

colonial legislatures, and maintaining a standing army during peacetime. Charges 13–22, which compose the second grouping, accuse George III of colluding with Parliament to subject the colonies to unconstitutional measures, including taxing the colonies without consent, altering charters, suspending their trade, and limiting the right to a trial by jury. The third set of charges, comprising charges 23–27, describes George III’s violence and cruelty in waging war against his American subjects.⁶¹

In the next section, known as the denunciation, Jefferson concludes the case for American independence. Jefferson argues that a severing of the relationship between the colonies and Great Britain is justified and necessary. The Declaration closes with an emphasis on the colonies’ need to dissolve their ties with the British Empire and gain their political freedom. In affixing their signatures to the document, the fifty-six signers pledged “to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor” to the cause of independence.⁶²

Reception

Philadelphia printer John Dunlap worked through the night to produce two hundred broadsides of the Declaration of Independence for distribution through the new thirteen states. The Declaration was also published in newspapers and read aloud in town centers and churches. One of the first formal public readings took place on July 8th in the yard of Philadelphia’s Independence Hall. General George Washington had the Declaration read to his troops in New York City on July 9th while British ships waited in the harbor, hoping that the document would motivate the Continental troops. Inspired by the Declaration, crowds in some cities tore down signs and statues representing royal authority, such as an equestrian statue of George III in New York City, which they pulled down and melted into lead for musket balls.⁶³

British officials sent copies of the Declaration to Great Britain. Parliament did not formally answer the Declaration, but Frederick, Lord North, the Prime Minister commissioned a pamphleteer to publish a rebuttal titled, “Answer to the Declaration of the American Congress.”⁶⁴ Later in 1776, 547 Loyalists from New York signed “[A Declaration of Dependence](#)” in response.

THE CONGRESS OF THE CONFEDERATION

The Articles of Confederation, November 1777

The third clause of the Lee Resolution required that Congress prepare “a plan of confederation,” to be “transmitted to the respective Colonies for their consideration and approbation.”⁶⁵ Following their experiences over the past decade and a half, the delegates and the colonists were wary of creating a strong centralized political power. However, Congress also recognized the need for national coordination in the war effort against the British. The delegates attempted to create a loose union where each state “retains its sovereignty, freedom, and independence.”⁶⁶ The resulting document, the [Articles of Confederation](#), was more a treaty for mutual defense than a blueprint for a common government.

On June 12, 1776, the Continental Congress appointed a committee with John Dickinson as chairman to draft a constitution for the union of the states. The committee presented the resulting document to Congress one month later. The presentation by the committee was followed by a period of debate, which was complicated by the periodic need to flee from the advancing British troops. The thorniest issues were state **sovereignty**, the specific legislative and executive powers granted to Congress, how to handle western land claims, voting procedures, and whether to have a judiciary.

After great debate and revision, the Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union were completed on November 15, 1777. The delegates achieved consensus by creating a limited national government with clearly delineated powers. The national government could declare war, make treaties with foreign nations, adjudicate disputes between states, borrow and print money, and request funds from the states for mutual defense. Under the Articles of Confederation, there was no chief executive or judiciary. The national government could not enforce treaty provisions or tax the states or individuals. As an association of equals, each state had one vote regardless of size, population, or wealth.

After they were approved by Congress, the Articles were submitted to the states for ratification in late November 1777. The document demanded unanimous