Summary: Moving Toward Independence

Conflicts Begin
In 1754, Britain and France fought the French and Indian War. Britain won and controlled most of the land east of the Mississippi River. Britain wanted colonists to help pay for the war by paying a tax. Colonists did not have representatives in the British government. Angry colonists said they should not be taxed without representation.

The Sons of Liberty and other groups protested the taxes. After Britain passed more taxes, colonists in Boston protested by dumping tea into the harbor. This is called the Boston Tea Party. Britain passed laws taking power away from colonial governments. Colonists called these laws the Intolerable Acts.

Breaking Away from Britain
Many colonists thought it was time for a revolution. In September 1774, colonial representatives met in the First Continental Congress. They voted to stop trade with Britain. Colonists prepared to fight a war.

In April 1775, British soldiers marched from Boston to Lexington and Concord to look for weapons. Paul Revere and others warned colonial fighters, called Minutemen. The British fought the Minutemen in Lexington. This was the first battle of the Revolutionary War. In June, Minutemen and British soldiers fought again at the Battle of Bunker Hill.

In 1776, the Second Continental Congress met. It asked Thomas Jefferson to write the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson wrote that people have natural rights to live freely and seek happiness. He wrote that King George III had taken away colonists’ rights, placed taxes on them, and sent soldiers to the colonies. For these reasons, Jefferson said, the colonies were breaking away from Britain.

Significance of the Declaration
On July 4, 1776, Congress accepted the Declaration. The delegates knew signing the Declaration was dangerous, but they signed anyway. The Declaration is still important today because it says the American people believe in equal rights for all. Today, Americans believe all people have equality, but in 1776, people’s ideas were different. Only white men who owned property had the right to vote. Laws that recognized equal rights of other groups were passed later.