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Eng 101

26 Oct. 2010

The Importance of the Declaration of Independence

In 1776, the tyranny of King George III made it necessary for the thirteen English colonies of America to unite, declare independence and to sever political ties to Great Britain. The Declaration of Independence was and is the most important part of America's history because of its influence throughout history. The over taxed, under represented people of America needed a strong unwavering statement showing the colonists resolve to be free of English rule. The Declaration of Independence was the starting point for the United States effectively serving its purpose, making it the most important document in history.

Thomas Jefferson the author of the Declaration of Independence was a well educated man graduating from The College of William and Mary in 1762. Born in Virginia 1743, Jefferson went to school learning French, Greek and Latin becoming quickly fluent in all three. Jefferson studied mathematics, philosophy and law so as to become a lawyer and was admitted to the Virginia BAR in 1767. Interested in politics at a young age, Jefferson became a delegate for the Continental Congress in June 1775. A year later he was the man appointed to write the first draft of the Declaration. Jefferson was elected because of his intellectual prowess and his known skill for writing. The congress was in need of a document explaining the decision to separate from their sovereign country and why that decision was made.

In the Declaration of Independence Thomas Jefferson wrote about how when a government becomes "destructive" and counterproductive to its people, it is the right of the

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people “to alter or abolish it, and to institute new government...” Jefferson wrote very passionately about egalitarianism and how all men have rights and “among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness”. Thomas Jefferson recognized that these rights aren't always attainable, but when a government repeatedly ignores these rights entirely, it then becomes the right of the people “...to throw off such a government...” He then claims that the King of Great Britain has subjected the people of America to his tyranny for too long. The list of offenses against the colonists proceeds, with a focus on the King's attempts to undermine the governments of the colonies and the horrors of war that had already been afflicted on the colonists. Jefferson even addresses that for every offense against them; the colonists had tried to communicate peacefully with their oppressors but were only “answered with repeated injury.” Thomas Jefferson concludes the piece by declaring these united colonies as a “free and independent states... Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown“. This powerful message to the most powerful man in Europe was what the newly formed states needed to unite under one banner and to show England that they were going to fight for their freedom. The message was so powerful that the rights of men, according to Jefferson, are still the principal rights of men in the country today.

Comment [J1]: An excellent summary. (Don't forget to cite quotations).

The Declaration of Independence was important when it was written because it formalized the opposing sides during the Revolutionary War. It stated that the English colonies of America had united to create a country where freedom and religious acceptance are the rights for all men in the country. The Declaration of Independence put into words what the colonists felt needed to be done. But without it, the separation could have not gained enough momentum to give the colonists a chance against the all powerful English monarchy.

Some would argue that other documents such as the Constitution or the Emancipation Proclamation have had a bigger affect on America's history. This is not true because neither of these doctrines would have been written without a country to write them for. Both the Constitution and the Emancipation Proclamation were written after the Declaration of Independence and both were based on the ideals of the country which were already set forth by Jefferson. Despite the importance of these two and others like them, none compare to the Declaration of Independence.

The Declaration of Independence is still the most important document ever written in United States. Today, the Declaration is important because it states that a government exists for the benefit of the people and that men have equal rights. These two statements have shaped United States history for centuries and will continue to do so for many years to come. The belief that all men are created equal was extremely important both during the Civil War and the African American Civil Rights Movement. Because the founding fathers of the United States created such a statement the arguments of men who thought race played a part in man's rights were eventually rendered useless. The Civil Rights movement being almost two hundred years from when the declaration was written attests to its power and importance in American culture. In addition to its importance with race rights, the declaration also played a role in woman's rights. Because of the success of the Declaration of Independence, the Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions written in 1848 by Elizabeth Cady Staton, was formatted and written as a parallel to the one written by Thomas Jefferson. The Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions was written by Staton to promote gender equality and to shine a light on the sexism of the country at the time. Without the strength of the Declaration of Independence's writing, Staton's piece and movement as a whole may not have been as successful which could have negatively affected

modern day life. Years after it was written the Declaration of Independence still has importance in the lives of Americans.

Overall the Declaration of Independence is the most important statement in United States history. It had a huge impact on the world when it was written and more than two hundred years later it is still affecting the world. Thomas Jefferson's work changed the world, creating a country that has led the globe almost since it was founded in 1776. All of these things are what make the Declaration of Independence the most important document in United States history.

The essay is still focusing on *The Declaration of Independence* as a historical document, so you're using evidence from history to show its effectiveness. What Essay 1 requires you to do is to use evidence from rhetorical and argument analysis to show its effectiveness, so you need evidence from the document itself to show the Declaration's effectiveness. As we talked about in class, that you want to continually point out how important *The Declaration* has been throughout history points to Jefferson's success in making his appeal—what kind of appeal(s)? How does he make that/those appeal(s)? Do you think the weight of each kind of appeal has remained the same throughout history or has cultural/historical context changed what about the document we find valuable? There's a lot from this draft that you will keep as you revise; it just needs to be reframed to say something about *The Declaration* as a text rather than as a historical moment.