

5.4 Justifying Rebellion: "Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms," 1775

Less than a month after the skirmishes at Lexington and Concord, the Second Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia to work out plans for the emerging rebellion. Both radicals and moderates tried to impose their views. On July 5, 1775, Congress adopted a conciliatory "Olive Branch Petition" that held out the hope of reconciliation with the king. Then on July 6, Congress adopted a "Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms." Drafted largely by Thomas Jefferson and John Dickinson, the language of the declaration, excerpted below, was both rousing and cautious. It reflected a delicate balance between the opposing views of the delegates to the Congress.

Consider:

1. *The audience to which this statement is addressed, and whether it is really an appeal to the people to support the cause of liberty or a message to the king;*
2. *How radical a statement this was in the context of events in July 1775;*
3. *How persuasive the arguments presented are.*

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 inhospitable wilds of America, then filled with numerous and warlike nations of 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. . . . 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 moment, the affairs of the British empire began to fall into confusion. . . . Parliament was influenced to adopt the pernicious

