

The Colonies Under British Rule

In the 1600s and 1700s, Europeans came to North America looking for religious freedom, economic opportunities, and political liberty. They created 13 colonies on the East Coast of the continent. Later, when the colonists won independence, these colonies became the 13 original states.

Each colony had its own government, but the British king controlled these governments. By the 1770s, many colonists were angry because they did not have self-government. This meant that they could not govern themselves and make their own laws. They had to pay high taxes to the king. They felt that they were paying taxes to a government where they had no representation. They were also angry because the colonists were forced to let British soldiers sleep and eat in their homes.

In 1774, leaders from the colonies met in Philadelphia to discuss British laws that they believed were unfair. They believed that Great Britain did not treat the colonists as equal citizens. They thought the people needed more

control over their government. In 1775, colonists fought against the British army in Massachusetts. The leaders met again and decided to organize an army. George Washington became the commander in chief of that army.



The 13 original states.

Answer these Civics Test questions.

1. Why did the colonists fight the British? _____
2. There were 13 original states. Name three. _____

The Declaration of Independence

Many colonists wanted to separate from Great Britain and form a new country. In 1776, the leaders met in Philadelphia again. They agreed that the colonies should be free and independent states. They asked Thomas Jefferson to write a document for them that expressed these ideas. He wrote the Declaration of Independence which announced that the colonies were independent from Great Britain.

The Declaration of Independence also promised Americans three rights: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This meant that the colonists had basic freedoms that the government could not take away.

The Declaration of Independence was adopted on July 4, 1776. Today we celebrate Independence Day on July 4 every year.



Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson in "Writing the Declaration of Independence, 1776," by Jean Leon Gerome Ferris. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-USZC4-9904.

Answer these Civics Test questions.

1. What did the Declaration of Independence do? _____
2. What are two rights in the Declaration of Independence? _____
3. Who wrote the Declaration of Independence? _____
4. When was the Declaration of Independence adopted? _____
5. When do we celebrate Independence Day? _____



To read the entire text of the Declaration of Independence, visit www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html.

The Father of Our Country

George Washington was born in Virginia on February 22, 1732. Washington owned a large farm in Mount Vernon, Virginia. He had many years of experience as a soldier in the army. When the Revolutionary War began in 1775, the colonies chose Washington to be the commander in chief of the Continental Army to fight the British. The war was long and difficult but the colonists finally won independence in 1783. Washington became a national hero during the Revolutionary War. In 1789, he was chosen as the first president of the new United States. He served as president until 1797 and died in 1799.

Today Americans call George Washington the “Father of Our Country.” He is remembered on Presidents’ Day in February. The state of Washington and our nation’s capital, Washington, DC, were named after him. There are universities, roads, and hospitals named after him. We also find Washington’s face on dollar bills, coins, and stamps.



George Washington's home in Mount Vernon, Virginia. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-DIG-highsm-12540.



General George Washington at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, during the Revolutionary War, by Percy Moran. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-3793.

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Answer these Civics Test questions.

1. Who is the “Father of Our Country”? _____
2. Who was the first President? _____



Discuss these questions with your classmates.

Who was one important leader in your country’s history?

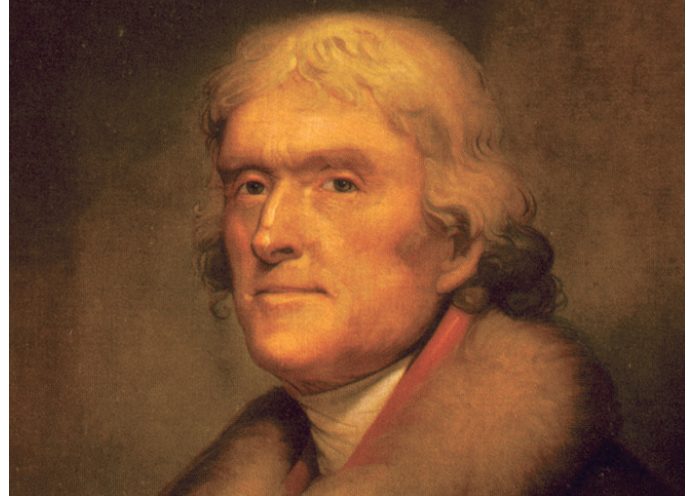
Why was that person important?

How did this person influence the history of your country?

All Men Are Created Equal

Thomas Jefferson was an important leader in the colonists' fight for independence. He believed in democracy and in people's basic rights. Jefferson was the main writer of the Declaration of Independence. Later when the new government was formed, President George Washington chose Jefferson to be the first secretary of state. In 1801, Jefferson became the third president of the United States. He served as president for eight years.

In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson wrote about values and ideas that were important to the colonists. These ideas are still important to Americans today. Read the famous words below from the Declaration and think about their meaning. Think about what they



*Thomas Jefferson by Rembrandt Peale.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-USZC4-2474*

mean to you personally. Share your ideas with your teacher and classmates.

We hold these truths to be self-evident,
We believe that there are certain ideas that are true and obvious

that all men are created equal,
We believe that everyone is equal

that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights,
We believe that they have certain natural rights and those rights cannot be taken away by any government

that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.
We believe in the right to live freely and the right to look for happiness.

Answer these Civics Test questions.

1. What are two rights in the Declaration of Independence? _____
2. Who wrote the Declaration of Independence? _____

Review—Establishing Independence

Irregular Past Tense Verbs:

The verbs below have irregular forms in the past tense. Write a sentence using the past tense form of each verb.

1. become: _____
2. begin: _____
3. choose: _____
4. feel: _____
5. fight: _____
6. meet: _____
7. think: _____
8. win: _____
9. write: _____

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Word Scramble:

Rearrange the letters to form the names of the 13 original states. Remember that the state names might be one word or two words.

1. eywkorn **New York** _____
2. awrdlae _____
3. smusaesthtasc _____
4. nlayrmad _____
5. ensradolihd _____
6. irniivga _____
7. oenicncttcu _____
8. arinthracloon _____
9. nehrweaspmi _____
10. hsntcaulroao _____
11. yeneeswjsr _____
12. ireaogg _____
13. anlInnisyeVpa _____

Civics Test Questions—Establishing Independence

Read the test questions and write the answers. Take turns practicing them with your partner.

1. What did the Declaration of Independence do? _____
2. What are two rights in the Declaration of Independence? _____
3. Why did the colonists fight the British? _____
4. Who wrote the Declaration of Independence? _____
5. When was the Declaration of Independence adopted? _____
6. There were 13 original states. Name three. _____
7. Who is the “Father of Our Country”? _____
8. Who was the first President? _____
9. When do we celebrate Independence Day? _____