

Inventing America: The Untold Story of the Declaration of Independence

Activity 1:

Directions: Watch Inventing America: Making A Nation. Answer the following questions:

1. According to John Adams, when did the Revolution begin?

2. What does John Adams call the Boston Massacre? Why?

3. Why was Parliament taxing the colonists in the first place?

4. Why did John Adams defend the British soldiers on trial for murder? What was the result of the case?

5. Who made an engraving of the Boston Massacre? How did this image portray the event?

6. According to John Adams what was “the last straw” for the colonists? What did they do as a response?

7. Why was Benjamin Franklin frustrated with Pennsylvania’s government?

8. What was the Stamp Act?

9. How did Thomas Jefferson argue that the American colonists did not have to follow the laws of Parliament?

10. Read the following primary source recited during the episode and answer the question below:

Scarcely have our minds been able to emerge from the astonishments into which one stroke of parliamentary thunder has involved us, before another more heavy and alarming is fallen on us. Single acts of tyranny may be ascribed to the accidental opinion of a day, but a series of oppressions, begun at a distinguished period and pursued unalterably through every stage of ministers, too plainly prove a deliberate, systematical plan of reducing us to slavery...A free people claim their rights as derived from the laws of nature, not as the gift of their chief magistrate....Can His Majesty thus put down all laws under his feet? Can he erect a power superior to himself? He has done it indeed by force; but let him remember that force cannot give right....Kings are the servants, not the proprietors of the people....Let not the name of George the Third be a blot on the page of history.

What is Jefferson saying in this passage? How was it received by the delegates? By the English?

11. What was the punishment for treason?
12. Why did Adams nominate Washington over Hancock to command the Continental Army?
13. What did Mr. Dickinson say in his Declaration of the Causes of Taking Up Arms?
14. How did this differ from what he wrote in the Olive Branch Petition?
15. Why did Mr. Dickinson change his mind about revolution and oppose war?

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16. What does Jefferson mean by “natural law”? How is this different from common law?

17. What document helped “turn the tide of public in favor of independence?”

18. What were some of the different arguments between the radicals and conservatives over the Declaration?

19. The following statement was in the original draft of the Declaration: “The Christian king of Great Britain has waged cruel war against human nature in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere.” Why was it taken out?

20. When was the vote unanimous in favor of passing the Declaration?

Activity 2: Origins of the Revolution

Reflecting on the video: Think back on the conversations you heard with the four men. They talked a lot about the origins of the Revolution. Fill out the following chart based on the information you received from the video.

Origins of the Revolution

Political Reasons	Ideological Reasons	Religious Reasons	Economic Reasons

Activity 3: Slavery and the Revolution

The Second Continental Congress debated Thomas Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence, ultimately changing one-fourth of his writing. One of the key passages taken out of the Declaration was the paragraph referring to slavery. Read the original paragraph below.

He has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of infidel powers, is the warfare of the Christian King of Great Britain. Determined to keep open a market where Men should be bought & sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or restrain this execrable commerce. And that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished die, he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them, by murdering the people on whom he has obtruded them: thus paying off former crimes committed against the Liberties of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the lives of another.

Thomas Jefferson, *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, Federal Edition (New

York and London, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1904-5). Vol. 2. Retrieved 7/8/2019 from the World Wide Web: <https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/755>

1. What does this paragraph say?
2. In a document that declares "all men are created equal," why did the representatives to the Second Continental Congress delete this paragraph?
3. Jefferson stated "Slavery is an insult to human nature. Indeed, I tremble that God's justice cannot sleep forever. But the issue before us is independence, not emancipation." How could a slave owner make such a statement? What does this statement reveal about Thomas Jefferson's priorities?