

John Hart, born a common colonist in Hopewell, New Jersey, built his legacy through his remarkable accomplishments within the Second Continental Congress. Despite his upbringing giving him an ordinary life as a farmer and businessman, his bravery and passion for independence lead him to hold a multitude of positions representing his fellow colonists, often with an underlying theme of peace and justice. With his ideas gaining traction throughout New Jersey, he was eventually elected to be one of the five brave men from the colony to put his livelihood on the line and become the thirteenth signer of the Declaration of Independence.

As the list of grievances against the King of Great Britain grew larger, I feel the grievance of “imposing taxes on us without our consent,” resonated with Hart deeply. Always having been a strong advocate for his peers, Hart’s background as a common farmer allowed him to sympathize and support those most affected. With Great Britain imposing outrageous taxes on the colonists, young America dealt with severe economic hardships and disadvantages that lit the spark within our founding fathers’ minds. With the Stamp Act, the Tea Act, and the Sugar Act driving these negative impacts, Hart personally took initiative in fighting this taxation, becoming elected to a committee that specifically protested the Tea Act. His ambition did not stop here because this grievance on the Declaration of Independence was fully supported by Hart, as he committed his life to bounding this document. Having first hand experience encountering these taxes, I believe that Hart’s deeply rooted patriotism and frustration sprouted from his own life, only fueling his determination to make a change in the colonies.

After the Declaration of Independence had been presented publicly to the colonists, many other grievances resonated with groups of individuals that were particularly affected by the King’s reign over the colonies. Specifically, I feel that the grievance, “he has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people and eat out their substance” resonated with the vast majority of colonists due to the extent of its impacts on individuals’ well-being. When the King of Great Britain significantly increased the amount of officers in the colonies, his only means to pay for their wages would be through increasing the amount of taxes collected from the colonists. Because the King used the colonists’ money in order to pay the unwelcome “swarms of officers,” I believe that they felt incredibly exploited and

frustrated with him. Since this affected every tax-payer in the colonies, as well as those who had to encounter the growing number of officers lining their streets, I feel that this grievance resonated most with the public.

However, some of these grievances were not viewed as heavily as others, specifically those pertaining to American law-makers. For example, the grievance, “he has called together legislative bodies... for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures,” would not have resonated with the common colonists throughout America, as they did not have firsthand experience with the exhaustive measures that the King took to sway the legislature. Because of this, I feel that the colonists more specifically focused their support toward grievances that they had personally witnessed, including that “he has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.” This highlighted the King’s forceful acts of harm and tyranny over the colonists rather than focusing on the small number of colonists involved in government procedures.

Although I understand the significance of each grievance written in the Declaration of Independence, because my passion for justice mirrors that of the signers, I feel that the grievance, “for depriving us in many cases, of the benefit of Jury trial,” resonates with me most sincerely. With the United States of America being built upon the fundamentals of justice and fairness, especially in a court of law, this grievance most directly calls attention to the King’s failure to provide measures to protect the well-being of all colonists. As trial by jury is now guaranteed, if this were to occur in contemporary society, I would feel betrayed and belittled by the government. This would directly change my behaviors and trajectory of my life, as I would be called upon to fight for a change in law and a government that protects its people to the best of its ability.

Overall, John Hart and the Signers’ passion for independence was an inspiration for all colonists in America and continues to inspire me each and every day. His bravery and willingness to risk his property, money, and life in order to fight for the next generation of Americans has served as a foundation for modern day patriots as they continue to protect our rights and freedoms. Along with this, his undying support for the grievances that resonated with both him and the colonists made him a key factor in establishing independence. Without his contribution to the Declaration of Independence, our nation would not be the extraordinary democracy it is today.

