

Advantages of Independence

1. The people could not be taxed from a parent country, which was larger and able to bully the smaller colonies into submission.
2. The people would be free to form their own constitution, and rule their country the way they saw fit.
3. The American people would no longer live in a monarchy, and would no longer be looked down upon by the British royalty.
4. They would be free to become a world power in their own right, and choose who they traded with.
5. They would be free to move into the Indians' territory.

Disadvantages of Independence

1. The British would no longer be around to protect them from Indians or other world powers.
2. They would have a world power as their enemy, who probably wouldn't stop trying to get America back even if the colonists did drive them out.
3. They wouldn't be British anymore, and the British way of life would be replaced by a new, American way. The Loyalists would be forced to flee if the war turned sour for the British.
4. They wouldn't be able to trade with Britain, one of their biggest markets, anymore.

Describe the immediate situation and conditions that prompted the colonists to declare independence.

The British had, previously, created a Stamp Tax, which caused many printed documents in the colonies to have an extra tax on them. The tax wasn't that bad, but the idea that their previously benevolent king could tax them without any way to stop him made the Americans worried. The situation soon spiraled out of hand. After the Boston Tea Party, the British Parliament declared it could tax the colonists as much as it wanted, and issued what the Americans called the intolerable acts, which, among other things, closed the Boston Port and brought the government of Massachusetts under control of Parliament. After this, tempers flared and it was a short amount of time before the first shots were fired.

Jefferson chose to begin the Declaration with the words, “The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America.” Do you feel this was necessary? Why or why not? Could the 13 colonies have declared independence if they were not unanimous? Why or why not?

Yes, I do feel it was necessary. Before the war, even during the war, all the states were their own little countries, and they didn't get on terribly well. The new government needed to show that it supported all the states equally and that they were all together in this. I believe that if the colonies had not come together into the United States, then they would have fallen apart soon after declaring independence and Britain or France would have stepped in.

How does Jefferson explain the reason for a formal declaration of independence? Why do you think it was necessary for Jefferson to state the “causes which impel them to the separation”?

Well, it may have been because other countries (such of France) would be very happy to claim America as a colony, and would probably leaped on them if the Americans had not stated legally why they didn't want to be British colonists. As for the causes, perhaps Jefferson wanted to solidify the peoples' distrust

of the king, and show them all the things he had done to them.

Next, review the two sections of John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*. In your own words, how does Jefferson use Locke's ideas in the preamble of the Declaration?

Locke stated that the purpose of a legitimate government was to preserve, so far as possible, the rights to life, liberty, health and property of its citizens, and to prosecute and punish those of its citizens who violated the rights of others. Any government that steps beyond those bounds becomes illegitimate. These same thoughts are echoed in the Declaration of Independence.

According to Jefferson, what was the purpose of government? What does Jefferson suggest should happen whenever government becomes "destructive of the ends for which it was created?" According to Jefferson, how do governments derive their powers?

The purpose of government, Jefferson wrote, was to protect man's unalienable rights. Jefferson also wrote that if a government became destructive of the ends for which it was created, "*it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.*" Governments, he said, derive their powers from the consent of the governed.

Jefferson noted that "all men are created equal," suggesting that this was "self-evident." Speculate as to what he meant by that statement. What sorts of conflicts and misconceptions may have stemmed from this statement?

Well, for one thing, the American colonists, particularly those in the South, kept slaves. Jefferson, too, was a slave owner. Did he consider his slaves to be people? Perhaps he simply meant that "all free white men are created equal" when he wrote that, and had no intention of freeing his slaves, or did he actually take it literally? We might never know.