but in my heart I despise them and look upon them with contempt.

**Source:** Cresswell, Nicholas. *The Journal of Nicholas Cresswell, 1774–1777*. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1968.

## Excerpt from a Letter from Lord Dunmore, Royal Governor of Virginia, to the Earl of Dartmouth

Dec. 24, 1774

. . . A Committee has been chosen in every county, whose business it is to carry the association of the Congress into execution, which committee assumes to inspect the books, invoices, and all other secrets of the trade and correspondence of merchants, to watch the conduct of every inhabitant without distinction, and to send for all such as come under their suspicion into their presence, to interrogate them respecting all matters which, at their pleasure, they think fit objects of their inquiry; and to stigmatize, as they term it, such as they find transgressing what they are now hardy enough to call the laws of the Congress, which stigmatizing is no other than inviting the vengeance of an outrageous and lawless mob to be exercised upon the unhappy victims . . .

. . . Their non-importation, non-exportation, &c., cannot fail, in a short time to produce a scarcity which will ruin thousands of families. The people, indeed, of fortune may supply themselves and their negroes for two or three years; but the middling and poorer sort, who live from hand to mouth have not the means of doing so, and the produce of their lands will not purchase those necessaries (without which themselves and negroes must starve) . . . The lower class of people too will discover that they have been duped by the richer sort, who for their part elude the whole effects of the association, by which their poor neighbors perish . . .

**Source:** Lord Dunmore, Royal Governor of Virginia, to the Earl of Dartmouth, C.O. 5/1373, 43–44, Public Record Office.

## Newspaper Entries

***Extract of a letter from Charles-Town, South Carolina, January 17.***

Our Provincial Congress rose this day after sitting seven successive days, Sunday not excepted. They have unanimously approved the proceedings of the Continental Congress, and have shut down the courts of law. Parties run so high here, or rather a very great majority being of one opinion, that it is dangerous for the friends of government (who are very few in number) to speak or write their sentiments. We however hope that the lenity, justice, and moderation of the British Parliament will be able to quiet the minds of the people, and restore us to peace and tranquility. We are looking out, with anxious expectations, for the King's speech, which, we hope, will recommend such prudent and conciliatory measures as will be the means of again restoring us to the harmony with our mother country, which it is so much the interest of Britain and America always to preserve.

**Source:** *London Evening Post*, March 23–25, 1775.

As I purpose going to England as soon as I dispose of my Goods (till Liberty of Importation is allowed) I am under the Necessity of not parting with a single Shilling's Worth without Cash; and I request, as a Favour, that all who are indebted to me will pay off their Accounts this Meeting, and all Persons having demands against me are desired to call immediately for their Money.

— ***Catherine Rathell***

**Source:** *Virginia Gazette* (Dixon & Hunter), April 22, 1775.

## Chief Joseph Brant – “The Disturbances in America give great trouble to all our Nations”

Brother Gorah, We have cross'd the great Lake and come to this kingdom with our Superintendent, Col. Johnson, from our Confederacy the Six Nations and their allies, that we might see our Father, the Great King, and joyn in informing him, his Councillors and wise men, of the good intentions of the Indians our brethren, and of their attachment to His Majesty and his Government. Brother. The Disturbances in America give great trouble to all our Nations, as many strange stories have been told to us by the people of that country. The Six Nations who always loved the king, sent a number of their Chiefs and Warriors with their Superintendent to Canada last summer, where they engaged their allies to joyn with them in the defense of that country, and when it was invaded by the New England people they alone defeated them. Brother. In that engagement we had several of our best Warriors killed and wounded, and the Indians think it very hard they should have been so deceived by the White people in that country, the enemy returning in great numbers, and no White people supporting the Indians, they were obliged to return to their villages and sit still. We now Brother hope to see these bad children chastised, and that we may be enabled to tell the Indians who have always been faithfull and ready to assist the King, what his Majesty intends. Brother. The Mohocks [Mohawks] our particular nation, have on all occasions shewn their zeal and loyalty to the Great King;

**Source:** E. B. O'Callaghan, ed. Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York, 15 vols. (Albany, 1853–87): 8:670–71. “The Disturbances in America give great trouble to all our Nations”: Mohawk Joseph Brant Comes to London to See the King, 1776. <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/8071>

## **Boston King – *Memoirs of the Life of Boston King, A Black Preacher***

My master being apprehensive that Charles-Town was in danger on account of the war, removed into the country, about 38 miles off. Here we built a large house for Mr. Waters, during which time the English took Charles-Town.<sup>6</sup> Having obtained leave one day to see my parents, who lived about 12 miles off, and it being late before I could go, I was obliged to borrow one of Mr. Waters's horses; but a servant of my masters, took the horse from me to go a little journey, and stayed two or three days longer than he expected the severest punishment, because the gentleman to whom the horse belonged was a very bad man, and knew not how to shew mercy. To escape his cruelty, I determined to go to Charles-Town, and throw myself into the hands of the English. They received me readily, and I began to feel the happiness of liberty, of which I knew nothing before, altho' I was much grieved at first, to be obliged to leave my friends, and reside among strangers. . . .

Soon after I went to Charles-Town, and entered on board a man of war. As we were going to Chesepeak-bay, we were at the taking of a rich prize. We stayed in the bay two days, and then sailed for New York, where I went on shore. . . .

About which time, (in 1783,) the horrors and devastation of war happily terminated, and peace was restored between America and Great Britain, which issued universal joy among all parties, except us, who had escaped from slavery, and taken refuge in the English army; for a report prevailed at New York, that all slaves, in number 2,000, were to be delivered up to their masters, although some of them had been three or four years among the English. This dreadful rumour filled us all with inexpressible anguish and terror, especially when we saw our masters coming from Virginia, North-Carolina, and other parts, and seizing upon their slaves in the streets of New-York, or even dragging them out of their beds. Many of the slaves had very cruel masters, so that the thoughts of returning home with them embittered life to us. For some days, we lost our appetite for food, and sleep departed from our eyes. The English had compassion upon us in the day of distress, and issued out a Proclamation, importing, That all slaves should be free, who had taken refuge in the British lines, and claimed the function and privileges of the Proclamations respecting the security and protection of Negroes.<sup>17</sup> In consequence of this, each of us received a certificate from the commanding officer at New-York,<sup>18</sup> which dispelled all our fears, and filled us with joy and gratitude. Soon after, ships were fitted out, and furnished with every necessary for conveying us to Nova Scotia. We arrived at Burch Town<sup>19</sup> in the month of August, where we all safely landed. Every family had a lot of land, and we exerted all our strength in order to build comfortable huts before the cold weather set in.

**Source:** King, Boston. *Memoirs of the Life of Boston King, A Black Preacher*. Written by Himself, during his Residence at Kingswood School. Serialized in *The Methodist Magazine*, March–June, 1798. [http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/slavery/Boston\\_King.pdf](http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/slavery/Boston_King.pdf)

## Primary Sources in Favor of Independence

Virginia Association, May 27, 1774

An Association, signed by 89 members of the late House of Burgesses.

We his majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the late representatives of the good people of this country, having been deprived by the sudden interposition of the executive part of this government from giving our countrymen the advice we wished to convey to them in a legislative capacity, find ourselves under the hard necessity of adopting this, the only method we have left, of pointing out to our countrymen such measures as in our opinion are best fitted to secure our dearest rights and liberty from destruction, by the heavy hand of power now lifted against North America: With much grief we find that our dutiful applications to Great Britain for security of our just, antient, and constitutional rights, have been not only disregarded, but that a determined system is formed and pressed for reducing the inhabitants of British America to slavery, by subjecting them to the payment of taxes, imposed without the consent of the people or their representatives; and that in pursuit of this system, we find an act of the British parliament, lately passed, for stopping the harbour and commerce of the town of Boston, in our sister colony of Massachusetts Bay, until the people there submit to the payment of such unconstitutional taxes, and which act most violently and arbitrarily deprives them of their property, in wharfs erected by private persons, at their own great and proper expence, which act is, in our opinion, a most dangerous attempt to destroy the constitutional liberty and rights of all North America. It is further our opinion, that as TEA, on its importation into America is charged with a duty, imposed by parliament for the purpose of raising a revenue, without the consent of the people, it ought not to be used by any person who wishes well to the constitutional rights and liberty of British America. And whereas the India company has ungenerously attempted the ruin of America, by sending many ships loaded with tea into the colonies, thereby intending to fix a precedent in favour of arbitrary taxation, we deem it highly proper and do accordingly recommend it strongly to our countrymen, not to purchase or use any kind of East Indian commodity whatsoever, except saltpetre and spices, until the grievances of America are redressed. We are further clearly of opinion, that an attack, made of one of our sister colonies, to compel submission to arbitrary taxes, is an attack made on all British America, and threatens ruin to the rights of all, unless the united wisdom of the whole be applied. And for this purpose it is recommended to the committee of correspondence, that they communicate, with their several corresponding committees, on the expediency of appointing deputies from the several colonies of British America, to meet in general congress at such place annually as shall be thought most convenient; there to deliberate on those general measures which the united interest of America may from time to time require.

A tender regard for the interest of our fellow subjects, the merchants, and manufacturers of Great Britain, prevents us from going further at this time; most earnestly hoping, that the unconstitutional principle of taxing the colonies without their consent will not be persisted in, thereby to compel us against our will, to avoid all commercial intercourse with Britain. Wishing them and our people free and happy, we are their affectionate friends, the late representatives of Virginia.

**Source:** Kennedy, John Pendleton, ed., *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia*, vol. 13:1773–1776. Richmond: The Colonial Press, 1905.

## Excerpts from Patrick Henry's "Liberty or Death" Speech

"I have," he said, "but one lamp by which my feet are guided; and that is the lamp of experience. I knew of no way of judging of the future but by the past. And judging by the past, I wish to know what there has been in the conduct of the British ministry for the last ten years to justify those hopes with which gentlemen have been pleased to solace themselves and the house. Is it that insidious smile with which our petition has been lately received? Trust it not, sir; it will prove a snare to your feet. Suffer not yourselves to be betrayed with a kiss.

"Ask yourselves how this gracious reception of our petition comports with those warlike preparations which cover our waters and darken our land. Are fleets and armies necessary to a work of love and reconciliation? Have we shown ourselves so unwilling to be reconciled that force must be called in to win back our love? Let us not deceive ourselves, sir. These are the implements of war and subjugation—the last arguments to which kings resort.

"I ask gentlemen, sir, what means this martial array, if its purpose be not to force us to submission? Can gentlemen assign any other possible motive for it? Has Great Britain any enemy in the quarter of the world, to call for all this accumulation of navies and armies? No, sir, she has none. They are meant for us: they can be meant for no other. They are sent over to bind and rivet upon us those chains which the British ministry have been so long forging. And what have we to oppose them? Shall we try argument? Sir, we have been trying that for the last ten years. Have we anything new to offer upon the subject? Nothing. We have held the subject up in every light of which it is capable; but it has been all in vain. Shall we resort to entreaty and humble supplication? What terms shall we find which have not been already exhausted?

"Let us not, I beseech you, sir, deceive ourselves longer. Sir, we have done everything that could be done to avert the storm which is now coming on. We have petitioned—we have remonstrated—we have supplicated—we have prostrated ourselves before the throne, and have implored its interposition to arrest the tyrannical hands of the ministry and parliament. Our petitions have been slighted; our remonstrances have produced additional violence and insult; our supplications have been disregarded; and we have been spurned, with contempt, from the foot of the throne.

... "They tell us sir," continued Mr. Henry, "that we are weak—unable to cope with so formidable an adversary. But when shall we be stronger? Will it be the next week or the next year? Will it be when we are totally disarmed, and when a British guard shall be stationed in every house? Shall we gather strength by irresolution and inaction? Shall we acquire the means of effectual resistance by lying supinely on our backs, and hugging the delusive phantom of hope, until our enemies shall have bound us hand and foot? Sir, we are not weak, if we make a proper use of those means which the God of nature hath placed in our power.

... "It is in vain, sir, to extenuate the matter. Gentlemen may cry, peace, peace—but there is not peace. The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the North will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field! 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," cried he, with both his arms extended aloft, his brows knit, every feature marked with the resolute purpose of his soul, and his voice swelled to its boldest note of exclamation— "give me liberty, or give me death!"

**Source:** From David A. McCants, *Patrick Henry, the Orator* (New York, 1990), pp. 123–126. [Note: Virginia jurist St. George Tucker wrote this recollection of Henry's speech more than twenty years later.]

## James Armistead Lafayette Petition

*James Armistead Lafayette was an enslaved man who served as a spy for the Marquis de Lafayette during the American Revolution. Below is his petition for freedom considering his military service. James Petitioned the General Assembly, November 30, 1786.*

To the honorable the Speaker & gentlemen of the gen l Assembly,

The petition of James (a slave belonging to Will: Armistead of New Kent county) humbly sheweth: That your petitioner perswaded of the just right which all mankind have to Freedom, notwithstanding his own state of bondage, with an honest desire to serve this Country in its defence thereof, did, during the ravages of Lord Cornwallis thro' this state, by the permission of his master, enter into the service of the Marquiss Lafayette: That during the time of his serving the Marquiss he often at the peril of his life found means to frequent the British Camp, by which means he kept open a channel of the most useful communications to the army of the state: That at different times your petitioner conveyed inclosures, from the Marquiss into the enemies lines, of the most secret & important kind; the possession of which if discovered on him would have most certainly endangered the life of your petitioner: That he undertook & performed all commands with chearfulness & fidelity, in opposition to the persuasion & example of many thousands of his unfortunate condition. For proof of the above your petitioner begs leave to refer to the certificate of the Marquiss Lafayette hereto annexed, & after taking his case as here stated into consideration he humbly intreats that he may be granted that Freedom, which he flatters himself he has in some degree contributed to establish; & which he hopes always to prove himself worthy of: nor does he desire even this inestimable favor, unless his present master from whom he has experienced everything, which can make tolerable the state of slavery, shall be made adequate compensation for the loss of a valuable workman; which your petitioner humbly requests may be done & your petitioner shall ever pray &c.

**Source:** Legislative Petition for James, Slave Belonging to William Armistead, November 30, 1786, Box 179, Folder 10, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

## Phillis Wheatley – “To the Right Honorable William, Earl of Dartmouth”

*Phillis Wheatley was a delicate revolutionary. She is likely the most anthologized of any African American writer, and rightly so. Born in Africa and transported to America at the age of seven, Wheatley spent her childhood as the slave of John Wheatley, a successful tailor and businessman in Boston, Massachusetts. By the time she was fourteen, Wheatley was literate as a result of being tutored by Mr. Wheatley’s children, Mary and Nathaniel.*

*Through her poetry, she had the ability to point out important and controversial social issues while simultaneously earning the praise of some of the most important leaders of the world, most notably George Washington. With her literary and Christian approach, her prose, even while subtly pointing out issues with the slave institution, had the ability to put the white slave owning majority at ease.*

*In the poem, Wheatley explains her desire and appreciation for freedom from tyranny as rooted in her subjugation and enslavement. She uses the poem as a platform to express her hopefulness in the earl’s ability to promote the freedom not only of the colonists, but of African American patriots in their struggle. Further, her status as a disenfranchised female minority should not be overlooked when considering her request to this member of the governing authority. Wheatley’s courage to voice her request is nothing short of remarkable.*

Hail, happy day, when, smiling like the morn,  
Fair Freedom rose New-England to adorn:  
The northern clime beneath her genial ray,  
Dartmouth, congratulates thy blissful sway:  
Elate with hope her race no longer mourns,  
Each soul expands, each grateful bosom burns,  
While in thine hand with pleasure we behold  
The silken reins, and Freedom’s charms unfold.  
Long lost to realms beneath the northern skies

She shines supreme, while hated faction dies:  
Soon as appear’d the Goddess long desir’d,  
Sick at the view, she languish’d and expir’d;  
Thus from the splendors of the morning light  
The owl in sadness seeks the caves of night.  
No more, America, in mournful strain  
Of wrongs, and grievance unredress’d complain,  
No longer shalt thou dread the iron chain,  
Which wanton Tyranny with lawless hand  
Had made, and with it meant t’ enslave the land.

Should you, my lord, while you peruse my song,  
Wonder from whence my love of Freedom sprung,

Whence flow these wishes for the common good,  
By feeling hearts alone best understood,  
I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate  
Was snatch’d from Afric’s fancy’d happy seat:  
What pangs excruciating must molest,  
What sorrows labour in my parent’s breast?  
Steel’d was that soul and by no misery mov’d  
That from a father seiz’d his babe belov’d:  
Such, such my case. And can I then but pray  
Others may never feel tyrannic sway?

For favours past, great Sir, our thanks are due,  
And thee we ask thy favours to renew,  
Since in thy pow’r, as in thy will before,  
To sooth the griefs, which thou did’st once deplore.  
May heav’nly grace the sacred sanction give  
To all thy works, and thou for ever live  
Not only on the wings of fleeting Fame,  
Though praise immortal crowns the patriot’s name,  
But to conduct to heav’ns refulgent fane,  
May fiery coursers sweep th’ ethereal plain,  
And bear thee upwards to that blest abode,  
Where, like the prophet, thou shalt find thy God.

**Source:** Wheatley, Phillis. Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral, by Phillis Wheatley, Negro Servant to Mr. John Wheatley, of Boston, in New England [London, 1773].

## Primary Sources Neutral or Undecided on Independence

### Virginia Gazette Article

The following extracts from the epistle from the yearly meeting of the people called Quakers, held last week in London, to the separate meetings of Friends, will shew the peaceable and christian disposition of that people:

“By accounts received from the several quarterly meetings in England, and by epistles from Wales, North Britain, Ireland, Holland, Rhode Island, and New England, Long Island, New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina, we are informed that the body of Friends in America, as well as here, are generally preserved from concerning themselves as parties in the present heats and commotions; and we entreat all in membership with us to enter as little into conversation with them as possible, and daily seek for and abide under the influence of that heavenly principle which leads to follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man can see the Lord. . . .

“Influenced by these principles, we cannot confidently join with such as form combinations of a hostile nature against any, much less an opposition to those providentially placed either in sovereign or subordinate authority; nor can we unite with, or encourage, such as indecently asperse or revile them, for it is written, thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people- Acts xxiii, 5.”

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“We trust that we are called to shew forth to the world, in life and practice, that the blessed reign of the MESSIAH, the Prince of peace, is begun; and we doubt not but it will proceed till it attain, in due time, it's completion in the earth, when, according to the prophecies of Isaiah and Micah, *nations shall not rise up against nations, neither shall they learn war any more.*

“Influenced by these principles, we cannot consistently join with such as form combinations of a hostile nature against any, much less an opposition to those providentially placed either in sovereign or subordinate authority; nor can we unite with, or encourage, such as indecently asperse or revile them, for it is written, *thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.—Acts xxiii. 5.*”

Source: Virginia Gazette (Dixon & Hunter), September 16, 1775.

## Hannah Griffiths – “Upon reading a Book entitled Common Sense”

From a well-to-do Quaker family in Philadelphia, Hannah Griffiths wrote more than 60 poems under the name “Fidelia,” meaning faithful. She favored moderation and could not support war. In this poem, she viewed Thomas Paine, author of the pro-revolution pamphlet *Common Sense* (1776), a “Snake beneath the Grass.” She hoped that more moderate voices be heard and that a more peaceful solution to the conflict with Great Britain could be found.

The Vizard drop’d, see Subtlety prevail,  
Thro’ ev’ry Page of this fallacious Tale,

Sylvania let it not unanswered pass,  
But heed the well guess’d Snake beneath the Grass,  
A deeper Wound at Freedom ne’er was made,  
Then by this Oliverian is display’d.  
Orders confounded - Dignities thrown down,  
Charters degraded equal with the Crown,  
The impartial Press, most partially maintain’d  
Freedom infring’d & Conscience is restrain’d,  
The moderate man is held to public View,  
“The Friend of Tyranny & Foe to you,”  
Deny’d the common Right to represent  
Forbid to give his Reasons for Dissent,  
Whilst base Informers - (Own’d a public Pest)  
Are round the land encourag’d & caress’d  
Our Representatives - the People’s Choice  
Are held contemptuous by this daring Voice.  
Persons are seiz’d & Posts monopoliz’d  
And all our Form of Government despis’d-  
--Then from this “Specimen of Rule” beware,  
Behold the Serpent & avoid his Snare.  
‘Tis not in Names, our present Danger  
lies Sixty as well as one can tyrannize,  
Ah! then awake Sylvania & beware,  
The fatal Danger of this subtle Snare,  
Hold fast your own, your charter’d Rights maintain  
Nor let them weave the Snare into the Chain,  
And whilst firm Union stands the British Foes,  
Let not the native Hand your Date of Freedom close.-

Source: Griffiths, Hannah. “Upon reading a Book entitled *Common Sense*,” Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, January, 1776.

## Journals of the Continental Congress – Excerpts of “Speech to the Six Nations, July 13, 1775”

*The Continental Congress appeals for neutrality from the Six Nations. It is important to note that this account represents a white colonizer’s idea of American Indian speech and should not be taken as a symbol of American Indian illiteracy or poor intelligence.*

### **BROTHERS AND FRIENDS!**

We desire you will hear and receive what we have now told you, and that you will open a good ear and listen to what we are now going to say. This is a family quarrel between us and Old England. You Indians are not concerned in it. We don’t wish you to take up the hatchet against the king’s troops. We desire you to remain at home, and not join on either side, but keep the hatchet buried deep. In the name and in behalf of all our people, we ask and desire you to love peace and maintain it, and to love and sympathise with us in our troubles; that the path may be kept open with all our people and yours, to pass and repass, without molestation.

Brothers! we live upon the same ground with you. The same island is our common birth-place. We desire to sit down under the same tree of peace with you: let us water its roots and cherish its growth, till the large leaves and flourishing branches shall extend to the setting sun, and reach the skies.

### **BROTHERS, OBSERVE WELL!**

What is it we have asked of you? Nothing but peace, notwithstanding our present disturbed situation-and if application should be made to you by any of the king’s unwise and wicked ministers to join on their side, we only advise you to deliberate, with great caution, and in your wisdom look forward to the consequences of a compliance. For, if the king’s troops take away our property, and destroy us who are of the same blood with themselves, what can you, who are Indians, expect from them afterwards?

Therefore, we say, brothers, take care-hold fast to your covenant chain. You now know our disposition towards you, the Six Nations of Indians, and your allies. Let this our good talk remain at Onondaga, your central council house. We depend upon you to send and acquaint your allies to the northward, the seven tribes on the river St. Lawrence, that you have this talk of ours at the great council fire of the Six Nations. And when they return, we invite your great men to come and converse farther with us at Albany, where we intend to re-kindle the council fire, which your and our ancestors sat round in great friendship.

**Source:** Journals of the Continental Congress 1774–1779, Vol. II, pp. 177–183. Edited from the original records in the Library of Congress by Worthington Chauncey Ford; Chief, Division of Manuscripts. Washington, DC : Government Printing Office, 1905. [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/contcong\\_07-13-75.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/contcong_07-13-75.asp)

## The Oneida Indians to Governor Trumbull, 1776

As my younger brothers of the New-England Indians, who have settled in our vicinity, are now going down to visit their friends, and to move up parts of their families that were left behind--with this belt [a real belt] by them, I open the road wide, clearing it of all obstacles, that they may visit their friends and return to their settlements here in peace.

Now we more immediately address you, our brother, the governor, and the chiefs of New England.

**BROTHERS**-We have heard of the unhappy differences and great contention between you and Old England. We wonder greatly, and are troubled in our minds.

**BROTHERS**-Possess your minds in peace respecting us Indians. We cannot intermeddle in this dispute between two brothers. The quarrel seems to be unnatural. You are two brothers of one blood. We are unwilling to join on either side in such a contest, for we bear an equal affection to both you Old and New England. Should the great King of England apply to us for aid, we shall deny him ; if the colonies apply, we shall refuse. The present situation of you two brothers is new and strange to us. We Indians cannot find, nor recollect in the traditions of our ancestors, the like case, or a similar instance.

**BROTHERS**-For these reasons possess your minds in peace, and take no umbrage that we Indians refuse joining in the contest. We are for peace.

**BROTHERS**-As we have declared for peace, we desire you will not apply to our Indian brethren in New-England for their assistance. Let us Indians be all of one mind, and live with one another; and you white people settle your own disputes between yourselves.”

**Source:** American Archives, 4th series, vol 2 (Washington, D.C., 1839), pp. 116–117. <https://edsitement.neh.gov/sites/default/files/2018-08/Oneida%20annotated.pdf>

## Conference with Indians at Fort Pitt

Fort Pitt, July 6, 1776

At a Meeting held this day at this place, present: Kiashura, a Mingo Chief, just returned from the treaty at Niagara; Captain Pipe, a Delaware Chief; the Shade, a Shawnees Chief, with several others, Shawnees and Delawares; likewise Major Trent, Major Ward, Captain Nevill, his officers, and a number of the inhabitants. After being seated, Kiashuta made the following speech:

**“BROTHERS:** Three months ago, I left this place to attend a treaty at Niagara, to be held between the commanding officer at that place, and Six Nations, Shawnees, Delawares, &c` ; but I was stopped near a month at Caughnawaga, as the commanding officer had sent word to the Indians not to assemble until he should hear from Detroit. While I was at Caughnawaga, eight hundred Indians of the Six Nations, hearing of my intention of going to the treaty, came to meet and go with me. Just as we arrived at a small village beyond Caughnawaga, they received a message from the commanding officer, acquainting them that the treaty was over; but they, notwithstanding, persisted in going. I received a message at the same time, inviting me to come, and assuring me that the Council fire was not entirely extinguished. Upon my arrival with the rest of the Indians, I informed the commanding officer that I had come a great distance to hear what he had to say, and desired that he would inform me; but he told me that he was not yet prepared to speak with me, which ended our conference.”

Kiashuta then produced a belt of the wampum which was to be sent from the Six Nations to the Shawnees, Delawares, Wyandots, and Western Indians, acquainting them that they were determined to take no part in the present war between Great Britain and America, and desiring them to do the same.

N` B` — Kiashuta has the belt, and is ordered by the Six Nations to send it through the Indian country.

He then addressed himself to the Virginians and Pennsylvanians in the following manner:

**“BROTHERS:** We will not suffer either the English or the Americans to march an army through our country. Should either attempt it, we shall forewarn them three times from proceeding; but should they then persist, they must abide by the consequences. I am appointed by the Six Nations to the care of this country, that is, to the care of the Indians on the west side of the River Ohio; and I desire you will not think of an expedition against Detroit, for (I repeat it to you again) we will not suffer an army to march through our country.” — A String.

Kiashuta again rose, and spoke as follows:

**“BROTHERS:** Should any mischief chance to be committed by any of our people, you must not blame the Nations, nor think it was done by the approbation of the Chiefs; for the Six Nations have strictly forbidden any of their young men or tributaries to molest any people on their waters; but if they are determined to go to war, let them go to Canada, and fight there.” — A String.

Kiashuta then addressed himself to Captain Pipe, a Delaware Chief, desiring him to inform his Nation of what he had heard, and to request them to be strong, and join with the other Nations in keeping peace in his country. — A String.

He also recommended to the Shade, a Shawnees Chief, to do the same. He then desired the foregoing speech might be distributed through the country, to quiet the minds of the people, and convince them that the Six Nations and their adherents did not desire to live at variance with them.

To which Captain Nevill returned the following answer:

“**BROTHER KIASHUTA:** I am much obliged to you for your good speech on the present occasion. You may depend we shall not attempt to march an army through your country, without first acquainting you with it, unless we hear of a British army coming this course; in such case, we must make all possible speed to march and endeavour to stop them.”

To which Kiashuta replied, there was not the least danger of that, as they should make it their business to prevent either an English or an American army from passing through their country.

**Source:** Digital Library of Northern Illinois <https://digital.lib.niu.edu/islandora/object/niu-amarch%3A87733> <https://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plans/native-americans-role-american-revolution-choosing-sides>