

Primary Source Set

Founding Principles, Civic Virtue, and the American Revolution

Guiding Questions

How were civic virtues demonstrated and Founding principles upheld during the lead-up to and during the American Revolution?

Objectives

- ☐ I will understand the meaning of the principles of equality and natural rights by analyzing primary sources.
- ☐ I will understand the virtues of moderation, respect, responsibility, courage, and prudence by analyzing primary sources.

The Olive Branch Petition, 1775

Background Information

American independence from Great Britain was never a guaranteed event. During the lead-up to the Revolutionary War, colonial leaders expressed their desire to remain part of the British Empire. While they had a list of grievances, they believed that the path of declaring independence was a final step that should only be taken after all other options were exhausted. In July 1775, tensions between Great Britain and the American colonies were extremely high as fighting had already broken out a few months earlier at the Battles of Lexington and Concord. However, colonial leaders sent the Olive Branch Petition to King George III in an attempt to bring about some type of reconciliation.

Olive Branch Petition Version A

Source: <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/primary-sources/olive-branch-petition>

Text	Vocabulary and Context
<p>We, your Majesty's faithful subjects of the colonies ... entreat your Majesty's gracious attention to this our humble petition ...</p> <p>We shall decline the ungrateful task of describing the irksome variety of artifices, practised by many of your Majesty's Ministers ... that have, from time to time, been dealt out by them ... or of traceing, thro' a series of years past, the progress of the unhappy differences between Great Britain and these colonies ...</p>	<p>entreat: respectfully request</p> <p>artifices: deception</p> <p>traceing: tracing or listing out</p>
<p>Your Majesty's Ministers, persevering in their measures, and proceeding to open hostilities for enforcing them, have compelled us to arm in our own defence...</p>	
<p>Knowing to what violent resentments and incurable animosities, civil discords are apt to exasperate and inflame the contending parties, we think ourselves required by indispensable obligations to Almighty God, to your Majesty, to our fellow subjects, and to ourselves, immediately to use all the means in our power, not incompatible with our safety, for stopping the further effusion of blood, and for averting the impending calamities that threaten the British Empire...</p>	<p>incurable animosities: unsolvable problems</p> <p>impending calamities: forthcoming catastrophes</p>

<p>We solemnly assure your Majesty, that we not only most ardently desire the former harmony between her and these colonies may be restored, but that a concord may be established between them upon so firm a basis as to perpetuate its blessings, uninterrupted by any future dissensions, to succeeding generations in both countries...</p>	<p>ardently: strongly</p> <p>perpetuate: continue for a long time</p>
<p>We, therefore, beseech your Majesty, that... measures may be taken for preventing the further destruction of the lives of your Majesty's subjects; and that such statutes as more immediately distress any of your Majesty's colonies may be repealed ... That your Majesty may enjoy a long and prosperous reign, and that your descendants may govern your dominions with honor to themselves and happiness to their subjects, is our sincere and fervent prayer.</p>	<p>beseech: urgently request</p> <p>fervent: passionate</p>

Olive Branch Petition Version B

Source: <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/primary-sources/olive-branch-petition>

Text	Vocabulary and Context
<p>We, your Majesty's faithful subjects of the colonies ... entreat your Majesty's gracious attention to this our humble petition ... We shall decline the ungrateful task of describing the irksome variety of artifices, practised by many of your Majesty's Ministers ... that have, from time to time, been dealt out by them ... or of traceing, thro' a series of years past, the progress of the unhappy differences between Great Britain and these colonies ...</p>	<p>entreat: respectfully request</p> <p>artifices: deception</p> <p>traceing: tracing or listing out</p>

<p>Your Majesty's Ministers, persevering in their measures, and proceeding to open hostilities for enforcing them, have compelled us to arm in our own defence...</p>	<p><i>The colonists felt forced to defend themselves from British overreach, with fighting breaking out in April 1775 at Lexington and Concord.</i></p>
<p>Knowing to what violent resentments and incurable animosities, civil discords are apt to exasperate and inflame the contending parties, we think ourselves required by indispensable obligations to Almighty God, to your Majesty, to our fellow subjects, and to ourselves, immediately to use all the means in our power, not incompatible with our safety, for stopping the further effusion of blood, and for averting the impending calamities that threaten the British Empire...</p>	<p>incurable animosities: unsolvable problems</p> <p>impending calamities: forthcoming catastrophes</p>
<p>We solemnly assure your Majesty, that we not only most ardently desire the former harmony between her and these colonies may be restored, but that a concord may be established between them upon so firm a basis as to perpetuate its blessings, uninterrupted by any future dissensions, to succeeding generations in both countries...</p>	<p><i>The colonists assure King George that they sincerely want peace and harmony between them and Great Britain.</i></p> <p>ardently: strongly</p> <p>perpetuate: continue for a long time</p>
<p>We, therefore, beseech your Majesty, that... measures may be taken for preventing the further destruction of the lives of your Majesty's subjects; and that such statutes as more immediately distress any of your Majesty's colonies may be repealed... That your Majesty may enjoy a long and prosperous reign, and that your descendants may govern your dominions with honor to themselves and happiness to their subjects, is our sincere and fervent prayer.</p>	<p><i>The colonists request that the king take steps to stop further violence and to also repeal statutes and laws that have violated the colonists' rights.</i></p> <p>beseech: urgently request</p> <p>fervent: passionate</p>

Henry Knox Letter to General George Washington, 1776

Background Information

In the late autumn of 1776, British troops were occupying Boston, Massachusetts. General George Washington's forces had established a siege of the city from the surrounding hills, but did not have sufficient artillery to effectively assault the enemy forces. Henry Knox, serving in Washington's army, devised a plan to bring artillery from Fort Ticonderoga in New York all the way to Boston. Knox and his men carried out their mission through brutal cold by pulling the huge guns 300 miles across snow, icy lakes, and over mountains on sleds. Once the artillery arrived, the British forces realized they needed to evacuate the city. Knox wrote the following letter to Washington in December, when he was still in New York leading the dangerous mission. While he believed at the time of writing that it would only be a couple more weeks until he could reach Boston, it ended up taking a month due to the difficulty of the journey

Henry Knox Letter to General George Washington, 1776 Version A

Source: <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/dragging-cannon-fort-ticonderoga-boston-1775>

Text	Vocabulary and Context
I return'd to this place on the 15 [of November] & brought with me the Cannon being nearly the time I conjectur'd it would take us to transport them to here, It is not easy [to] conceive the difficulties we have had in getting them over the Lake owing to the advanc'd Season of the Year & contrary winds, but the danger is now past & three days ago it was very uncertain whether we could have gotten them untill next spring, but now please God they must go—	conjectur'd : predicted conceive : imagine advanc'd Season of the Year : winter

I have had made forty two exceeding Strong Sleds & have provided eighty Yoke of oxen to drag them as far as Springfield where I shall get fresh Cattle to Carry them to Camp...	Yoke: groups
I have sent for the Sleds & teams to come here & expect to begin [to] move them to Saratoga on Wednesday or Thursday next trusting that between this & then we shall have a fine fall of snow which will enable us to proceed further & make the carriage easy – if that should be the case I hope in 16 or 17 days time to be able to present to your Excellency a noble train of artillery	

Henry Knox Letter to General George Washington, 1776 Version B

Source: <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/dragging-cannon-fort-ticonderoga-boston-1775>

Text	Vocabulary and Context
I return'd to this place on the 15 [of November] & brought with me the Cannon being nearly the time I conjectur'd it would take us to transport them to here, It is not easy [to] conceive the difficulties we have had in getting them over the Lake owing to the advanc'd Season of the Year & contrary winds, but the danger is now past & three days ago it was very uncertain whether we could have gotten them untill next spring, but now please God they must go--	<p><i>Knox relays the incredible difficulties that he and his men faced in moving the cannon.</i></p> <p>conjectur'd: predicted</p> <p>conceive: imagine</p> <p>advanc'd Season of the Year: winter</p>

I have had made forty two exceeding Strong Sleds & have provided eighty Yoke of oxen to drag them as far as Springfield where I shall get fresh Cattle to Carry them to Camp...	<i>Knox's group consisted of forty two sleds and eighty groups of oxen to pull the artillery pieces.</i> Yoke: groups
I have sent for the Sleds & teams to come here & expect to begin [to] move them to Saratoga on Wednesday or Thursday next trusting that between this & then we shall have a fine fall of snow which will enable us to proceed further & make the carriage easy – if that should be the case I hope in 16 or 17 days time to be able to present to your Excellency a noble train of artillery.	<i>Knox expects fresh snow to arrive to make pulling the artillery across the snow easier.</i>

The Declaration of Independence, 1776

Background Information

After over a year of skirmishes with British forces, the American colonies took the drastic step of declaring independence in July 1776. Thomas Jefferson, then a 33-year-old, was the primary author of the Declaration of Independence. While the document listed out grievances against King George III, the Preamble laid out principles that the new country would be based on.

The Declaration of Independence Version A

Source: <https://bri-docs.s3.amazonaws.com/DeclarationPDFFinal.pdf>

Text	Vocabulary and Context
We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.	endowed: given instituted: created deriving: obtaining from

<p>That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.</p>	<p>institute: create</p>
<p>Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.</p>	<p>transient: lasting only a short time</p> <p>hath shewn: has shown</p>
<p>But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security...</p>	<p>invariably: every time</p> <p>evinces: indicates</p> <p>Despotism: tyranny</p>

<p>We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved...</p>	<p>rectitude: goodness</p>
<p>And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.</p>	

The Declaration of Independence Version B

Source: <https://bri-docs.s3.amazonaws.com/DeclarationPDFFinal.pdf>

Text	Vocabulary and Context
<p>We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.</p>	<p><i>All humans are equal in the rights they have that God or Nature has given them. Government exists to protect these rights and governments get their power from the people they govern.</i></p> <p>endowed: given</p> <p>instituted: created</p> <p>deriving: obtaining from</p>

<p>That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.</p>	<p><i>Whenever a government does not protect rights any longer, the people have a right to form a new government that can better do so.</i></p> <p>institute: create</p>
<p>Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.</p>	<p><i>Governments that have existed for a while should not be overthrown casually, and people tend to deal with bad government for long periods of time.</i></p> <p>transient: lasting only a short time</p> <p>hath shewn: has shown</p>
<p>But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security...</p>	<p><i>While it should not be done lightly, if the people do in fact suffer from tyranny for a long time, they have a right and duty to overthrow the government and create a new one that will better secure their rights.</i></p> <p>invariably: every time</p> <p>evinces: indicates</p> <p>Despotism: tyranny</p>

<p>We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved...</p>	<p><i>The representatives of the colonists declare the colonies to be free and all political connections with Great Britain are ended.</i></p> <p>rectitude: goodness</p>
<p>And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.</p>	<p><i>The signers pledge their livelihoods to each other in order to support the movement for independence.</i></p>

George Washington's Address to Congress Resigning his Commission

Background Information

Throughout history, military leaders have frequently used their power to overthrow governments and establish dictatorships. During the American Revolution, the civilian Continental Congress was a weak body that struggled to exercise effective governance. Its members squabbled, struggled to raise revenue, and soldiers frequently went without pay. Despite this, the colonists won their independence. Washington lived up to the principles of the Declaration of Independence and self-government by resigning his military commission and returning to private life as a civilian. He gave the following speech to Congress when resigning.

George Washington's Address to Congress Resigning his Commission Version A

Source: <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-06-02-0319-0004>

Text	Vocabulary and Context
I have now the honor of offering my sincere Congratulations to Congress and of presenting myself before them to surrender into their hands the trust committed to me, and to claim the indulgence of retiring from the Service of my Country.	indulgence: pleasure
Happy in the confirmation of our Independence and Sovereignty, and pleased with the opportunity afforded the United States of becoming a respectable Nation, I resign with satisfaction the Appointment I accepted with diffidence. A diffidence in my abilities to accomplish so arduous a task, which however was superseded by a confidence in the rectitude of our Cause, the support of the Supreme Power of the Union, and the patronage of Heaven...	diffidence: modesty arduous: difficult superseded: to replace in favor of a different thing
Having now finished the work assigned me, I retire from the great theatre of Action; and bidding an Affectionate farewell to this August body under whose orders I have so long acted, I here offer my Commission, and take my leave of all the employments of public life.	August: esteemed

George Washington's Address to Congress Resigning his Commission Version B

Source: <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/dragging-can-non-fort-ticonderoga-boston-1775>

Text	Vocabulary and Context
I have now the honor of offering my sincere Congratulations to Congress and of presenting myself before them to surrender into their hands the trust committed to me, and to claim the indulgence of retiring from the Service of my Country.	<p><i>Washington congratulates Congress on winning the war and announces his intention to surrender his military commission.</i></p> <p>indulgence: pleasure</p>
Happy in the confirmation of our Independence and Sovereignty, and pleased with the opportunity afforded the United States of becoming a respectable Nation, I resign with satisfaction the Appointment I accepted with diffidence. A diffidence in my abilities to accomplish so arduous a task, which however was superseded by a confidence in the rectitude of our Cause, the support of the Supreme Power of the Union, and the patronage of Heaven...	<p><i>Washington explains that he resigns happily knowing that the goal of independence was achieved. He modestly took the role of commander-in-chief, but he felt confident that unity and God would ensure that they would succeed.</i></p> <p>diffidence: modesty</p> <p>arduous: difficult</p> <p>superseded: to replace in favor of a different thing</p>
Having now finished the work assigned me, I retire from the great theatre of Action; and bidding an Affectionate farewell to this August body under whose orders I have so long acted, I here offer my Commission, and take my leave of all the employments of public life.	<p><i>Washington returns the commission and announces his intention to return to private civilian life.</i></p> <p>August: esteemed</p>