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The American Revolution

Was the Revolution justified?

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Did the colonists have grievances against the British government substantial enough to justify revolution?

In the Declaration of Independence, the American patriots listed "a history of injuries and usurpations" designed to establish "an absolute Tyranny over these states." What specific abuses did the delegates cite?

1. "He has refused his Assent to Laws necessary for the public good."

The King had rejected laws passed by colonial assemblies.

2. "He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of pressing importance."

Royal governors had rejected any colonial laws that did not have a clause suspending their operation until the King approved them.

3. "He has refused to pass Laws unless people would relinquish the right of Representation."

The Crown had failed to redraw the boundaries of legislative districts to ensure that newly settled areas were fairly represented in colonial assemblies.

4. "He has called together legislative bodies at places distant from the depository of their public records."

Royal governors sometimes had forced colonial legislatures to meet in inconvenient places.

5. "He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly."

Royal governors had dissolved colonial legislatures for disobeying their orders or protesting royal policies.

6. "He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected."

Royal governors had delayed in calling for elections of new colonial assemblies.

7. "He has endeavored to prevent the population of these States."

The King had impeded the development of the colonies by prohibiting the naturalization of foreigners (in 1773) and raising the purchase price of western lands (in 1774).

8. "He has obstructed the Administration of justice."

The King had rejected a North Carolina law setting up a court system.

9. "He has made judges dependent on his Will alone."

The Crown had insisted that judges serve at the King's pleasure and that they should be paid by him.

10. "He has erected a multitude of New Offices to harass our people."

The royal government had appointed tax commissioners and other officials.

11. "He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies."

The Crown had kept an army in the colonies after the Seven Years' War without the consent of the colonial legislatures.

12. "He has affected to render the Military independent of Civil power."

The British government had named General Thomas Gage, commander of British forces in America.

13. "He has subject[ed] us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution."

The royal government had claimed the power (in the Declaratory Act of 1766) to make all laws for the colonies.

14. "For quartering armed troops among us."

The Crown had required the colonies to house British troops stationed in America.

15. "For protecting them from punishment for Murders."

Parliament had passed a 1774 law permitting British soldiers and officials accused of murder while in Massachusetts to be tried in Britain.

16. "For cutting off our Trade."

Parliament had enacted laws restricting the colonies' right to trade with foreign nations.

17. "For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent."

Parliament had imposed taxes (such as the Sugar Act of 1764) without the colonists' consent.

18. "For depriving us of the benefits of Trial by Jury."

The royal government had deprived colonists of a right to a jury trial in cases dealing with smuggling and other violations of trade laws.

19. "For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried."

A 1769 Parliamentary resolution declared that colonists accused of treason could be tried in Britain.

20. "For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighboring Province."

The 1774 Quebec Act extended Quebec's boundaries to the Ohio River and applied French law to the region.

21. "For taking away our Charters."

Parliament (in 1774) had restricted town meetings in Massachusetts, had decided that the colony's councilors would no longer be elected but would be appointed by the king, and had given the royal governor control of lower court judges.

22. "For suspending our Legislatures."

Parliament (in 1767) had suspended the New York Assembly for failing to obey the Quartering Act of 1765.

23. "waging War against us"

The Crown had authorized General Thomas Gage to use force to make the colonists obey the laws of Parliament.

24. "He has plundered our seas...burnt our towns."

The British government had seized American ships that violated restrictions on foreign trade and had bombarded Falmouth (now Portland), Me.; Bristol, R.I.; and Norfolk, Va.

25. "He is...transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries."

The British army hired German mercenaries to fight the colonists.

26. "He has constrained our fellow Citizens to bear Arms against their Country."

The Crown had forced American sailors (under the Restraining Act of 1775) to serve in the British navy.

27. "He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us."

In November 1775, Virginia's royal governor had promised freedom to slaves who joined British forces. The royal government also instigated Indian attacks on frontier settlements.

In the eyes of the American patriots, what rights or liberties had the British Parliament violated?

Parliament seemed intent on slowing the colonies' growth and protecting British economic interests at the colonists' expense. Royal officials had restricted westward expansion, levied taxes without the colonists' consent, and stationed a standing army in the colonies in peacetime. In addition, the Crown had expanded the imperial bureaucracy, made the West a preserve for French Catholics and Indians, and infringed on traditional English liberties, including the right to trial by jury, freedom from arbitrary arrest and trial, freedom of speech and conscience, and the right to freely trade and travel. Parliament had also restricted meetings of legislative assemblies, vetoed laws passed by assemblies, billeted soldiers in private homes, and made royal officials independent of colonial legislatures.

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