■ Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms

Date: 1775
Author: Jefferson, Thomas; Dickinson, John
Genre: political tract

"Our cause is just. Our union is perfect. Our internal resources are great, and, if necessary, foreign assistance is undoubtedly attainable."

Summary Overview

The Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms was a document offered on July 6, 1775, during the Second Continental Congress. In the declaration, Jefferson and Dickinson took issue with the deterioration of the relationship between Great Britain and the American colonies, citing what they saw as examples of British efforts to subjugate and enslave the colonists. Jefferson and Dickinson identified Parliament as the primary instigators of the conflict and appealed to King George III to intervene and help bring about peace. While they sought reconciliation with the king, they also approved the use of armed force in the pursuit of ceasing all British hostilities against the colonies.

Defining Moment

By the 1770s, tensions between the British Empire and the American colonies had reached a fever pitch, hastened by the violent incident known as the Boston Massacre. Parliament had already approved a wide range of tax increases on colonial goods, including paper goods, tea, and sugar. Parliament also enacted a series of laws that impinged upon the liberties of colonial residents, including laws that permitted English soldiers to take up quarters in colonists' homes. Furthermore, strict measures were put into place restricting colonial trade with countries other than Great Britain. The conflict spilled onto the battlefield on April 19, 1775, when American minutemen and British troops clashed in Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts. Two months later, the two sides met again at the Battle of Bunker Hill.

Although the tensions had devolved into violent confrontations, the colonies had not yet raised a formalized military force to fight the British. In fact, no official pursuit of independence been launched by the colonists. On May 10, 1775, the Second Continental Congress met in Philadelphia to address these issues. Despite the presence of pro-independence figures such as John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson, not all of the delegates were in favor of complete dissolution of the Anglo–colonial relationship. In order to appease these moderate voices, the Continental Congress opted to send a final appeal to King George III, asking him to intervene on their behalf with Parliament, whom it identified as the primary source of the tensions. That document—known as the Olive Branch Petition—was sent to the King on July 14, 1775.

As the Olive Branch Petition was being finalized, however, the Congress worked on another document. The Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms, like the Olive Branch Petition, identifies Parliament as the main instigator of the violence and bitterness between the two parties. Written by Jefferson and John Dickinson, the declaration excludes King George III from the debate in the hope that he would order Parliament to halt its anticolonial policies as requested in the Olive Branch Petition.

Meanwhile, however, the declaration states that the Continental Congress was prepared to raise weapons

and forces in defense of the colonists should England continue its policies. According to the declaration, the colonists were prepared to fight for their liberties, laying down their arms only when the English government ceased its offensive policies and operations in America.

Author Biography

John Dickinson

John Dickinson was born on November 13, 1732, in Talbot County, Maryland, to a moderately wealthy family. While still a newborn, his family moved to Delaware. He was educated in Pennsylvania, where he was trained as an attorney before receiving his formal training in this field at the prestigious Temple in London. Upon his return to the colonies in 1757, he established a law practice before entering public office.

Dickinson began his political career as a member of the Delaware Assembly in 1759. In 1762, he moved over to the Pennsylvania Assembly. There, he wrote a number of articles and essays, including "Resolutions of the Stamp Act Congress" in 1765. In 1767, Dickinson wrote "Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania," a pivotal essay and a bold statement against what he saw as increasingly oppressive governance by England. Although he was outspoken on the English treatment of the colonists, Dickinson was also opposed to launching any sort of military offensive to resist British rule, a policy that ran counter to his devout Quaker beliefs. Instead, he advocated peaceful demonstration and civil disobedience.

In 1774 and 1775, Dickinson attended the First and Second Continental Congresses. He remained a dissenter to many of the proactive policies adopted by the pro-independence camp, refusing to sign the Declaration of Independence in 1776 (although he absented himself from the proceedings to avoid making it seem as if the declaration's adoption was not unanimous). Later, Dickinson himself joined the Delaware militia. He was elected to be President of Delaware in 1781 and would later play a major role in the writing of the Constitution of the United States. He died on February 14, 1808.

Thomas Jefferson

Born in 1743 near Charlottesville, Virginia, Thomas Jefferson came from a well-established family. He was formally educated near his home before he enrolled at the College of William and Mary, where he studied classical languages and mathematics. After graduating, he built a successful early career as an attorney.

In addition to his tenures as a magistrate and county lieutenant, Jefferson was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses. There, he became connected with Patrick Henry and George Washington. In 1774, he wrote "A Summary View of the Rights of British America," which cemented his reputation as an individual who could eloquently present colonials issues and agendas.

In 1775, Jefferson attended the Second Continental Congress, which appointed Jefferson's colleague, Washington, as the commander in chief of the newly established Continental Army. A year later—in light of the reception of "A Summary View of the Rights of British America"—Jefferson (working with John Adams, Roger Sherman, Benjamin Franklin, and Robert Livingston) drafted the Declaration of Independence.

From 1776 until 1779, Jefferson served as a member of Virginia's House of Delegates. From 1779 to 1781, Jefferson served as Virginia's governor. He returned to the Congress in 1783 and was made the American Minister to France in 1785. Upon his 1789 return to the United States he was appointed George Washington's Secretary of State, a post he held until 1794. He was defeated by John Adams to succeed Washington as president, but was eventually elected as the nation's third president in 1800. In 1819, Jefferson founded the University of Virginia. He died in 1826.

HISTORICAL DOCUMENT

A declaration by the representatives of the united colonies of North America, now met in Congress at Philadelphia, setting forth the causes and necessity of their taking up arms.

If it was possible for men, who exercise their reason to believe, that the divine Author of our existence intended a part of the human race to hold an absolute property in, and an unbounded power over others, marked out by his infinite goodness and wisdom, as the objects of a legal domination never rightfully resistible, however severe and oppressive, the inhabitants of these colonies might at least require from the parliament of Great-Britain some evidence, that this dreadful authority over them, has been granted to that body. But a reverance for our Creator, principles of humanity, and the dictates of common sense, must convince all those who reflect upon the subject, that government was instituted to promote the welfare of mankind, and ought to be administered for the attainment of that end. The legislature of Great-Britain, however, stimulated by an inordinate passion for a power not only unjustifiable, but which they know to be peculiarly reprobated by the very constitution of that kingdom, and desparate of success in any mode of contest, where regard should be had to truth, law, or right, have at length, deserting those, attempted to effect their cruel and impolitic purpose of enslaving these colonies by violence, and have thereby rendered it necessary for us to close with their last appeal from reason to arms. Yet, however blinded that assembly may be, by their intemperate rage for unlimited domination, so to sight justice and the opinion of mankind, we esteem ourselves bound by obligations of respect to the rest of the world, to make known the justice of our cause. Our forefathers, inhabitants of the island of Great-Britain, left their native land, to seek on these shores a residence for civil and religious freedom. At the expense of their blood, at the hazard of their fortunes, without the least charge to the country from which they removed, by unceasing labour, and an unconquerable spirit, they effected settlements in the distant and unhospitable wilds of America, then filled with numerous and warlike barbarians. — Societies or governments, vested with perfect legislatures, were formed under charters from the crown, and an harmonious intercourse was established between the colonies and the kingdom from which they derived their origin. The mutual benefits of this union became in a short time so extraordinary, as to excite astonishment. It is universally confessed, that the amazing increase of the wealth, strength, and navigation of the realm, arose from this source; and the minister, who so wisely and successfully directed the measures of Great-Britain in the late war, publicly declared, that these colonies enabled her to triumph over her enemies. — Towards the conclusion of that war, it pleased our sovereign to make a change in his counsels. — From that fatal movement, the affairs of the British empire began to fall into confusion, and gradually sliding from the summit of glorious prosperity, to which they had been advanced by the virtues and abilities of one man, are at length distracted by the convulsions, that now shake it to its deepest foundations. — The new ministry finding the brave foes of Britain, though frequently defeated, yet still contending, took up the unfortunate idea of granting them a hasty peace, and then subduing her faithful friends.

These colonies were judged to be in such a state, as to present victories without bloodshed, and all the easy emoluments of statuteable plunder. — The uninterrupted tenor of their peaceable and respectful behaviour from the beginning of colonization, their dutiful, zealous, and useful services during the war, though so recently and amply acknowledged in the most honourable manner by his majesty, by the late king, and by parliament, could not save them from the meditated innovations. — Parliament was influenced to adopt the pernicious project, and assuming a new power over them, have in the course of eleven years, given such decisive specimens of the spirit and consequences attending this power, as to leave no doubt concerning the effects of acquiescence under it. They have undertaken to give and grant our money without our consent, though we have ever exercised an exclusive right to dispose of our own property; statutes have been passed for extending the jurisdiction of courts of admiralty and vice-admiralty beyond their ancient limits; for depriving us of the accustomed and inestimable privilege of trial by jury, in cases affecting both life and property; for suspending the legislature of

one of the colonies; for interdicting all commerce to the capital of another; and for altering fundamentally the form of government established by charter, and secured by acts of its own legislature solemnly confirmed by the crown; for exempting the "murderers" of colonists from legal trial, and in effect, from punishment; for erecting in a neighbouring province, acquired by the joint arms of Great-Britain and America, a despotism dangerous to our very existence; and for quartering soldiers upon the colonists in time of profound peace. It has also been resolved in parliament, that colonists charged with committing certain offences, shall be transported to England to be tried. But why should we enumerate our injuries in detail? By one statute it is declared, that parliament can "of right make laws to bind us in all cases whatsoever." What is to defend us against so enormous, so unlimited a power? Not a single man of those who assume it, is chosen by us; or is subject to our control or influence; but, on the contrary, they are all of them exempt from the operation of such laws, and an American revenue, if not diverted from the ostensible purposes for which it is raised, would actually lighten their own burdens in proportion, as they increase ours. We saw the misery to which such despotism would reduce us. We for ten years incessantly and ineffectually besieged the throne as supplicants; we reasoned, we remonstrated with parliament, in the most mild and decent language.

Administration sensible that we should regard these oppressive measures as freemen ought to do, sent over fleets and armies to enforce them. The indignation of the Americans was roused, it is true; but it was the indignation of a virtuous, loyal, and affectionate people. A Congress of delegates from the United Colonies was assembled at Philadelphia, on the fifth day of last September. We resolved again to offer an humble and dutiful petition to the King, and also addressed our fellow-subjects of Great-Britain. We have pursued every temperate, every respectful measure; we have even proceeded to break off our commercial intercourse with our fellow-subjects, as the last peaceable admonition, that our attachment to no nation upon earth should supplant our attachment to liberty. — This, we flattered ourselves, was the ultimate step of the controversy: but subsequent events have shewn, how vain was this hope of finding moderation in our enemies.

Several threatening expressions against the colonies were inserted in his majesty's speech; our petition, tho' we were told it was a decent one, and that his majesty had been pleased to receive it graciously, and to promise laying it before his parliament, was huddled into both houses among a bundle of American papers, and there neglected. The lords and commons in their address, in the month of February, said, that "a rebellion at that time actually existed within the province of Massachusetts-Bay; and that those concerned with it, had been countenanced and encouraged by unlawful combinations and engagements, entered into by his majesty's subjects in several of the other colonies; and therefore they besought his majesty, that he would take the most effectual measures to inforce due obediance to the laws and authority of the supreme legislature." — Soon after, the commercial intercourse of whole colonies, with foreign countries, and with each other, was cut off by an act of parliament; by another several of them were intirely prohibited from the fisheries in the seas near their coasts, on which they always depended for their sustenance; and large reinforcements of ships and troops were immediately sent over to general Gage.

Fruitless were all the entreaties, arguments, and eloquence of an illustrious band of the most distinguished peers, and commoners, who nobly and strenuously asserted the justice of our cause, to stay, or even to mitigate the heedless fury with which these accumulated and unexampled outrages were hurried on. — equally fruitless was the interference of the city of London, of Bristol, and many other respectable towns in our favor. Parliament adopted an insidious manoeuvre calculated to divide us, to establish a perpetual auction of taxations where colony should bid against colony, all of them uninformed what ransom would redeem their lives; and thus to extort from us, at the point of the bayonet, the unknown sums that should be sufficient to gratify, if possible to gratify, ministerial rapacity, with the miserable indulgence left to us of raising, in our own mode, the prescribed tribute. What terms more rigid and humiliating could have been dictated by remorseless victors to conquered enemies? in our circumstances to accept them, would be to deserve them.

Soon after the intelligence of these proceedings arrived on this continent, general Gage, who in the course of the

last year had taken possession of the town of Boston, in the province of Massachusetts-Bay, and still occupied it a garrison, on the 19th day of April, sent out from that place a large detachment of his army, who made an unprovoked assault on the inhabitants of the said province, at the town of Lexington, as appears by the affidavits of a great number of persons, some of whom were officers and soldiers of that detachment, murdered eight of the inhabitants, and wounded many others. . . .

The general, further emulating his ministerial masters, by a proclamation bearing date on the 12th day of June, after venting the grossest falsehoods and calumnies against the good people of these colonies, proceeds to "declare them all, either by name or description, to be rebels and traitors, to supercede the course of the common law, and instead thereof to publish and order the use and exercise of the law martial." — His troops have butchered our countrymen, have wantonly burnt Charlestown, besides a considerable number of houses in other places; our ships and vessels are seized; the necessary supplies of provisions are intercepted, and he is exerting his utmost power to spread destruction and devastation around him.

We have received certain intelligence, that general Carleton, the governor of Canada, is instigating the people of that province and the Indians to fall upon us. . . .

Our cause is just. Our union is perfect. Our internal resources are great, and, if necessary, foreign assistance is undoubtedly attainable. — We gratefully acknowledge, as signal instances of the Divine favour towards us, that his Providence would not permit us to be called into this severe controversy, until we were grown up to our present strength, had been previously exercised in warlike operation, and possessed of the means of defending ourselves. With hearts fortified with these animating reflections, we most solemnly, before God and the world, declare, that, exerting the utmost energy of those powers, which our beneficent Creator hath graciously bestowed upon us, the arms we have been compelled by our enemies to assume, we will, in defiance of every hazard, with unabating firmness and perseverance, employ for the preservation of our liberties; being with one mind resolved to die freemen rather than to live slaves.

Lest this declaration should disquiet the minds of our friends and fellow-subjects in any part of the empire, we assure them that we mean not to dissolve that union which has so long and so happily subsisted between us, and which we sincerely wish to see restored. — Necessity has not yet driven us into that desperate measure, or induced us to excite any other nation to war against them. — We have not raised armies with ambitious designs of separating from Great-Britain, and establishing independent states. We fight not for glory or for conquest. We exhibit to mankind the remarkable spectacle of a people attacked by unprovoked enemies, without any imputation or even suspicion of offence. They boast of their privileges and civilization, and yet proffer no milder conditions than servitude or death.

In our own native land, in defence of the freedom that is our birthright, and which we ever enjoyed till the late violation of it — for the protection of our property, acquired solely by the honest industry of our fore-fathers and ourselves, against violence actually offered, we have taken up arms. We shall lay them down when hostilities shall cease on the part of the aggressors, and all danger of their being renewed shall be removed, and not before.

With a humble confidence in the mercies of the supreme and impartial Judge and Ruler of the Universe, we most devoutly implore his divine goodness to protect us happily through this great conflict, to dispose our adversaries to reconciliation on reasonable terms, and thereby to relieve the empire from the calamities of civil war.

GLOSSARY

despotism: absolute political power, tyranny

garrison: body of troops located in a fort or single location

indignation: anger generated by unfair treatment

Providence: acts of God on Earth

statuteable: lawful, legal

Document Analysis

Jefferson and Dickinson begin the Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms by suggesting that, even if God had allowed for certain parties to have irresistible and total power over others, the colonies would still need validation from Great Britain's Parliament. After all, such a power is supposed to be used out of wisdom and goodness, and it had become clear in the minds of the colonists that Parliament was not acting with either concept in mind.

Instead of proceeding with benevolence, Jefferson and Dickinson say, the Parliament seems to be driven by a pursuit of power. Indeed, their declaration accuses Parliament of demonstrating an "inordinate passion" for a type of power that was not only unjustified but, according to Jefferson and Dickinson, illegal. The declaration makes this statement to demonstrate that the actions taken by Great Britain were against the tenets of the British Constitution itself. It amplifies this tone, saying that any reasonable leader within the Parliament should remain dedicated to making policy that was right, legal, and truthful, regardless of the conditions at hand.

These conditions were the grumblings of civil war between the colonies and Britain. The relationship between the two parties had clearly devolved into distrust and open conflict. Jefferson and Dickinson's declaration comments that Parliament has an obligation as the legislators of England, to pursue policies that would work to improve relations. However, the authors accuse Parliament of struggling to wrest control from the colonies instead. As the "contest" between Parliament and the colonies grew more intense and closer to a stalemate, the declaration says that Parliament is becoming desperate to end the conflict. In light of this desperation, Parliament was turning to the imposition of cruel and oppressive measures.

The declaration specifically cites Parliament, not King George III, for instigating and exacerbating the conflict. In fact, there was no mention of the king in this document. By purposely leaving the king out of the focus of the colonists' grievances, the authors leave open the door for the king to intervene and perhaps direct Parliament away from its hostile stance. In its censure of Parliament, the declaration accuses the British government of being so blinded by its "intemperate rage" for domination over the colonies that it had become willing to launch a campaign of brutality and hostility against the colonies. In spite of this campaign, the document says, the colonies had remained morally upright and respectful.

Jefferson and Dickinson remind the king of the colonies' history. More than a century earlier, the Puritans had left their native England in search of civil and religious freedom. They experienced hardships in their new home in New England, not the least of which were harsh weather and occasionally violent encounters with American Indians. They spent their personal fortunes in order to come to the New World and worked tirelessly once there in order to build a new society. They were successful, the authors say, building governmental institutions that support the colonists and, at the same time, remaining loyal to the British government.

England benefited greatly from the colonists' success. Dickinson and Jefferson state that, once the colonies were established, the British Empire had a new base from which it could launch exploration and trade missions. Also, the goods produced in the colonies added considerably to the wealth of Great Britain's economy. Furthermore, the contributions of the colonies (which included military personnel and supplies) greatly aided the British army in its efforts against the French in Canada during the French and Indian War.

However, the conclusion of the French and Indian War led the Parliament to refocus on subduing England's "faithful friends"—the colonies. Jefferson and Dickinson theorize that Parliament, which enjoyed increased power over the colonies through King George III, saw the need for this subjugation based on two facts. First, the colonies had long been willing and loyal subjects of the Crown—they would not, Parliament assumed, object to further management by the British government. Second, there was a wealth of resources in New England that could be accessed by Great Britain by increasing pressure on the colonists legally. The authors dub such a policy "statuteable plunder."

Parliament's inflammatory policies were myriad, according to Jefferson and Dickinson. For example, the British military had been given increased liberties and protections in the colonies. Under the 1765 Quartering Act, for example, British Army soldiers were allowed to stay at colonists' private residences. In 1774, the colonists' faith in the acceptable behavior of British soldiers was further shaken by a law that stated that British soldiers and officials who were accused of murder in the colonies would not be tried by the colonial judiciary—rather, they would be taken back to Britain

and given what the colonists saw as mock trials with minimal punishments, if any.

Additionally, Dickinson and Jefferson accuse Parliament of collecting and spending colonial money without the consent of the New England governments. This comment refers to the number of occurrences during the 1760s and 1770s in which new taxes on tea, paper, molasses, and other products were applied. The revenues from these taxes were spent at the discretion of Parliament for the benefit of the entire Empire.

Furthermore, Parliament made a number of changes to the colonial legal structure, placing officials in key positions within the judicial system, which gave Parliament enhanced oversight over the colonial legal system. These officials' power was useful in implementing many new legal policies, such as the 1769 law that allowed colonists who were accused of treason to be extradited to Britain for prosecution and those colonists accused of smuggling and other trade-related crimes to be prosecuted in court without a jury of their peers present.

Other grievances include the accusation of political and economic manipulation, citing the 1767 suspension of the New York Assembly for refusing to comply with the Quartering Act; the extreme restrictions on the colonists' trade relationships with other nations; and the 1774 Quebec Act, which moved the border between that colony and the Ohio River, placing one of Britain's greatest rivals at the doorstep of its colonies.

Jefferson and Dickinson state that the Second Continental Congress chose to list these grievances because Parliament had effectively stripped away the colonial governments' areas of authority. The 1766 Declaratory Act was the most egregious example of this fact—this law said that the royal government retained the authority to make any and all laws for the colonies. Through this act, Parliament had been able to enact the wide range of laws and policies that rendered colonial legislatures nearly powerless. For the better part of a decade, the colonists had attempted to communicate their concerns to Parliament and the king, using respectful and "decent" language, with no positive response or changes emanating from Britain.

The response the colonists did receive was one of further heavy-handedness. Parliament sent more ships and troops to New England to address what was seen as growing indignation among the colonists. Colonial delegates met twice, at the First Continental Congress in New York and again at the Second Congress in Philadelphia, in order to create a reasonable, peaceful response to Parliament's actions. The product of the Second Congress was the Olive Branch Petition, which had been sent while the Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms was being drafted. The declaration states that the colonists took every reasonable step to appeal to Great Britain.

The British response to these "reasonable" steps was, according to Jefferson and Dickinson, a combination of neglect and hostile rhetoric. First, the colonists expected the Olive Branch Petition and other appeals to be received graciously by the king and read into Parliament. Instead, the documents were lost in the bureaucracy. Meanwhile, Parliament spoke of the fact that the colonies—particularly Massachusetts Bay—were in a state of full rebellion against the king. When the legislative body relayed this charge to the king, he acted immediately, calling upon Parliament to enact and enforce any measure to halt this rebellion. Trade was restricted and more troops and ships were sent to enforce the law and maintain order in the colonies.

Britain also attempted to undermine the increasingly united front of colonies. One example of this effort was the "auctioning" of tax rates to potential supporters in colonial governments; by rewarding colonies that supported the king's policies with lower taxes, Parliament sought to create divisions, pitting colony against colony. Jefferson and Dickinson's declaration says that this tax policy maneuver led the colonies to closely examine the social and moral costs of accepting such proposals. The colonies, according to the document, refused to comply with such extortive.

In late 1774, General Thomas Gage, the British-installed Governor of the Massachusetts Bay colony, took notice of the growing pro-liberty movement the confrontations and incidents it incited. Gage declared Massachusetts to be in a state of martial law and began a search for any weapons and supplies the rebellion might be gathering. In April of 1775, British intelligence revealed that such a depot could be found in Concord. Gage deployed his military forces to secure the supplies and arrest John Hancock and Samuel Adams (two of the most outspoken critics of England). Colonial minutemen were alerted to the British force's imminent arrival and engaged them in two major skirmishes (which would become known as the Battle of Lexington and Concord).

The declaration says that Gage's attack was unprovoked and an "assault on the inhabitants" of that region, suggesting that not all of the targets of Gage's

campaign were military. Gage would take this approach to pursuing civilians farther two months later, declaring all colonists to be rebels and traitors. This policy, according to Jefferson and Dickinson, would further allow Gage to crack down on the colonists with martial law. The military launched attacks on Breed's Hill in Charlestown (a battle known as the Battle of Bunker Hill) and other targets. American ships were seized and their crews forced to take up arms against the colonists, while troops also stopped inbound supply ships in order to choke the rebellion. It is at this point that Jefferson and Dickinson state the justification for formally raising arms against the British. In light of the inability of the colonies to gain the King's favor and halt Parliament's ongoing effort to clamp down on the colonists, the authors say that the colonies have no other recourse. Their cause, according to the document, was just. Additionally, the union that was being forged in the face of this poor treatment was strong and becoming stronger.

Furthermore, the resources that the colonists had to defend themselves were many. The Americans could obtain weapons and supplies and could even call upon the assistance of Britain's rivals if necessary. Finally, the colonies had the benefit of divine Providence—it was the view of Jefferson and Dickinson that God would not have placed the colonists in this situation if they could not call upon their experience and tap into the resources at hand in order to defend themselves and achieve their freedom from British tyranny.

The Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms states a clear case for independence. The colonists, the victims of two decades of increased oppression, had reached out repeatedly to Parliament, the king, and anyone else within the British Empire who might intervene. According to the declaration, the colonists felt that they were entirely justified to respond to the Crown's actions by taking up arms against Britain; they believed that the pursuit of independence was a reasonable pursuit under such circumstances.

However, the declaration left open the possibility for reconciliation. Jefferson and Dickinson state that the colonies do not wish to dissolve their union with Great Britain and their fellow subjects. The colonists' situation was not irreversible—they had not yet reached so desperate a point at which open war was the only option, nor had they raised an army whose sole purpose was to achieve independence. Nevertheless, the colonists were, in the minds of Jefferson and Dickinson, a group endangered by British policies. They had every right to defend themselves and act in a spirit of self-preservation against such unprovoked attacks. Now, the document says, the colonists would need to take up arms against such oppressive actions, laying them down again when British hostilities came to an end.

The declaration comes to a conclusion by offering a prayer. The authors pray to God to protect them from the coming conflict, which despite their hopes of a lasting peace, seems to be moving closer to reality. They add that it was the hope of the colonists that God would steer the British toward reconciliation (with reasonable terms) in order to avoid sending the colonies and Great Britain into deeper into civil war.

Essential Themes

The Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms served a number of important purposes during the pivotal years between 1774 and 1776 in colonial America. To serve these purposes, Thomas Jefferson and John Dickinson deliberately used respectful, peaceful language, although they also showed indignation at the ongoing events and issues between the colonies and Great Britain. This dual tone was reflective of the moderate, non-contentious approach preferred by Dickinson and Jefferson's more vehement pro-independence attitude.

The first purpose of this document was to issue one last appeal to the king to intervene with Parliament and move the country from the brink of civil war with its colonies. To be sure, according to the declaration, Parliament had done its part to instigate conflict with the colonies. The growing sense of anger among the colonies that was generated by these actions could have elicited a positive response from Parliament, said Jefferson and Dickinson, but instead the colonies' anger was only met with more oppressive measures. Only the king, who had previously shown appreciation for the colonies—at least in terms of the strategic and economic benefits they gave to the British Empire—could intervene and reverse Parliament's actions.

The declaration therefore served another important purpose—justifying the eventual raising of arms in self-defense against the British. It served as a sort of low-key rallying cry for the colonists and provided a clear outline of the despotic and unfair governance that Parliament demonstrated in the colonies. This document did not call for independence, but it did make a clear case for standing up against the tyranny of British government and its disruptive impact on the colonial way

of life. It left open the hope that moderation and reconciliation would be offered by the British, but also made clear that the colonies would no longer be passive if reconciliation did not occur.

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LESSON PLAN: **Taking Up Arms**

Students analyze a declaration issued by the Second Continental Congress to trace the political and ideological origins of the American Revolution.

Learning Objectives

Identify the events that led to the document and the purpose for which it was created; read the document imaginatively, taking into account the values, motives, and hopes it reveals; analyze the cause-and-effect relationships the document establishes.

Materials: Thomas Jefferson and John Dickinson, Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms (1775).

Overview Questions

What is the document's purpose? What views on the dispute between Britain and the colonies does it present? What justifications and goals for an armed rebellion does the document provide?

Step 1: Comprehension Questions

On whose authority have Jefferson and Dickinson written this document? Who does it blame for the deterioration of relations between Britain and the colonies? What was Jefferson and Dickinson's reason for writing the first and second paragraphs of the document?

- **Activity:** Have students write a summary of the first or second paragraph of the document. Select students to read their summaries to the class.

Step 2: Comprehension Questions

What reasons do Jefferson and Dickinson provide for taking up arms? What do they identify as the goal in taking this action? What assurances do they provide to the British? What warnings to the British does their document provide?

- **Activity:** Have students identify and read aloud statements in the document that present the colonies as holding the moral "high ground" in their dispute with Britain.

Step 3: Context Questions

What earlier efforts does the document note the colonies have made to peacefully resolve their dispute with Britain? How does it characterize the British responses to those efforts? How might these characterizations justify armed rebellion? Do you agree that armed rebellion was called for at this point? Why or why not?

- **Activity:** Work with students to establish the sequence of events the document sets forth as preceding the confrontation at Lexington in April 1775. Have them record these events on a sequence chart.

Step 4: Historical Connections Questions

How accurate and objective is the document's account of the confrontation at Lexington? What responsibility does it assign to General Thomas Gage in escalating the conflict? What "foreign assistance" does the document anticipate? For what reasons might France be willing to help the colonists?

- **Activity:** Have students write in their own words a one-page justification for taking up arms that draws on the reasons and arguments provided in the document.

Step 5: Response Paper

Word length and additional requirements set by Instructor. Students answer the research question in the Overview Questions. Students state a thesis and use as evidence passages from the primary source document as well as support from secondary historical document/s assigned in the lesson.