

## Excerpt, Declaration of Independence (Grievances)

### Historical Background

The list of grievances in the Declaration of Independence followed a political tradition rooted in English history. During the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the English Parliament removed King James II from power, claiming he had violated the rights of the people and misused his authority. To justify this action, Parliament adopted the English Bill of Rights in 1689, which carefully listed the king's offenses, such as interfering with free elections, suspending laws without consent, and maintaining a standing army in peacetime without approval. By formally recording these grievances, Parliament set a precedent: when a monarch violates the law and threatens the rights of the people, the people have the right to resist and replace their ruler.

This historical example greatly influenced the American colonists nearly a century later. In 1776, when the American revolutionaries declared independence from King George III, they similarly included a detailed list of grievances, accusing the king of repeated abuses of power. These include imposing unfair taxes, dissolving colonial legislatures, keeping troops in the colonies without consent, and denying colonists the right to a fair trial. By presenting these complaints in a formal document, the colonists aimed to show that their decision to separate from Britain was justified. They were not simply rebelling; they were following a legal and philosophical tradition that argued a government loses its legitimacy when it fails to protect the rights of its people. The colonists' grievances served as evidence that the king had broken the social contract, giving the colonies the right to establish their own government.

**Consider these questions** as you read the grievances list in the Declaration:

1. Many of the grievances describe government actions that denied colonists a voice — such as dissolving assemblies, imposing taxes, or ignoring petitions. What kind of government were the colonists saying they wanted instead? How do these complaints connect to the idea that governments must have the “consent of the governed”?
2. Which of the grievances stands out to you the most? Why? Do you see any that seem especially unfair or serious? Which concerns still feel relevant in how citizens relate to government today?

3. The colonists say they have “petitioned for redress in the most humble terms” but were ignored. Why was it important for them to show that they had tried peaceful methods before declaring independence?

*The history of the present 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 to them and formidable to tyrants only.*

*He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.*

*He has dissolved Representative Houses 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, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.*

*He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations 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, and the amount and payment of their salaries.*

*He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harrass our people, and eat out their substance.*

*He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.*

*He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power:*

*He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, 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 a 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 to be tried for pretended offences:*

*For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, 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 into 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, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.*

*He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & 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 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 endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.*

