### Analysis of the Declaration of Independence

Recent news/events about America’s wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, role in global leadership with respect to Iran and North Korea, spurred me to examine a number of U.S. Supreme courts cases and re-read U.S. Constitution (a hobby of mine). My question was “What justifies the U.S. telling other countries (China, Iran, Pakistan, etc.) how they should act?” As part of this, I was re-reading the U.S. Declaration of Independence, which provides a foundation for the Constitutional freedoms we all enjoy as U.S. citizens. It is also a very good example of a critical argument. I thought about giving this to you as a final exam problem, but decided on something else. So I am giving this to you for practice.

The Declaration of Independence was primarily written by Thomas Jefferson, who was an extraordinary statesman, agriculturalist, and scientist. His impact on the world with respect to the founding and growth of the United States was tremendous and is felt even today in the debates that we currently face in this national recession and global events. His writing of the Declaration is an excellent example of a formal critical argument. It begins with premises and assumptions followed by a list of statements about King George to validate the premises, and draws a clear conclusion.

For those who may not be familiar with the history or background of the United States, you can read about the Declaration of Independence on Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\_States\_Declaration\_of\_Independence)

1. **What is the conclusion of this critical argument?**
2. **Based on the first 2 paragraphs of the Declaration of Independence, identify the basic premises for the critical argument that leads to the conclusion. Do not provide a simple list of statements from the source. Analyze the text and provide clear premises in your own words.**
3. **Excluding the long list of specific issues related to King George (He has … statements), arrange/write your premises and conclusion in critical argument format. Clearly identify all the premises, which should, of course, logically lead to the conclusion. As always, be very careful about heaps of sand wording and logical structure.**
4. **Analyze the argument to determine whether it is a valid/sound argument or not. Determine which premises, in your opinion, are questionable and explain/analyze the strength of the argument in light of these.**
5. **Excluding the issues involving separation from Britain, which premises could be used to form a basis to justify why the U.S. has the right to tell other nations how they should behave/act?**

**I realize that some of you may have difficulty with the language style/wording of this writing. To help with any difficulties, here are some definitions of words that may be useful.**

**absolved**: freed.

**acquiesce**: to accept or consent passively.

**appropriations of land**: the British government, or Crown, considered the land of all the colonies originally to belong to it, and individual colonies had charters that limited their settlement. To expand those colonies or create new ones required new appropriations of land from the Crown, which became more difficult and expensive to secure.

**beyond seas**: that is, in England.

**conjured**: to entreat or appeal to.

**constitution**: not the United States Constitution, which came after independence, but the various charters and laws by which the colonies were established and governed.

**despository**: the place where something is kept.

**despotism**: absolute rule by a tyrant, with no legal safeguards.

**disavow**: reject or repudiate any association with or responsibility for something.

**eat out their substance**: the American colonies were required to supply the needs of British troops stationed there, including food and housing; as the number of troops rose, the burden of feeding them became proportionately greater.

**formidable**: causing dread or extreme opposition.

**incapable of annihilation**: the idea here is that "legislative powers," since they reside ultimately in the people and not in a king or even a legislature, cannot be destroyed by dissolving such a legislature, in which case they would return to the people to be exercised in various other forms.

**inestimable**: extremely valuable or important.

**King**: George III (1738-1820), king of England (1760-1820) at the time of the American Revolution.

**jurisdiction**: a governing authority

**levy war**: wage or fight a war.

**magnanimity**: generosity and nobility, especially expressed in the forgiving of past wrongs.

**neighboring province**: the colonies which eventually formed part of Canada.

**perfidy**: treachery, deliberate betrayal.

**prince**: ruler; in this case, George III.

**rectitude**: moral correctness.

**redress**: correction of or compensation for wrongs suffered.

**representative houses**: colonial legislatures, such as the Virginia House of Burgesses, which was dissolved in 1764.

**taken captive on the high seas**: if a ship was short of crew members, the British (and later also the American) navy followed the practice of "impressing," or physically forcing individuals into its service, well into the 19th century. Men were often captured on land, before a ship set sail, but if the shortage occurred once the ship was on the high seas, they would simply board a merchant vessel (often of a different nationality) and take some of its sailors captive.

**tenure of their offices**: length or period of in office.

**usurpations**: illegal seizures of rights or powers.

**THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE**

**IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776**

**THE UNANIMOUS DECLARATION OF THE THIRTEEN UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bonds which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

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. That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive to 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. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and [usurpations](http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/itl/graphics/apps/declnote.html#usurp), pursuing invariably the same object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute [despotism](http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/itl/graphics/apps/declnote.html#despot), it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security. Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former systems of government. The history of the present [King](http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/itl/graphics/apps/declnote.html#King) of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has refused his assent to laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.

He has forbidden his governors to pass laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has refused to pass other laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of representation in the Legislature, a right [inestimable](http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/itl/graphics/apps/declnote.html#inest) to them and [formidable](http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/itl/graphics/apps/declnote.html#formid) to tyrants only.

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the [depository](http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/itl/graphics/apps/declnote.html#deposit) of their public records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

He has dissolved [Representative Houses](http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/itl/graphics/apps/declnote.html#represent) repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the legislative powers, [incapable of annihilation](http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/itl/graphics/apps/declnote.html#incap), have returned to the people at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the meantime exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.

He has endeavored to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the laws for naturalization of foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migration hither, and raising the conditions of new [appropriations](http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/itl/graphics/apps/declnote.html#approp) of lands.

He has obstructed the administration of justice, by refusing his assent to laws for establishing judiciary powers.

He has made judges dependent on his will alone, for the [tenure of their offices](http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/itl/graphics/apps/declnote.html#tenure), and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He has erected a multitude of new offices, and sent hither swarms of officers to harass our people, and [eat out their substance](http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/itl/graphics/apps/declnote.html#eat).

He has kept among us, in times of peace, standing armies without the consent of our legislature.

He has affected to render the military independent of and superior to civil power.

He has combined with others to subject us to a [jurisdiction](http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/itl/graphics/apps/declnote.html#juris) foreign to our [constitution](http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/itl/graphics/apps/declnote.html#constit), and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his assent to their acts of pretended legislation:

for quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:

for protecting them, by mock trial, from punishment for any murders which they should commit on the inhabitants of these States:

for cutting off our trade with all parts of the world:

for imposing taxes on us without our consent:

for depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of trial by jury:

for transporting us [beyond seas](http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/itl/graphics/apps/declnote.html#beyond) to be tried for pretended offenses:

for abolishing the free system of English laws in a [neighboring province](http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/itl/graphics/apps/declnote.html#neighbor), establishing therein an arbitrary government, and enlarging its boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule in these colonies:

for taking away our charters, abolishing our most valuable laws, and altering fundamentally the forms of our governments:

for suspending our own legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated government here, by declaring us out of his protection and waging war against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burned our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of cruelty and [perfidy](http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/itl/graphics/apps/declnote.html#perfidy) scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation.

He has constrained our fellow citizens [taken captive on the high seas](http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/itl/graphics/apps/declnote.html#taken) to bear arms against their country, to become the executioners of their friends and brethren, or to fall themselves by their hands.

He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian savages, whose known rule of warfare, is undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.

In every stage of these oppressions we have petitioned for [redress](http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/itl/graphics/apps/declnote.html#redress) in the most humble terms: our repeated petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A [prince](http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/itl/graphics/apps/declnote.html#prince), whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

Nor have we been wanting in attention to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and [magnanimity](http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/itl/graphics/apps/declnote.html#magnan), and we have [conjured](http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/itl/graphics/apps/declnote.html#conjured) them by the ties of our common kindred to [disavow](http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/itl/graphics/apps/declnote.html#disavow) these usurpations, which, would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. We must, therefore, [acquiesce](http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/itl/graphics/apps/declnote.html#acquiesce) in the necessity, which denounces our separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, enemies in war, in peace friends.

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](http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/itl/graphics/apps/declnote.html#rectitude) of our intentions, do, in the name, and by the 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](http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/itl/graphics/apps/declnote.html#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; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full power to [levy war](http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/itl/graphics/apps/declnote.html#levy), conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, and to do all other acts and things which independent states may of right do. 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.

**New Hampshire:** Josiah Bartlett, William Whipple, Matthew Thornton   
**Massachusetts:** John Hancock, Samual Adams, John Adams, Robert Treat Paine, Elbridge Gerry   
**Rhode Island:** Stephen Hopkins, William Ellery   
**Connecticut:** Roger Sherman, Samuel Huntington, William Williams, Oliver Wolcott   
**New York:** William Floyd, Philip Livingston, Francis Lewis, Lewis Morris   
**New Jersey:** Richard Stockton, John Witherspoon, Francis Hopkinson, John Hart, Abraham Clark   
**Pennsylvania:** Robert Morris, Benjamin Rush, Benjamin Franklin, John Morton, George Clymer, James Smith, George Taylor, James Wilson, George Ross   
**Delaware:** Caesar Rodney, George Read, Thomas McKean   
**Maryland:** Samuel Chase, William Paca, Thomas Stone, Charles Carroll of Carrollton   
**Virginia:** George Wythe, Richard Henry Lee, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Harrison, Thomas Nelson, Jr., Francis Lightfoot Lee, Carter Braxton   
**North Carolina:** William Hooper, Joseph Hewes, John Penn   
**South Carolina:** Edward Rutledge, Thomas Heyward, Jr., Thomas Lynch, Jr., Arthur Middleton   
**Georgia:** Button Gwinnett, Lyman Hall, George Walton

### I: Structure of the Declaration

It should come as no surprise that the Declaration of Independence, whose signers were heirs to the rationalist traditions of the seventeenth century Age of Reason and the eighteenth century Age of Enlightenment, is written in the form of an argument. It begins with a statement of premises and assumptions, and then lists evidence to support those premises in the series of claims beginning with "He" (in reference to King George of England). One of these claims, dealing with disruption of the legal system, is further supported with evidence in a secondary series of claims, beginning with "for." [To make this clear, in this web-version of the Declaration, all these supporting claims have been set off as separate passages (in the original there is no paragraphing at all); further, some punctuation and spelling has also been regularized or modernized here.] Having asserted its premises and itemized its evidence, the Declaration then proceeds to draw its conclusion, introduced by that clearest of conclusion indicators, "therefore."

The logical structure of the Declaration does not make it a dry or predictable document, however. Like all great arguments, this one is full of surprising, controversial, and--yes--revolutionary ideas. In fact, the logical form of the Declaration, so clear that almost *anyone* could follow the argument, is an expression of the *democratic* assumptions on which it is based.