

The Declaration of Independence

November 1775–July 1776

Tyrant:

1. *An absolute monarch, governing imperiously.*
2. *A cruel, despotic and severe master.*

Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 1755

‘Believe me, dear sir, there is not in the British Empire a man who more cordially loves a union with Great Britain more than I do,’ Thomas Jefferson wrote to a friend on 29 November 1775.¹ Yet in the same letter he described King George as ‘the bitterest enemy we have’ and argued that breaking with Britain was ‘now pressed upon us’ by the King and Parliament. He felt particular ire that Lord Dunmore, the Governor of Virginia, had offered freedom to any slaves who escaped from their owners and joined the British colours. Some 200 joined what was called the Ethiopian Regiment, where they saw service at the battle of Great Bridge on 9 December.²

On 6 December, the Second Continental Congress declared its complete independence from Parliament, while overtly still claiming loyalty to George himself. ‘What allegiance is it that we forget?’ it asked, rhetorically. ‘Allegiance to Parliament? We never owed – we never owned it. Allegiance to our King? Our words have ever avowed it – our conduct has ever been consistent with it. We condemn with arms in our hands . . . we oppose the claim and exercise of unconstitutional powers, to which neither the Crown nor Parliament were ever entitled.’³ Later claims by various Founding Fathers that they had favoured outright independence earlier than 1776 were for the most part false, such as John Adams’ statement in his *Autobiography* that Thomas Paine’s ideas about independence ‘had been urged in Congress a hundred times’.⁴

Adams went so far as to claim that many Congressmen were not in

favour of outright independence even at the time of signing the Declaration, writing, 'I then believed and I have not since altered my opinion, that there were several who signed with regret, and several others with many doubts and much lukewarmness.'⁵ Although many Patriots had indeed long wanted the thirteen colonies to become an independent nation, even in the months after the battle of Bunker Hill they only tiptoed towards it, with the moderate representatives from outside New England still not persuaded that any successor state might be federalized.

Meanwhile, the shooting war continued: American Generals Richard Montgomery and Benedict Arnold attacked Quebec in a driving blizzard on the last day of 1775, and were defeated by the British garrison under Sir Guy Carleton. Montgomery was killed, Arnold wounded, and one-third of their army in Canada were killed, wounded or captured, yet the hardy survivors were to remain encamped on the Plains of Abraham outside Quebec for the next five months. As late as 21 April 1776, Charles Turner was betting the Earl of Northington twenty-five guineas at Brooks's 'that Quebec [is] now, or will be before 1st January 1777, in the hands of the Provincial Army, supposing no peace concluded'.⁶

The year 1775 ended with the British having signally failed to strangle the rebellion in its cradle. Boston was still under siege, and the American colonists had failed to take Canada only by a slim margin; they were by no means vanquished in that theatre. Although some in the government such as Lord Barrington wanted to concentrate on blockading the colonies into eventual submission, the majority, including the King, were determined upon a land war to force the issue.

There is a saying in military circles that amateurs talk about strategy while professionals discuss logistics. George was no professional, but he was certainly concerning himself in a professional manner with the logistics of fighting a trans-oceanic conflict. The logistical problem in the winter of 1775/6 was that each British soldier in the small East Coast bridgeheads required one-third of a ton of food, which, if it could not be sourced locally, had to be shipped to him from Britain: oats, pork, salted beef, butter, oatmeal and so on.⁷ George occupied himself in working on this challenge, which in turn served to spur others to action. As one junior minister noted wryly, 'I have always observed that the Admiralty can be expeditious when the King is inquisitive or anxious about their preparations.'⁸

On 1 January 1776 Lord Dunmore's fleet bombarded Norfolk, Virginia, a Loyalist town that had been captured by the rebels; the colonial militia then demolished it themselves and blamed its ruination on the British. Of the 1,331 structures that were destroyed, the British were responsible for demolishing thirty-two before evacuating, and then nineteen more in the

bombardment. The American militiamen burned 863, and then a further 416 when the Virginia Convention ordered Norfolk to be razed to the ground. Yet somehow the destruction of Virginia's largest town, and its most important port, was successfully blamed entirely on the British.⁹ The widespread belief in an atrocity committed in Norfolk meant that, in the words of George Washington's biographer, 'the conflict abruptly lurched toward total war.'¹⁰ Their relative innocence at Norfolk is not of course to suggest that the British did not burn towns during the war – they had already burned 500 houses in Charlestown, Massachusetts, during the battle of Bunker Hill in June 1775, while the guns of the Royal Navy destroyed Falmouth, Massachusetts (today's Portland, Maine), in October of that year. As in all wars that encompassed a civil war, neither side had a monopoly of atrocity. But at no point did the King condone any atrocities, outrages or behaviour contrary to the then rules of war, any more than did George Washington.

On Wednesday 10 January 1776 the publication of an anonymous pamphlet ignited the first instance of outright mass republicanism among Americans. It was called *Common Sense* and the first thousand copies went on sale in Philadelphia. It proved a literary phenomenon, going through twenty-five printings in 1776 alone, and would sell 150,000 in the eventual fifty-six editions soon thereafter, and ultimately over three million copies.¹¹ An American historian has stated that 'with the possible exception of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Common Sense* was demonstrably the most immediately influential political or social tract ever published in this country.'¹² Its author, the Englishman Thomas Paine, asserted 'that a thirst for absolute power is the natural disease of monarchy' and that 'the prejudice of Englishmen in favour of their own government by king, lords and commons, arises as much or more from national pride than from reason'.¹³ It was an anti-English diatribe as much as an anti-monarchical one, written by a Briton who had arrived from England only fourteen months earlier.

The thirty-nine-year-old Paine was a former staymaker,* schoolmaster, grocer and twice-dismissed excise officer, who, as his generally sympathetic biographer admits, had 'relentlessly failed in everything personal and professional he had ever attempted'.¹⁴ As one historian has written, Paine was 'full of rage at the ways the Old World had kept him down'.¹⁵ Sarah, the daughter of Paine's benefactor Benjamin Franklin, wrote of him soon after he arrived in Philadelphia, 'There never was a man less loved in a place

* A stay being the thick rope used aboard ships; Paine was not, as is often erroneously thought, a maker of corsets.

than Paine in this, having at different times disputed with everyone.¹⁶ Paine's contemporaries found him 'obnoxious, self-absorbed, impetuous, conceited and disputatious', which might help to explain why he failed in politics in both the Old World and later in the New.¹⁷ Certainly the adjectives Paine directed against King George were evidence of an unquiet mind, for by December he was describing the King as 'a sottish, stupid, stubborn, worthless, brutish man' who resembled 'a common murderer, a highwayman or a housebreaker'.¹⁸ Calling the King sottish was particularly inaccurate in relation to someone who rarely drank alcohol and never to excess – unlike Paine himself.¹⁹

'Government by kings was first introduced into the world by the heathens, from whom the children of Israel copied the custom,' Paine claimed, blaming history's oldest scapegoats. 'Monarchy is ranked in scripture as one of the sins of the Jews,' he opined, 'for which a curse in reserve is denounced against them.'²⁰ Further, 'The hankering which the Jews had for the idolatrous customs of the heathens is something exceedingly unaccountable,' but Paine nevertheless explained it: 'The Jews, elated with success' over Gideon's victories, wanted to make him a king. What Paine called 'the evil of monarchy' was, according to his reading of the Book of Samuel, to be put down to 'the general manner of the kings of the earth, whom Israel was so eagerly copying after'.²¹

Having thus squarely blamed the Jews for the institution of monarchy, Paine then attacked George personally, describing him as 'the royal brute of Britain', the 'royal criminal', 'his Mad-jesty',* 'a full-blooded Nero' and 'Mr Guelph' (the Hanoverians' surname), and his government as 'a detestable junto'.²² He argued that Americans had to choose between independence and slavery, which as one of his modern critics David Pryce-Jones points out was 'imagining a polarisation that sounded urgent but was factitious, quite false' since the status quo was of course neither of those things.²³

Common Sense was written for the ordinary populace rather than for well-educated readers, and was devoid of the customary Latin tags, classical allusions and learned footnotes of many other pamphlets of the day. Most references or allusions were to the Bible, a copy of which virtually all Americans possessed and which many knew well. Paine claimed that 'censure to individuals make[s] no part' of his argument, though that was demonstrably untrue when it came to Mr Guelph.²⁴ In an appendix to a later edition, Paine noted of the King's most recent speech to Parliament, 'Every line convinces, even at the moment of reading, that he who hunts the woods for prey, the naked and untutored Indian, is less a savage than the King of Britain.'²⁵

* Admittedly, an impressive prediction, considering the episode of 1765 was not known about.

Paine claimed in *Common Sense* that 'No man was a warmer wisher for reconciliation than myself, before the fatal 19 April 1775,* but the moment the event of that day was made known, I rejected the hardened, sullen-tempered Pharaoh† of England for ever; and disdain the wretch, that with the pretended title of Father of his People can unfeelingly hear their slaughter, and composedly sleep with their blood on his soul.'²⁶ In fact Paine had been telling people that 'kings might very well be dispensed with' since at least 1771.²⁷ Three months after landing in America in November 1774, he was editing a new publication, the *Pennsylvania Magazine*, and as his biographer states, 'During his next fifteen months as executive editor, Paine tried hard to steer the magazine toward the growing controversies about the position of the American colonies within the British Empire.'²⁸ He published in full the text of the petition of the First Continental Congress, for example. His claim of a Damascene conversion on 19 April 1775 was therefore untrue.

A timeless tactic of warfare is to be the first to define your enemy. Paine had struck first and hard. *Common Sense* unleashed a series of newspaper articles, speeches, pamphlets and letters across the colonies that now referred to the King as the 'cruellest sovereign *tyrant* of this age', a 'butcher' and 'that wicked tryanical [*sic*] brute (nay worse than brute) of Great Britain'.²⁹ Patriots vied with each other in condemning him in the most extreme language possible. Yet the King was not without his supporters. Charles Inglis, an assistant rector in New York City, wrote a pamphlet entitled *The Deceiver Unmasked* about Paine, although every copy was destroyed by a mob in March 1776. Undeterred, he then wrote *The True Interest of America Impartially Stated*, describing the King as 'our true and lawful liege sovereign' and warning that Paine's republicanism would 'plunge [America] into a tedious, bloody and most expensive war with Great Britain'.³⁰ Inglis was to be attainted for treason by the state of New York, but escaped to become Bishop of Nova Scotia.

Inglis highlighted the way Paine had sought to imply that the King was a secret Roman Catholic, writing in *Common Sense* 'that the phrase parent or mother country hath been jesuitically adopted by the King and his parasites, with a low papistical design of gaining an unfair bias on the credulous weakness of our minds'.³¹ This attempt to play on American anti-Catholic bigotry was, as we have seen, widespread after the Quebec Act. 'This curious observation was introduced purely to insinuate the King is a papist,' Inglis

* The events at Lexington and Concord.

† The mention of George as Pharaoh ought to have reminded readers that the Jews could not be blamed for the concept of monarchy, given that the Egyptian monarchy predated theirs by centuries.

wrote, 'which has as much truth in it as to insinuate that he is a Mahometan or Gentoo [that is, Muslim or Hindu], for there is not a firmer Protestant in Great Britain than his present Majesty.' It was true, but by then the huge success of *Common Sense* – for all its anti-Semitism, absurd exaggeration, anti-Catholic bigotry and bogus claims of objectivity – meant that its aim of blackening George's name had been triumphantly achieved. The success of *Common Sense* also underlines the appallingly bad job that the royal governors and Loyalists had done in advancing the King's point of view.

On the same day that *Common Sense* was published, Lord Sandwich wrote to the King enclosing a captured rebel flag, and apologizing that he could not see the King for the next few days because he was mourning his twenty-three-year-old son William, an MP who had died of 'dissipation' in Lisbon. The navy, he said, had experienced a whole chapter of problems in preparing Admiral Sir Peter Parker's fleet for the Southern Expedition (also known as the Cape Fear Expedition) that Lord George Germain wanted in order to support the Loyalists in the Carolinas that spring, and 'the short notice we have had for such enormous demands is without precedent'.³² The King replied at 10.33 the next morning, commiserating over Sandwich's son but rejecting the excuse about the fleet refitting: 'You call it unprecedented . . . but when such acts of vigour are shown by the rebellious Americans, we must show that the English lion when roused has not only his wonted resolution but has added the swiftness of the racehorse.'³³ George's letters sometimes show a deft turn of phrase and, if Britain had won the war, some of them might today be considered Churchillian: instead, they read as absurd and vainglorious.

The problems the fleet encountered included 'contrary winds and accidents', the delayed refit of *Bristol*, *Boreas* beached at Spithead, *Actaeon*, *Thunder* and *Deal Castle* being blown back to Plymouth (the last of them running ashore mastless) and a hospital ship and bomb vessel not even making the rendezvous. Nonetheless, Sir Peter Parker's fleet carrying Henry Clinton's army arrived off Cape Fear to spearhead the Southern Expedition on 12 March 1776. By then, however, 1,100 North Carolinian Patriots had defeated 1,800 Loyalists at the battle of Moore's Creek Bridge on 27 February, preventing them from establishing a British naval base at Wilmington. After a failed attack in late June on Sullivan's Island, which protected the estuary leading to Charleston, Parker was forced to sail away, anchoring off New York City on 2 August.

One of the progenitors of the Southern Expedition was General Charles Cornwallis, 2nd Earl Cornwallis, who had fought at Minden and had been one of the few officers to have given evidence for Germain rather than

against him at his court martial. Germain encouraged Cornwallis to apply for this command, even though he had opposed both the Stamp and Coercive Acts. Cornwallis was the kind of sober, dignified family man that the King liked, a former aide-de-camp of his, as well as being the nephew of the Archbishop of Canterbury. George approved Cornwallis's appointments as the Vice-Treasurer of Ireland in 1769, Privy Councillor in 1770 and Constable of the Tower of London in 1771. He also approved Cornwallis's request to take his own 33rd Regiment with him to Cape Fear. The King was thus intimately bound up with his advancement. Cornwallis became a lieutenant-general on New Year's Day 1776.

On 4 March 1776, George Washington occupied the Heights of Dorchester above Boston, forcing Sir William Howe on the 17th to evacuate all British forces by sea to Halifax, Nova Scotia, where he awaited reinforcements from his brother, Admiral Richard Howe. Had Gage and Howe not concentrated their forces in Boston in 1775, there is at least a possibility that some provincial governors with Loyalist support might have been able to hold on to at least a few of the other twelve colonies in the earliest stage of the conflict.³⁴ Yet, as Frederick the Great said, 'He who defends everything, defends nothing,' and it might have been that every small British contingent across America would have been defeated piecemeal. After forcing Howe out of Boston, George Washington moved to New York City, correctly predicting that that was where the British would attack next. He constructed Forts Lee and Washington along the Hudson River, summoned troops (mainly militia) from the nearby colonies and dispatched General Israel Putnam and half of his 13,000-strong force to the Flatbush area of Long Island. He then built fortified earthworks along the Brooklyn Heights and the hills to the south of them, as well as batteries on lower Manhattan and Governors Island.

To the north, Major-General John Burgoyne's arrival in Quebec province with British troops and German auxiliaries on 6 May led to the dispersal of the American threat to Canada, General John Sullivan retreating first to Crown Point and then Ticonderoga. Nine days later, the Virginia Convention instructed Richard Lee and its other representatives to Congress to propose a declaration of independence and the formation of a confederation of colonies, while Congress itself called for all royal authority in the colonies to be 'totally suppressed'.³⁵

Back in London, the King answered another petition from the Corporation of London on 23 March:

I deplore, with the deepest concern, the miseries which a great part of my subjects in America have brought upon themselves by an unjustifiable

resistance to the constitutional authority of the kingdom; and I shall be ready and happy to alleviate those miseries by acts of mercy and clemency whenever that authority shall be established, and the now existing rebellion at an end. To obtain these salutary purposes, I will invariably pursue the most proper and effectual means.³⁶

There is no reason to doubt him. When the Cabinet in London envisaged what resolution in America might look like, they saw the end of the rebellion through a negotiated settlement that involved first a military surrender and then a political settlement involving no taxation and a substantial degree of autonomy.³⁷ Later claims that George was vengeful towards his soon-to-be-former subjects were a total fabrication.

At the time, the King was having a good deal of his time taken up by a problem that plagued all eighteenth-century governments: that of office- and honours-seekers, whose importuning did not end even when a peerage had been granted, since they continued to press for a rise through its five ranks.* This constant pressure on the King came to a head in late May 1776 over an issue that seems to have caused him as much personal distress as anything Thomas Paine or the Virginia Convention were saying or doing at that time. George Montagu, 1st Duke of Montagu, had applied for the earldom of Montagu as a remainder title that he could give to his son, to which the King had agreed. George was then reminded by Lord North that he had already promised the title to the 1st Lord Beaulieu. The King could not recall making any such pledge, but Lady Beaulieu, the proud, rich and formidable septuagenarian daughter of the 2nd Duke of Montagu (by an earlier creation) and widow of the 2nd Duke of Manchester, insisted that he had.

Because it impinged upon his honour to promise the same title to two people, the row threw the King into what he told North was 'the greatest state of uneasiness I ever felt'.³⁸ At the moment when thirteen colonies were fast in the process of shearing off from his empire, this must have been an exaggeration of the kind that he often resorted to, yet there is no doubt that he loathed the feeling that he might be breaking his word, even to a woman who had forced her husband to join the Opposition ten years earlier and had later boycotted the Court when the Montagu dukedom had been revived. 'I cannot go to my Levee, nor see any mortal, till you have been here,' the King told North desperately. The situation was eventually sorted out by denying the duke the earldom, and in 1784 Lord Beaulieu

* Only Wellington managed to go through every rank from baron to viscount to earl to marquess to duke.

became the 1st Earl Beaulieu, but not – to Lady Beaulieu's great chagrin – the Earl of Montagu.

These incessant honours issues had much the same effect on North as they had on the King, and indeed two years later he begged George to be allowed to resign the premiership, 'as I really shall not be able to stand the storm and violence which the candidates for the peerage will bring upon me'.³⁹ The obsession with honours was a feature of the era; the 1st Marquess of Abercorn wore the blue riband of his Order of the Garter even when he went shooting. (He also insisted his maids wear white gloves while making his bed.)⁴⁰ Tending to grandees' pride and pettiness exhausted both the King and North, just as they were approaching the greatest crisis of their lives.

On 2 July, Congress approved Richard Henry Lee's resolution of independence at the Pennsylvania State House in Philadelphia, severing all ties between the thirteen colonies and Britain, and becoming a republic. Only New York did not support the resolution, because the instructions from its assembly to its delegation were delayed. In effect, of course, Congress had already been acting as what Jefferson called one of 'the powers of the earth' for almost two years: appointing agents in Europe who were ambassadors, seeking aid from France and Spain as well as an alliance with both countries, raising capital, founding an army and navy, and so on.⁴¹ Indeed, the Declaration of Independence has recently been described as more of 'a call for help from France and Spain' than a domestic political document, although in practice it was both.⁴² To set out reasons why a new nation should exist was itself a new idea. Pasquale Paoli had not bothered with it when Corsica rose against Genoa in 1755; and while the Dutch had published the Act of Abjuration against the King of Spain in 1581, that was in no sense a manifesto for a new nation in the same way as the Declaration of Independence.

Two days after the Lee Resolution passed, on Thursday 4 July 1776, Congress printed and distributed its Declaration, which had been principally written by Thomas Jefferson. Popular legend has it that John Hancock, who as President of the Congress was the first to sign it, said he had made his signature big so that 'fat old King George could read it without his spectacles', proving that not all eighteenth-century political vituperation was witty.⁴³

'The Revolution was in the minds of the People,' John Adams told Thomas Jefferson in 1815, 'and this was effected, from 1760 to 1775 . . . before a drop of blood was drawn at Lexington.'⁴⁴ More than a thousand pamphlets were published in that fifteen-year period, and it was largely

through them that the debate moved from explicit expressions of loyalty to George to rebellion against him. In private, Adams wrote of the Declaration that there was 'not an idea in it, but what has been hackneyed in Congress for two years before'.⁴⁵ If anything, the surprise is that it had taken so long before these issues of sovereignty actually involved the sovereign himself and for him to become the focus of open criticism – especially since he had made his views on Parliament's authority over every part of the empire publicly known since November 1767.

Congress cut one-third of the Declaration, but mercifully left its preamble largely intact. The 1,458-word document falls naturally into two discrete parts. It opens with language worthy of Shakespeare and the Book of Common Prayer in its eloquent, two-paragraph justification of rebellion. The quest for self-government and the rights of man are set within a doctrine of political equality that became the foundational principle for the United States and went on to inspire millions of people all over the globe for two and a half centuries. This first section has rightly been hailed as one of the greatest documents of the Enlightenment. The second section, however, consists of twenty-eight separate ad hominem accusations against the King which, because of their centrality to the way that King George III has been viewed by history, deserve some detailed analysis.

Perhaps surprisingly, there is nothing about Parliament in the Declaration; the word does not even appear. With the British Army out of Boston and every British governor ejected from his provincial capital, *de facto* independence already existed, so Congress now needed to emphasize its complete *de jure* independence. For that it needed to abjure the King rather than just Parliament, as it was to the King, not to Parliament, that they had previously admitted allegiance. Unless it took the form of a personal attack, therefore, it would not answer the Loyalists' argument that it was possible to become independent of Britain but remain in a political condominium of some sort under the Crown. As a result, Britain and the British people are hardly mentioned either: indeed the only reference to 'our British brethren' is to the fact that because they had been 'deaf to the voice of justice and consanguinity' they must be 'enemies in war, in peace friends'.⁴⁶ The same offer was not extended to George.

Some of Jefferson's original strictures against Britain – such as that the settlement of the colonies had been 'unassisted by the wealth or the strength of Great Britain' – were excised by the committee as it was believed that these would alienate support.⁴⁷ In order to present themselves as heirs to the 1642 and 1688 revolutions, as they genuinely believed themselves to be, the American revolutionaries had to paint George as a Stuart-style tyrant, even though he was nothing of the sort. Unlike in the two English

revolutions, the King was actively supporting the policy of the British government and the majority of the House of Commons.

The second section of the Declaration, which comprises more than two-thirds of the text, was therefore devoted to a series of ad hominem accusations against the King in an attempt to prove that '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.'⁴⁸ These charges were kept deliberately unspecific regarding places and dates, for the obvious reason that most were untrue, since George had never sought to establish any kind of tyranny over America.⁴⁹ Indeed, in terms of genuine as opposed to theoretical liberties, Britain was well ahead of North America – Dissenters could operate in Britain without licences, for example, which was not the case in all the colonies – and as the Mansfield Judgment attested, slavery was illegal in Britain and Canada.

Two trenchant defenders made their way into print shortly after the Declaration was published. John Lind, a London barrister, wrote a 132-page rejection of its charges in his *Answer to the Declaration of Congress* which tended to refute on legal grounds. Thomas Hutchinson thought in more political terms when he read the Declaration in London in August, and published *Strictures upon the Declaration of the Congress at Philadelphia* anonymously in November. The latter attempted to counter that 'most infamous paper', full of 'a great number of pretended tyrannical deeds of the King'.⁵⁰ There could hardly have been a person better placed to undertake it than Hutchinson, since he was not only Massachusetts born and bred, but had held almost all the great offices in the colony. His argument was that 'If no taxes or duties had been laid upon the colonies, other pretences would have been found for exception to the authority of Parliament.'⁵¹ Hutchinson believed that the accusations against the King in the document were, 'with design, left obscure; for as soon as they are developed, instead of justifying, they rather aggravate the criminality of this revolt'.⁵²

The twenty-eight charges against the King fall into three distinct groups as they build up steadily in rhetoric. The first through to the twelfth were complaints about the actions that the King – or, more usually, his provincial governors with his subsequent approval – had committed in order to try to check the rising tide of rebellion. The thirteenth through to the twenty-second focused on the King's support of Parliament over American legislatures, several referring to episodes that had long predated his reign.⁵³ The next five, from the twenty-third to the twenty-seventh, concerned the war itself – the fighting at Bunker Hill, the occupation of Boston, the burning of Falmouth and Norfolk, and so on – and were an *ex post facto* ploy

to use British attempts to suppress the rebellion as a justification for the rebellion itself.⁵⁴ The last, twenty-eighth, charge was that the King had ignored Congress's two petitions to him of 1774 and 1775, even though he did not recognize the body from which they emanated.

The first charge was that 'He has refused his assent to laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.'⁵⁵ Although the lack of specificity makes it impossible to be certain, this probably refers to the vetoing of colonial laws creating paper money, granting divorces, taxing the slave trade and lowering the numbers of convicts sent to America.⁵⁶ Of course some of these were highly subjective; several colonies welcomed the thousand or so convicts that were sent every year, sometimes because they were a source of cheap labour, and sometimes because people often treated over-harshly by the British penal system eventually turned into good immigrants. Flooding the colonies with inflationary paper money would hardly be 'wholesome and necessary to the public good', and large numbers of pious Americans did not support easier divorce. Moreover, the fact that the King had, on relatively rare occasions, exercised his constitutional right to veto legislation did not prove that that right was an improper one, any more than a presidential veto over legislation would today. When the United States established control over Puerto Rico after the Spanish-American War, for example, it retained the power to annul the Acts of the Puerto Rican legislature. That is what empires do.

The second charge accused George of having 'forbidden his governors to pass laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his assent should be obtained'.⁵⁷ The law of suspension, necessary because of the distance across the Atlantic, had been in operation since 1708, and was a sensible precaution against laws being overturned months after they had gone into operation.⁵⁸ The third charge accused the King of gerrymandering representation in the colonial legislatures against the rights of 'large districts of people'. It was true that the British government had insisted on newly created townships receiving representation in New Hampshire in 1748, and required that the Scotch-Irish should be fairly represented in the Pennsylvania legislature when it was controlled by the Germans and Quakers.

The fourth, fifth and six charges referred to interference with the colonial legislatures. The Virginia Assembly had been dissolved in 1765 over the Stamp Act, and the Virginia, Massachusetts and South Carolina legislatures in 1768 over the Massachusetts Circular Letter. In 1768 the Massachusetts Governor had directed that the legislature meet at Cambridge until 1772 rather than 4 miles away in Boston, but this had been

in part because Patriots such as John Hancock and James Otis had complained that they did not want to meet in a city full of British troops.⁵⁹ (It had met in Cambridge before, during smallpox outbreaks in Boston.)

All three of these charges referred to British actions after the revolutionary movement had begun its drive for independence, and none was unconstitutional under the laws pertaining at the time. Hutchinson commented from personal experience on the fifth charge – ‘He has dissolved representative houses repeatedly for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people’ – writing that it had been ‘the only way to prevent their prosecuting the plan of rebellion . . . Thus . . . the regular use of the prerogative in suppressing a begun revolt is urged as a grievance to justify the revolt.’⁶⁰

The sixth charge – about the ‘long time’ during which Massachusetts had been left without a government, and thus ‘exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without and convulsions within’ – drew Hutchinson’s special ire. He pointed out that Massachusetts had been without a government for less than three months, and that far from the danger being an invasion ‘from without’, the four regiments sent to Boston had been ‘to aid the civil magistrate in preserving the peace, and the convulsions within were the tumults, riots and acts of violence which this Convention was called not to suppress but to encourage’.⁶¹ He knew all about such riots, since one had destroyed his own home.

The seventh charge, that the King had ‘endeavoured to prevent the population of these states; for that purpose obstructing the laws for the naturalization of foreigners’, glided over the reasons that this had indeed sometimes happened. The British government had actively encouraged immigration into Pennsylvania and the middle colonies, for example, but was alive to the danger of naturalizing foreigners as American citizens if they owned vessels. ‘Colonial naturalization had become part and parcel of colonial smuggling,’ one American historian has noted, and ‘The check on naturalization was, therefore, intended only as a check on smuggling, rebellion and independence,’ not as a check on the colonies’ demographics or economy.⁶² Jefferson, of course, knew this perfectly well.

The eighth charge claimed that the King ‘has obstructed the administration of justice by refusing his assent to laws for establishing judiciary powers’, implying that he had often refused assent to laws establishing courts and that therefore justice had been impaired.⁶³ Yet that had also only happened once, again in North Carolina, when the Assembly had refused to vote salaries for judges between 1773 and 1776, which could hardly be blamed on the royal governor. ‘All this was fully known to Congress,’ Hutchinson pointed out, ‘who, notwithstanding, have most

falsely represented the regular use of prerogative to prevent injustices as an obstruction to the administration of justice.⁶⁴ Jefferson was already starting to run out of worthwhile points on his brief, yet there were twenty more charges to come.

The ninth was that the King had 'made judges dependent on his will alone for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries'.⁶⁵ In most colonies, judges had been dependent on the Crown for tenure while the assemblies paid their salaries, but lately the assemblies had refused to give judges permanent salaries, preferring to vote on them from year to year in order to retain a measure of control over the judiciary, and, it was alleged, deter them from prosecuting smuggling to the full extent of the law. In 1773, the Governor of Massachusetts took over the payment of judges, which had infuriated the legislature, but Crown payment of judges had been the practice in England when the colonies were founded, and except in charter colonies such as Rhode Island and Connecticut they were always dependent on the Crown for their continuance in office. In some colonies the judges were paid by the Crown also, and Hutchinson pointed out that those colonies 'considered it as an act of favour' because it saved them from footing the bill themselves.

The tenth charge was that the King had 'erected a multitude of new offices and sent hither swarms of officers to harass our people and eat out their substance'. This was a reference to the four new Admiralty courts which the Commissioners of Customs had headquartered at Boston and which had attempted to combat smuggling.⁶⁶ Every penny of the commissioners' salaries and the costs of the Admiralty courts were paid out of customs receipts rather than by the legislatures. John Lind pointed out that the only class of people who could justifiably complain about the new courts were smugglers. Hutchinson reminded readers that when the five customs commissioners were appointed, four surveyors-general had been dismissed, and only fifteen or twenty junior staff came over from England with them, so the size and cost of the bureaucracy was much the same. 'Thirty or forty additional officers in the whole continent', jeered Hutchinson, 'are the *swarms* which eat out the subsistence of the boasted number of three millions of people.'⁶⁷

The eleventh charge was that the King had 'kept among us, in times of peace, standing armies without the consent of our legislatures'. Once Jefferson had excised charges criticizing George over slavery from the original draft, this was perhaps the most hypocritical allegation of those that remained. Quite apart from the obvious fact that there had been no dividing line in the period from 1754 and 1756 between a time of war with the French and Native Americans and one of peace, and a standing army on

the western border had been the only way of protecting the colonies, the assemblies had actually voted their thanks for what the British Army had done. The only point at which the 'consent of our legislatures' had been withdrawn was when the four battalions had arrived in Boston in 1768, another example of the Declaration using as an excuse for rebellion the actions the British had taken in trying to prevent it.

Hutchinson explained that, before Boston rose in riot and threatened rebellion, the only British troops were on the western border, defending the colonists from the Native Americans. They were not to be found on the streets of colonial America; in fact in many parts of the colonies, particularly in the South, they barely existed at all. Britain had always had the right to station troops in her colonies, so the eleventh charge, while sounding as though it had a basis in natural or actual law, in fact had none. The amount that the colonists contributed to their own defence had been only around 10 per cent of the total, yet this was Congress's response.⁶⁸ The historian John Shy has pointed out that 'Until early 1774, most Americans would have been happy to have the services of British regulars without the "consent", that is, the appropriation of funds, of their provincial assemblies.'⁶⁹

The twelfth charge was that the King had 'affected to render the military independent of, and superior to, the civil power'.⁷⁰ All that this can refer to is the appointment of General Gage as Governor of Massachusetts in 1774. Yet in times of rebellion – and the Boston Tea Party had taken place prior to Gage's appointment – the military is often and perfectly legally made superior to the civil power. All the King had actually done was, as Hutchinson put it, 'to reduce those rebellious civil powers to their constitutional subjection to the supreme civil power'.⁷¹ As for the King having 'affected' to render the military politically dominant, at no point did he ever suggest, wish or plan for a military government in America.*

As soon as the American Revolution was defeated, it was Britain's intention to return the civil power to its traditional primacy. If, as Jefferson alleged, George had held any desire, let alone a plan, to establish a

* There are sometimes inevitably crises when the military power needs to be rendered independent of the civil power, as the United States was regularly to discover during the Whiskey Rebellion, in New Orleans in the War of 1812, when habeas corpus was suspended in Maryland on the outbreak of the Civil War, during the Great Chicago Fire and the San Francisco Earthquake, during the Omaha Race Riot of 1919, in the Illinois Mormon War, during the 1934 West Coast waterfront strike, when the Roosevelt Administration interned Japanese-Americans after the attack on Pearl Harbor, on occasion during the Civil Rights struggle in the 1960s, and in several other instances. Cuba was under American martial law for years after the Spanish-American War. None of this lessened the legitimacy of the US government, any more than it did that of George III in 1774.

dictatorial tyranny over America of the totalitarian kind implied by the language of the Declaration, there would be some evidence of this. And yet, among around 100,000 pages of George's personal archive, not a single scrap of paper exists to support such a contention. Not only is there nothing to suggest such a thing, there is the exact opposite, in the form of orders that the assemblies be left unmolested and that governors treat them considerately, at least until the aggression, destruction and law-breaking of the Boston Tea Party took place. Even then the King was not hoping to establish a tyranny, simply looking for an apology, financial restitution to the victims and a peaceful return to the status quo ante.

Jefferson's thirteenth charge – that George had 'combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution and unacknowledged by our laws' – was a reiteration of the claim that Parliament had no authority over the colonies, which was now asserted but clearly unsupported either by law or by the experience of the previous century and a half. Critics of the Declaration such as Lind and Hutchinson pointed to the numerous Acts of Parliament that the colonists had accepted in the past, and the way the Stamp Act Congress had specifically stated that Parliament had jurisdiction in every area but internal taxation. 'Why is our present sovereign to be distinguished from all his predecessors since Charles II?' asked Hutchinson. 'And then, how can a jurisdiction submitted to for more than a century be *foreign* to their constitution?'⁷² As a former supreme justice of Massachusetts, he knew the law.

The modern American historian Eric Nelson has pointed out the contradiction inherent in the thirteenth charge. 'Only because Patriots remained convinced that the King possessed a constitutional prerogative power to "refuse his assent" to parliamentary Bills could they indict him for having refused to wield it on behalf of the colonies,' he writes. 'George could only be styled a "tyrant" on the supposition that he was, as a juridical matter, far more powerful than any British monarch had claimed to be for over a hundred years.'⁷³ George was being criticized by Jefferson for not vetoing Bills in America, even though he had not and was not vetoed to veto any in his whole reign, just as George I and George II had not.

The fourteenth charge, the King's 'quartering large bodies of armed troops among us', was not quite the same complaint as the earlier one against the existence of a standing army, so much as an objection to paying for its upkeep. Here Jefferson was on slightly stronger ground, because although until 1764 Britain had paid for barracks, in 1765 the annual Mutiny Act had included a section stating that each colony should provide for the barracks, firewood, candles and other necessities for the men stationed in it. When in 1765 the New York Assembly had refused to

provide vinegar, salt and beer, it had been suspended. Hutchinson pointed out that the colonies had not complained about the quartering of British troops when they were there 'to protect the colonies against French invasion', and that the quartering provisions were similar to those in Britain. He added that the opposition to the quartering of troops was 'not because the provision made was in itself unjust or unequal, but because they were Acts of Parliament whose authority was denied'.^{74*}

The fifteenth charge of the Declaration accused the King of 'protecting [his troops] by a mock trial from punishment for any murders which they should commit' on colonists. This was a reference to the temporary provision in the Administration of Justice Act of 1774 which had been passed to ensure that revenue officers and soldiers would not be judged by partisan local juries if they were accused of murder. The trial in England or a peaceful colony would not have been 'mock', of course, and the only reason for a change of venue was to obtain an impartial jury. Moreover, the sole reason why the law was passed was to avoid the need to declare martial law in a colony. Since no 'murders' had been committed since the Boston Massacre six years earlier, it was all moot anyhow, but grist for Jefferson's mill as he piled charge upon charge, possibly hoping that sheer quantity would mask the lack of logic or legal quality.

The sixteenth charge attacked the King 'for cutting off our trade with all parts of the world'. In fact the navigation and trade laws that restricted colonial commerce dated back to Oliver Cromwell in 1651, and were instrumental in placing the American colonies within the British trading bloc and outside rival ones. All this amounted to in terms of eighteenth-century trade was that the American colonies were part of the British Empire. It was much the same as the seventeenth charge, that of 'imposing taxes on us without our consent', which had of course been the most visible of the complaints since the Stamp Act, and which will be discussed later.

* On 14 December 1775, forty armed soldiers arrived at the door of William Thompson's home in Brookline, Massachusetts, with orders to seize his residence for their quartering. He told them it was 'contrary to the sacred right of every freeman to the enjoyment of his property and domestic security', and generously offered to lodge them at his expense at the nearest public house, in order to protect his family and privacy. Instead, the sergeant used his musket to break the lock of the front door and his men, with bayonets fixed, threw Thompson's family out of his house. The irony of the Declaration of Independence's denunciation of British quartering provisions cannot have been lost on Mr Thompson the following year, since it was the Continental Army troops who had violated his home. Where there were no barracks, eighteenth-century armies needed other quartering, as George Washington's officers understood just as well as the King's. Yet what happened to William Thompson was not felt to invalidate Congress's right to rule.

The eighteenth charge was 'For depriving us in many cases of the benefit of trial by jury'.⁷⁵ This was much the same as the fifteenth charge – a certain degree of repetition was inevitable as Jefferson needed numbers more than rationality – and referred to the establishment of the Admiralty and Vice-Admiralty courts which came about because of the partisan verdicts of American juries in favour of smugglers and Stamp Act violators, regardless of the evidence produced by the Crown. Yet there had been non-jury Admiralty courts in both Britain and America since 1670, and justices of the peace tended to decide excise cases without juries in the colonies too; indeed the United States was to employ non-jury trials in order to defeat smuggling until the twentieth century.⁷⁶ Hutchinson argued that juries who lived close to where the offences took place would not be impartial over a crime such as smuggling, adding that the law had changed under William III in both Britain and the colonies. 'Strange!' he wrote sarcastically, 'that in the reign of King George the Third, this jurisdiction should suddenly become an usurpation and ground for revolt.'⁷⁷

The nineteenth charge was 'For transporting us beyond seas to be tried for pretended offences'. Although the provision for this had existed since the time of Henry VIII for treason, in fact nobody had been transported for trial in George III's reign, and this was another example of Jefferson doing something lawyers occasionally did in the eighteenth century (and later), a practice known as 'padding the brief'.

The twentieth charge was an attack on the Quebec Act, accusing the King of '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'.⁷⁸ Far from introducing 'arbitrary government' or 'absolute rule', the Quebecois so welcomed the return of their laws and religious liberties under the Quebec Act that there were no French uprisings against British rule in Canada at any stage of the American Revolution or afterwards. If the King had genuinely been interested in introducing absolute rule into the American colonies it might fairly be expected that he would at some point have mentioned it to someone else – such as the Cabinet ministers responsible for effecting it – which he never once did.

Charge number twenty-one condemned the King 'For taking away our charters, abolishing our most valuable laws and altering fundamentally the forms of our governments', a reference to the Government of Massachusetts Act of 1774, which was the only alteration of a colonial charter during George's reign, and once again was enacted as a reaction to the rebellion rather than being an incitement of it. Notice the way that

Jefferson yet again used the plural 'charters', attempting to turn a single instance into a general rule. There had been plenty of charter alterations in earlier reigns which had not been cited as a justification for rebellion before, but Jefferson was looking for propaganda rather than intellectual consistency in the second part of the Declaration. John Lind showed in his commentary on the Declaration that in fact every single American charter in 1775 had been altered or repealed at some earlier point in history, but not by George III. If charters once granted could not be altered or repealed by the Crown, Lind pointed out, then under the terms of Virginia's original charter its inhabitants would still be 'dependent on two trading companies residing in England'.⁷⁹

The twenty-second charge concerned 'suspending our own legislatures and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever'. This again referred to the suspension of the New York Assembly, and Rockingham's ill-advised Declaratory Act, which had used the phrase 'in all cases whatsoever'. It was such a propaganda boon that Jefferson quoted it directly. 'Both the suspension of the New York legislature and the Declaratory Act were valid and constitutional exercises of Parliament's power according to the constitutional theory prevailing in England at that time,' acknowledges an American historian of that clause, however, and by no means an abuse of the King's prerogative powers.⁸⁰ That was the last of the nine Parliament-related charges.

The next group, numbering five charges, began with the twenty-third: 'He has abdicated government here by declaring us out of his protection and waging war against us.' In the original draft that the committee submitted to Congress, the King was also accused of 'withdrawing his governors', but since everyone knew that the royal governors had been driven out by Patriot mobs and militiamen, it was dropped as too ludicrous a charge. Nor had the King in fact declared the colonists out of his protection or allegiance: indeed, he was trying to compel them back into both. This clause once again gave George's acts in suppressing the rebellion as a reason for the rebellion itself.⁸¹

The same objection can be made to the next charge, that 'He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns and destroyed the lives of our people,' a reference to the destruction of Norfolk (which was mainly carried out by Patriots), as well as Charlestown and Falmouth. Hutchinson replied that 'The acts of a justly incensed sovereign for suppressing a most unnatural, unprovoked rebellion are here assigned as the *causes* of this rebellion.'⁸² In terms of pure chronology, the point was unanswerable.

The next charge concerned 'transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already

begun with circumstances of cruelty and perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy [of] the head of a civilized nation'.⁸³ A glance at the conduct of the War of Independence shows that this was nonsense. For all that there were indeed examples of atrocities and town burnings in the American War of Independence – especially in the civil-war aspect of it between Loyalists and Patriots – overall the war up until July 1776 had generally been conducted according to the rules of warfare then pertaining, with prisoner exchanges, parleys between commanders, local truces for the burial of the dead, and so on. The fact that soldiers were willing to surrender at all proves that it was not conducted as 'in the most barbarous ages', when no quarter was given. Later in the conflict, Washington even offered to allow captured commanders to return to London. Nor was it fair to assume that the 12,000 German auxiliaries then on their way to America would be barbarous; they did not fundamentally behave any differently from the British or American troops.

Although even today some American historians describe George's German auxiliaries as 'military scabs' and consider him as having somehow 'cheated' by employing them, contemporaries knew that paid foreign soldiers had been used regularly in European wars for centuries, and in a rebellion against a king who was also the Elector of Hanover it was strange to complain when he used troops from Hanover and Hanover's allies to try to quell it.⁸⁴ Of course Congress employed foreigners to fight in their army too, including large numbers of French officers long before France joined the conflict. They paid Baron von Steuben and the Marquis de Lafayette, General Casimir Pulaski's Legion, Bartholomew von Heer's Provost Corps and General Armand's Independent Chasseurs. Once the French had joined the war, they too used auxiliaries and foreigners such as the Lauzun Legion, who spoke German.⁸⁵

The twenty-sixth charge was that the King had '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'. By the Prohibitory Act of December 1775, American ships could be captured and their crews pressed into British service, which ran contrary to their rights under a 1708 Act that excepted American colonists from being pressed into service in the Royal Navy. This exemption (compared with British seafarers) had been guarded jealously, and while naval press gangs did operate legitimately to recapture deserters, they were often viewed suspiciously as symbols of tyrannical rule and a potential threat to individual liberties in the colonies, and this had sometimes led to local unrest. The Prohibitory Act legislation categorically rescinded the

1708 exemption, but once again it would not have been passed had the colonies not already risen in revolt eight months earlier.

'He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us,' claimed charge number twenty-seven, '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.'⁸⁶ This was a reference to Lord Dunmore's offer of freedom and weapons to those African-American slaves in Virginia who joined the British forces, as well as the treaties made with Britain's long-standing Native American allies. Lind and others did not fail to point out the inherent contradiction of complaining about freeing slaves in a document that starts with high-sounding remarks about all men being created equal.⁸⁷ Given that Congress had already tried to outbid the British for the support of the Indigenous Nations, a Congressional committee had reported in favour of using them as auxiliaries and some Stockbridge Native Americans were serving in the Massachusetts Militia, while the Massachusetts provincial government had offered an alliance to the Mohawks, this twenty-seventh charge against the King was just as hypocritical as the one denouncing the use of 'foreign mercenaries'.⁸⁸

The twenty-eighth and final charge was that 'In every stage of these oppressions we have petitioned for redress in the most humble terms; our repeated petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a tyrant is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.'⁸⁹ The two remonstrances of 1774 and 1775 were not real petitions, however, but requests that the King should work against Parliament and uphold the colonies' opinion that Parliament had no jurisdiction over them. They were demands that the King act unconstitutionally. Of this clause, Hutchinson was predictably indignant:

A tyrant, in modern language, means, not merely an absolute and arbitrary but a cruel, merciless sovereign. Have these men given an instance of any one act in which the King has exceeded the just powers of the Crown as limited by the English constitution? Has he ever departed from known, established laws, and substituted his own will as the rule of his actions? Has there ever been a prince by whom subjects in rebellion have been treated with less severity, or with longer forbearance?

He ended with a stricture on the rebels for having grasped their opportunity to become independent as soon as the threats from the French and Native Americans had receded, thanks to the British victory in the Seven Years War:

Gratitude, I am sensible, is seldom found in a community, but so sudden a revolt from the rest of the Empire, which had incurred so immense a debt, and with which it remains burdened, for the protection and defence of the colonies, and at their most importunate request, is an instance of ingratitude nowhere to be paralleled.⁹⁰

John Adams later wrote of the Declaration, 'There were other expressions which I would not have inserted if I had drawn it up, particularly that which called the King a tyrant. I thought this too personal, for I never believed George to be a tyrant in disposition and nature . . . I thought the expression too passionate and too much like scolding, for so grave and solemn a document.'⁹¹

Of all the twenty-eight charges, only two really stand in terms of logic, natural law, chronology or politics – namely, the seventeenth, about imposing taxes without the colonists' consent, and the twenty-second, about Parliament being 'invested with power to legislate for us' – yet those two were so important that they went to the heart of the issue, and justified the whole rebellion on their own. The other twenty-six were a mixture of political propaganda, hypocrisy, hyperbole and *ex post facto* rationalization, tacked on to the first two paragraphs of superb prose which will justly live for as long as democracy and self-government still matter in the world.

The Declaration of Independence is simultaneously grotesquely hypocritical, illogical, mendacious and sublime. As one American historian has put it, the twenty-eight charges are 'very dull and tiresome and mean nothing much to a modern mind except that one carries away a general impression that the King must have been a horrible monster of tyranny and cruelty against an innocent child-like and loving people'.⁹² So Jefferson achieved his end, and has continued to do so ever since, especially in the United States where the document has attained the status of Holy Writ.

In the original draft of the Declaration, with breathtaking gall, Jefferson had even blamed the slave trade on George, with the words 'He has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither.'⁹³ This staggering piece of hypocrisy had to be, as Jefferson noted, 'struck out in complaisance to South Carolina and Georgia, who had never attempted to restrain the importation of slaves, and who on the contrary wished to continue it. Our Northern brethren also I believe felt a little tender under those censures, for though their people have very few slaves themselves yet they have been pretty considerable carriers of them to others.'⁹⁴ So it was not just Southern

slave owners who got the paragraph deleted, but Northern slave traders too. Forty-one of the fifty-six signatories to the Declaration owned slaves at one point in their lives, and Thomas Hutchinson wrote that he 'could wish to ask the delegates of Maryland, Virginia and the Carolinas how their constituents justify the depriving more than an hundred thousand Africans of their right to liberty and the pursuit of happiness'.⁹⁵

Hutchinson sent the King a copy of his pamphlet with an inscription that revealed himself to be its author, expressing his intention 'to expose . . . the very criminal designs of the leaders of Your Majesty's deluded unhappy American subjects'.⁹⁶ The receipt of the pamphlet might have nonplussed George, since there is no indication that he ever actually read the Declaration of Independence. He made no reference to or even hint of it in his voluminous correspondence, even though the text was reprinted in almost every British newspaper, usually *in extenso*, as in the *London Chronicle* on 15 August.

The Declaration of Independence prompted the Patriots to start removing and destroying the King's image and insignia across the thirteen colonies, often in front of cheering crowds. Except in those relatively small areas controlled by Loyalists, the carved and painted royal coats of arms on churches, government buildings, court houses and taverns were torn down and burned. In Boston, shop signs that featured crowns and lions were thrown on to a bonfire in King Street. In Providence, the royal arms from the Colony House and Crown Coffee House were carried through the streets and burned, as was an effigy of the King in Baltimore.⁹⁷ In Philadelphia his portrait was hung upside down. Juries were no longer summoned in the King's name, which was struck from legal documents. In some places he was subjected to mock trials and executions, buried or burned in effigy.⁹⁸ In Huntington, Long Island, with perhaps an element of overkill, George was 'hung on a gallows, exploded and burnt to ashes'.⁹⁹

By far the most famous act of destruction took place in New York City after George Washington had ordered the Declaration to be read at the head of each brigade of his army, formed up in hollow squares. One of his aides-de-camp noted that it 'was received with three huzzas by the troops - everyone seemed highly pleased that we were separated from a King who was endeavouring to enslave his once-loyal subjects'.¹⁰⁰ Directly outside Washington's headquarters stood the two-ton gilded equestrian statue of the King in Roman imperial costume, sculpted by Joseph Wilton, that had been erected at the Bowling Green in 1770, when New Yorkers had still hoped he might side with them against his ministers and Parliament.¹⁰¹

The soldiers and crowd pulled the statue down from its marble pedestal with lassos, cut off the head, took off his nose and clipped the laurels from

his brow. A musket ball was fired into his dismembered head and others into the statue's torso. The ten ounces of gold leaf that had covered it was scraped off and even the crown-shaped finials on the Green's iron fence were knocked off, as one can still see today. The statue's head was then carried in a wheelbarrow to be impaled on a stake outside the Blue Bell Tavern, to the sound of 'The Rogue's March' on fife and drums. Most of the 4,000 pounds of lead in the rest of the statue was melted down to make a total of 42,088 musket balls for the Continental Army. Washington himself pronounced his disapproval of 'the appearance of riot and want of order' in the vandalism, although he doubtless appreciated the extra ammunition.¹⁰² When New York later fell to the British, an engineer named John Montresor found the statue's mutilated head and sent it back to London, where it was put on display to illustrate the 'disposition of the ungrateful people'.^{103*}

Some street and place names were demonarchized – Boston's King Street was renamed State Street and New York's King's College became Columbia, for example – although plenty stayed the same. Georgetown, Georgia and Charlotte, North Carolina, remained, for example, as did several Prince and Duke streets. For every place name stripped of its monarchical connotations in the former American colonies, of course, there were many more being created in the rest of the empire at the time, such as Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown, Charlottesburg, George Street in Sydney, Fort Charlotte, various Fort Georges, Georgetown (Penang), the Queen Charlotte Islands and many more.

It is ironic that had King George indeed been the ruthless despot that Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson made him out to be, Britain might have won the war. Because he was in fact a civilized, good-natured, Christian and enlightened monarch who worked entirely through the Cabinet and Parliament, and was subject to moral and ethical restraints as well as a desire to be a good Patriot King to all his subjects – including, crucially, his American ones – he did not fight the kind of scorched-earth campaign that every other contemporary despotic power would have fought. He was thus unwilling to cause chaos in the Southern states by a mass liberation and arming of the African-American slaves there, or to create havoc in the West by arming the Indigenous Nations with flintlock muskets, or to terrorize the eastern seaboard by razing Boston and Baltimore, in the way that Admiral Thomas Cochrane was to burn Washington, DC, in 1814.

* The horse's tail survived, and can be seen today at the New-York Historical Society. As it turned out, the statue would probably have collapsed anyway, as its twin in London's Berkeley Square did in the early years of the next century (Marks, 'Statue of King George III' p. 66).

Nor was George about to treat the American rebels in the way that his uncle, the Duke of Cumberland, had treated the Scottish Highlanders after the Jacobite rebellion. After that bloody campaign, thousands of Scots had been interned, hundreds convicted and between eighty and 120 executed, mostly by hanging or beheading but also occasionally by hanging, drawing and quartering.¹⁰⁴ Jacobite sympathizers in the Highlands also faced large-scale destruction of property and mass starvation. If George had condoned the slaughter of tens of thousands of innocent civilians in the same way that other European monarchs did, then the American Revolution might have died in a welter of gore and decades-long resentment. There were undoubtedly horrific outrages committed during the war, but not ones ordered or condoned by the King or any part of the British high command. It was partly because George was *not* a tyrant, therefore, that he lost the war against his own so-called tyranny.