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American Revolution Writing Assignment

The Declaration of Independence was a document designed to explain the Americans’ objections to the way Britain asserted its authority over them. In particular, the Americans were concerned about representation in parliament. They claimed that Britain was not only refusing to give the Americans representation in parliament, it was also “suspending our own legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever” (Reilly 779). Britain assumed complete authority over the Americans. Britain chose to “subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws”, despite the fact that the Americans had no representation in parliament (Reilly 779). Although Britain viewed America as just a few colonies to extend their empire, the Americans had become accustomed to a degree of self government such that they were horrified with the idea of having new laws and taxes imposed on them without Americans having any say in the matter. The main focus of the Declaration of Independence was to explain that the reason America was breaking away from Britain was because this imposed authority without corresponding representation was unjust and would not be tolerated.

The Declaration of Independence has several methods of making this point clear. The document starts out by establishing the foundation inspired by Enlightenment philosophers, particularly Locke and Rousseau, that humans are born with “unalienable rights” and that governments should be “deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed” (Reilly 777). The Declaration then goes on to claim that “under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government” and transitions into the specifics by denouncing the British rule as such a condition (Reilly 778). Although the tyranny is perpetuated by the British government as a whole, the grievances are addressed to King George III and are attacking him specifically. One reason for this is that it is easier to rally sentiment behind attacking a public figure than a governing body. After the list of grievances, the Declaration states that Americans have tried their best to peacefully reconcile their differences with Britain, but that the British “have been deaf to the voice of justice and consanguinity” (Reilly 780). In this way, the Declaration repeats the thesis that Britain’s actions have been unjust and that America has no choice but to declare independence.

As lofty as the statements and goals of the Declaration of Independence are, they neglected to consider half of the American population. A casual reader might assume “we hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal” meant all people (Reilly 777). However, “all men” really meant “all free men”; these rights did not extend to slaves or women. In 1776, the Americans were fed up with the laws and lack of rights under the current system of British ruling. As the founding fathers were discussing how to make changes, Abigail Adams wrote to her husband, urging him to include women in the sequel. She reminded him that men had treated women unfairly in the past and would continue to do so if the government did not explicitly give women the rights they deserved. Her husband scoffed and told her he had no intention of including women in the Declaration of Independence. However, he then made the claim that men’s superior authority as compared to women was only nominal. He explained that while men would make sure to treat women fairly, to “subject us to the Despotism of the Petticoat” would be far too extreme and ought to be avoided just like the tyranny of the British (782). He concluded that Abigail Adams’ request would be unreasonable and put men too far below women, despite the fact that at this point women were far below men and her request would level the playing field. John Adams either didn’t accurately perceive the inequality between men and women, or he preferred the current state in which men had more power than women. Abigail Adams did not appreciate his misogyny and mansplaining, and she reminded him that women could and would rebel against such an unequal system, though the revolution she suggested was one that would not come until much later.