

Handout A: Warm-Up: America's Founding Principles

Document: The Declaration of Independence

Source:

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/declaration-of-independence/>

Introduction:

The Declaration of Independence, written by Thomas Jefferson and adopted by the Second Continental Congress, declares the natural rights to which all men are entitled. It declares that governments exist to protect the natural or inalienable rights of their citizens. Furthermore, it explains how someone should act in the face of a government that violates these rights instead of protecting them.

Text

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed—That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.

Questions:

1. According to this document, what are the natural rights all men are born with?
2. When do the people have the right to alter or abolish their government?
3. If people do seize upon their right and duty to revolution, what then is their duty regarding the unjust government they revolted against?