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John Ferling. *Independence: The Struggle to set America Free*. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2011.

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Jim Dick

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There have been many books published dealing with the causes and events that led to why the American colonies declared their independence from Great Britain. Many people often think it was inevitable that America declared its independence when in truth it was anything but that. There is ample evidence that a large group of people throughout the colonies and even in the Second Continental Congress that were in favor of reconciliation with Great Britain even as late as May 1776. The battles within Independence Hall between those that favored reconciliation and independence are not so well known, and that story is just as important to the early years of the Revolutionary era as those of Lexington and Concord, Bunker Hill, and the siege of Boston.

John Ferling tells the story of how the interests of the colonies and their delegates to Congress changed from reconciliation to independence. He also illustrates the anxiety the issue of independence caused for the Americans before they made the fateful leap of faith from being colonies of the British Empire to states of a new nation. Ferling, a professor emeritus of history at the University of West Georgia uses his extensive knowledge of the Revolutionary period to great effect in *Independence*. His use of biographical vignettes explaining the delegate's view on the issues at hand is a masterful stroke, which keeps the reader engrossed in the narrative. When coupled with the small details, he shows the delegates as men who reached their final decision over months of deliberation, not as a kneejerk reaction.

Ferling describes the struggle of those who favored independence versus those favoring reconciliation as an ongoing debate that was heavily dependent upon events outside Philadelphia. *Independence* reveals that the decisions were anything but inevitable until both the common people and their representatives reached the same conclusion regarding their futures. By placing the struggle as that between men and their ideas and interests, he removes it from a series of events to that of how the personal interaction of the delegates was just as important to the process. The end result is a book that adds to our understanding of how those men came to the decisions they reached when they cast the fateful vote on July 2, 1776.