

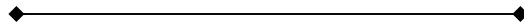
**JOHN DICKINSON,
“A SPEECH AGAINST INDEPENDENCE” (1776)**

Questions:

1. Why does Dickinson feel that the colonies should resolve their differences with the British?
2. What advantages does he see in remaining part of the British empire?
3. What dangers does he perceive in an independent America?

Not all Americans were eager to break away from the British empire. John Dickinson was among those reluctant to embrace independence. A prominent lawyer, Dickinson had represented Pennsylvania at the Stamp Act Congress (1765). In 1767-68, he wrote "Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania," an attack on Parliament's plan to use the Townshend Duties in order to pay the salaries of royal officials in the colonies. As a member of the Continental Congress (1774-76), Dickinson voted against the Declaration of Independence. He eventually supported independence and was one of the signers of the U.S. Constitution.

In this passage, Dickinson explains his opposition to the Declaration of Independence.



I know the name of liberty is dear to each one of us; but have we not enjoyed liberty even under the English monarchy? Shall we this day renounce that to go and seek it in I know not what form of republic, which will soon change into a licentious anarchy and popular tyranny? In the human body the head only sustains and governs all the members, directing them, with admirable harmony, to the same object, which is self-preservation and happiness; so the head of the body politic, that is the king, in concert with the Parliament, can alone maintain the union of the members of this Empire, lately so flourishing, and prevent civil war by obviating all the evils produced by variety of opinions and diversity of interests. And so firm is my persuasion of this that I fully believe the most cruel war which Great Britain could make upon us would be that of not making any; and that the surest means of bringing us back to her obedience would be that of employing none. For the dread of the English arms, once removed, provinces would rise up against provinces and cities against cities; and we shall be seen to turn against ourselves the arms we have taken up to combat the common enemy.

Insurmountable necessity would then compel us to resort to the tutelary authority which we should have rashly abjured, and, if it consented to receive us again under its aegis, it would be no longer as free citizens but as slaves. Still inexperienced and in our infancy, what proof have we given of our ability to walk without a guide?

...Our union with England...is no less necessary to procure us, with foreign powers, that condescension and respect which is so essential to the prosperity of our commerce, to the enjoyment of any consideration, and to the accomplishment of any enterprise....From the moment when our separation shall take place, everything will assume a contrary direction. The nations will accustom themselves to look upon us with disdain; even the pirates of Africa and Europe will fall upon our vessels, will massacre our seamen, or lead them into a cruel and perpetual slavery....

Independence, I am aware, has attractions for all mankind; but I am maintaining that, in the present quarrel, the friends of independence are the promoters of slavery, and that those who desire to separate would but render us more dependent....to change the condition of English subjects for that of slaves to the whole world is a step that could only be counseled by insanity....

But here I am interrupted and told that no one questions the advantages which America derived at first from her conjunction with England; but that the new pretensions of the ministers have changed all, have subverted all. If I should deny that....I should deny not only what is the manifest truth but even what

I have so often advanced and supported. But is there any doubt that it already feels a secret repentance? These arms, these soldiers it prepares against us are not designed to establish tyranny upon our shores but to vanquish our obstinacy, and to compel us to subscribe to conditions or accommodation.

...To pretend to reduce us to an absolute impossibility of resistance, in cases of oppression, would be, on their part, a chimerical project [But only] an uninterrupted succession of victories and of triumphs could alone constrain England to acknowledge American independence; which, whether we can expect, whoever knows the instability of fortune can easily judge.

If we have combated successfully at Lexington and at Boston, Quebec and all Canada have witnessed our reverses. Everyone sees the necessity of opposing the extraordinary pretensions of the ministers; but does everybody see also that of fighting for independence?

....By substituting a total dismemberment to the revocation of the laws we complain of, we should fully justify the ministers; we should merit the infamous name of rebels, and all the British nation would arm, with an unanimous impulse, against those who, from oppressed and complaining subjects, should have become all at once irreconcilable enemies. The English cherish the liberty we defend; they respect the dignity of our cause; but they will blame, they will detest our recourse to independence, and will unite with one consent to combat us.

The propagators of the new doctrine are pleased to assure us that, out of jealousy toward England, foreign sovereigns will lavish their succors upon us, as if these sovereigns could sincerely applaud rebellion; as if they had not colonies, even here in America, in which it is important for them to maintain obedience and tranquility. . . under the most benevolent pretexts they will despoil us of our territories, they will invade our fisheries and obstruct our navigation, they will attempt our liberty and our privileges. We shall learn too late what it costs to trust those European flatteries, and to place that confidence in inveterate enemies which has been withdrawn from long tried friends.

There are many persons who, to gain their ends, extol the advantages of a republic over monarchy. I will not here undertake to examine which of these two forms of government merits the preference. I know, however, that the English nation, after having tried them both, has never found repose except in monarchy. I know, also, that in popular republics themselves, so necessary is monarchy to cement human society, it has been requisite to institute monarchical powers Nor should I here omit an observation, the truth of which appears to me incontestable- the English constitution seems to be the fruit of the experience of all anterior time, in which monarchy is so tempered that the monarch finds himself checked in his efforts to seize absolute power; and the authority of the people is so regulated that anarchy is not to be feared. But for us it is to be apprehended that, when the counterpoise of monarchy shall no longer exist, the democratic power may carry all before it and involve the whole state in confusion and ruin. Then an ambitious citizen may arise, seize the reins of power, and annihilate liberty forever....

"Speech of John Dickinson of Pennsylvania, Favoring a Condition of Union with England, Delivered, July 1, 1776," *Principles and Acts of the Revolution in America*, ed. Hezekiah Niles (Baltimore, 1822), 493-495.