

To me, the Declaration of Independence was a fascinating event because of its ironies. The Declaration was meant to assert the rights of the people, but not everyone under the umbrella term of “the people” fully agreed with its goals. Among them was my ancestor, Richard Stockton. He was more moderate, and more inclined to respect the letter of the law than to usurp it in the dramatic fashion suggested by Thomas Jefferson and other delegates. In the end, he found that the law had been corrupted in ways he simply could not agree to uphold, so when August came after the July adoption of the document, he signed it, launching a new era of history.

Richard Stockton came to Pennsylvania as a delegate of New Jersey, and as New Jersey’s Supreme Court Justice. When Jefferson laid out the grievances leveled against King George III, the ones that were most likely to resonate with Stockton were the ones that illustrated the breaches in law that had been committed by the monarchy. After being educated as a lawyer at what is now known as Princeton University, Stockton became a Justice. This is not a title given to someone with no respect for the law as written. The grievances that discuss the Administration of Justice were likely the ones that Stockton was most passionate about, and most willing to support. He also probably signed due to certain words that appear in the shorter grievances, like the one that states King George is a tyrant because he imposed taxes “without our consent.” The addition of the last three words were the ones that Stockton must have believed most fiercely, as he wanted the colonies to have a say in parliament. He wanted the representation so consent could feasibly be given. He did not want to completely overhaul the system, but he wanted a say in it. The Declaration of Independence demanded this say, which would have appealed to Stockton as a man that worked to uphold the law as a Justice.

The people are another story. While Stockton probably appreciated the without consent segment, the people most likely were more drawn to the complaint about imposed taxes. Economics can be a huge driving factor in how people make their decisions, both then and now. Voting men saw these taxes as a rude imposition, and their livelihood was being threatened by their implementation. Stockton, as a well-educated and well-off man, may have seldom agreed to the concerns of the people, but both him and voting men saw King George’s actions as an invasion of their rights.

As a female student that will be attending a university in a city and state that did not even exist during this time, I have a different opinion, and different points of this historic document

resonate with me. Due to my experience as an AP Language and Composition student, I know that rhetoric was crucial in tumultuous times. The choices that authors make can make the difference between radical ideas and sound arguments. I read through the grievances and analyzed one in particular for its rhetorical choices. The third grievance on Jefferson's list describes the refusal of the Crown to pass laws until the colonies disbanded their assemblies. He adds that this right is "inestimable" to the people, and "formidable to tyrants only."

I find this addition to be interesting, as it calls King George a tyrant in a more subtle way. Since the colonial opinion at the time was not entirely for independence, its indirect reference serves to persuade others that the work they are seeing done by the monarchy may not be the work of a monarch, but a tyrant. It does not outright describe him as one, but it presents a case that he is exhibiting the traits of an autocratic ruler. Considering the audience that this document was presented to, this choice is a smart one. It is also one of the ways that my opinion might differ from Stockton. While he was a moderate that was reluctant to call the monarchy out on its violations, I would not have been so willing to settle for representation in parliament. I believe in the consent of the governed, and I believe that when it is breached, it is the right of the people—all of the people—to stand up for their own rights.