**John Locke's Influence on the American Declaration of Independence**

When our founding fathers met to discuss the possibility of severing ties with Great Britain, each came for numerous reasons. Some were upset about taxation without representation or agreement, and others mainly concerned with the grievances committed towards them by the royal army at King George's command. No matter the reason, it soon became apparent that a new, separate government needed to be formed; Thomas Jefferson was to be the lead author of this document. Jefferson, and therefore our Declaration of Independence, was heavily influenced by British philosopher John Locke. You can see in the text of the document, and even in the list of reasons given to separate from Great Britain, Locke's words, ideas, and theories coming into play.

As a colony of Great Britain, we experienced many wrongs committed against us at the hands of our government. The King taxed everyday items like sugar, tea, and legal documentation (newspapers, pamphlets, even passports). Under the Quartering Act, we were forced to house soldiers of the royal army in our homes. Many times they were never held accountable for the crimes they committed or even the property they harmed and destroyed. Many times, the benefit of a trial by jury was denied. The King would refuse laws that needed to be in place to keep peace, and would not allow the governors of the colonies to pass laws they saw fit until he approved them, no matter how long that took. For so-called "worries of population", he would deny foreigners naturalization into the country while at the same time he created numerous new offices and flooded the country with his military officers and their families. These all are just examples of the wrongs we withstood under Great Britain's rule.

In Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* provided a framework as to why we should act on all these grievances and declare independence. His ideas focused on the theory of a "state of nature" in which all men are equal. One of the most noticeable instances of direct influence is in the preamble, where our Declaration proclaims the right of every man to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness". Locke's *Treatises* provides everyone with a right to defend their "life, health, Liberty, or possessions". Even the first sentence of our Declaration establishes a Natural Law, a theory popularized by Locke with his State of Nature ideas. It was also in this first section of the Declaration that we establish if it becomes necessary for one government to be abolished and another created, this process is allowed under Natural Law; so Locke's theory is employed again as his ideas of a State of Nature are lent to our idea of Natural Law. The second part of the Declaration, were we list our grievances (as already mentioned above) towards King George, and establish that because of these wrongs he is no longer fit to rule us as a colony. The final part of the Declaration in which we list the examples of governments not fit to lead their people. We show that the government of Great Britain has fallen under these guidelines, and therefore establish again that we must now separate from their government and form another.

The Declaration is an amazing historical document that explains our reasons and logic behind splitting with Great Britain. It borrows heavily form Locke's *Second Treatise*, as noticeable in not only the almost identical preamble but also in the idea of a Natural Law (or Locke's State of Nature); our reasons for abolishing Great Britain's rule was mirrored in Locke's ideas about Rights of Revolution, and his whole Second Treatise pushed the idea of Representative Government, which we translated into our form of democracy. Jefferson was obviously heavily influenced by Locke's philosophies, and although differences are also apparent (Locke didn't suggest a democracy, and his ideas centered more on the rights and duties of the indivual instead of Jefferson's focus of government; Locke also addresses slavery which the declaration widely curtails) Locke's influence is apparent. No matter the differences, our Declaration is logically laid out. We had sound reasons for declaring our independence, and as apparent, our government has since been proven a strong and worldwide symbol of democracy and political freedom.

**Sources:**Brown, Stuart Gerry (1954). *The First Republicans: Political Philosophy and Public Policy in the Party of Jefferson and Madison*.

Onuf, Peter S. *Jefferson's Empire: The Languages of American Nationhood*. (2000).

Locke, *Two Treatises of Government,* ed. Thomas Hollis (A. Millar et al., 1764)

Friedenwald, Herbert. *The Declaration of Independence: An Interpretation and an Analysis.* New York: Macmillan, (1904).

Please answer the following questions after you do the reading:

1. Which American was choose to write the DOI?

2. What items did the King tax?

3. What did the Quartering Act do?

4. What else did the King do that angered the colonists?

5. According to Locke's Second Treatise of Government, what was the "state of nature?"

6. What words from Locke's preamble actually end up in our DOI?

7. According to Locke, "natural law" gives man the right to defend which three things?

8. What part of "natural law" appears in the very first sentence of the DOI?

9. In the second part of the DOI, we list "grievances" (complaints) against the King. What do we conclude from these grievances?

10. What were some of the difference between Locke and Jefferson?