

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE



The American Revolution was really three related series of events:

- 1) A revolution in values and political thought, specifically linked to the Enlightenment.
- 2) A series of escalating political events following the Seven Years War.
- 3) A war for independence.



The *Declaration of Independence* has become the symbol of all of these events.

IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America,

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.—That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such Principles and organizing its Powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly we experienced both these, that mankind are more inclined to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.—Such has been the patient Sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The History of the present King of Great Britain is a History of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the Establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.— He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation, till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.— He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of People, unless those People would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only.— He has called together legislative Bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the Residences of their Public Representatives, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them by long Sittings.— He has refused to assent to their Petitions, nor to relieve them from compliance with his measures.— He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the People.— He has refused for a long time after such Dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative Powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large, the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of Despotism, from without, and convulsions within.— He has endeavored to prevent the Population of these States, for that purpose obstructing the Commerce between them and the most fertile Part of the World.— He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary Powers.— He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their Offices, and the amount and Payment of their Salaries.— He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither Swarms of Officers to harass our People, and eat out their Substance.— He has kept among us in Times of Peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our Legislature.— He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil Power.— He has combined with them to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our Constitution, and unacknowledged by our Laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation:— For quartering large Bodies of armed Troops among us:— For exercising them, by mock Trials, from Punishment for any Offences which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:— For taking away our Charters, and altering our fundamental Laws:— For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an empire and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies.— For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:— For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with Powers to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.— He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.— He has plundered our Seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our Towns, and destroyed the Lives of our People.— He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to complete the works of Death, Desolation and Tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & Opprobrium fully justified in the most barbarous Ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized Nation.— He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the Soldiers of their enemies, and to fall thus by their Swords.— He has excited domestic Contentions among us, and has endeavored to bring on the Inhabitants of our frontiers the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of Warfare, is an undistinguished Destruction, of all age, Sex and Condition.— In every Stage of these Oppressions we have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble Manner:— Our repeated Petitions have been answered by insult and Injury.— A Prince whose Character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free People.

Not have we been wanting in attention to our British Brethren.— We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their Legislatures to enact an unwarrantable Jurisdiction over us.— We have reminded them of the Circumstances of our emigration, and settlement here.— We have appealed to their native Justice and Magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the Ties of our common Kindred to disavow these usurpations, which would inevitably interrupt our Connections and Correspondence.— They too have been deaf to the Voice of Justice and of Reason.— We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace, and in Alliance.

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the Rectitude of our Intentions, do, in the Name and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be free and Independent States; that they are absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political Connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of Right do.— And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the Protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.

<p>John Hancock</p> <p>John Adams</p> <p>Samuel Adams</p> <p>John Jay</p> <p>John Dickinson</p> <p>Richard Stockton</p> <p>George Wythe</p> <p>Richard Henry Lee</p> <p>Thomas Jefferson</p> <p>Benjamin Harrison</p> <p>Thomas Mifflin</p> <p>Charles Carroll</p>	<p>John Hancock</p> <p>John Adams</p> <p>Samuel Adams</p> <p>John Jay</p> <p>John Dickinson</p> <p>Richard Stockton</p> <p>George Wythe</p> <p>Richard Henry Lee</p> <p>Thomas Jefferson</p> <p>Benjamin Harrison</p> <p>Thomas Mifflin</p> <p>Charles Carroll</p>	<p>John Hancock</p> <p>John Adams</p> <p>Samuel Adams</p> <p>John Jay</p> <p>John Dickinson</p> <p>Richard Stockton</p> <p>George Wythe</p> <p>Richard Henry Lee</p> <p>Thomas Jefferson</p> <p>Benjamin Harrison</p> <p>Thomas Mifflin</p> <p>Charles Carroll</p>	<p>John Hancock</p> <p>John Adams</p> <p>Samuel Adams</p> <p>John Jay</p> <p>John Dickinson</p> <p>Richard Stockton</p> <p>George Wythe</p> <p>Richard Henry Lee</p> <p>Thomas Jefferson</p> <p>Benjamin Harrison</p> <p>Thomas Mifflin</p> <p>Charles Carroll</p>	<p>John Hancock</p> <p>John Adams</p> <p>Samuel Adams</p> <p>John Jay</p> <p>John Dickinson</p> <p>Richard Stockton</p> <p>George Wythe</p> <p>Richard Henry Lee</p> <p>Thomas Jefferson</p> <p>Benjamin Harrison</p> <p>Thomas Mifflin</p> <p>Charles Carroll</p>
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July 4, 1776:

The *Declaration of Independence* has a clear structure:

Part 1: Principles that are (or should be) true for all people and their relationships to government.

Part 2: A list of **grievances** with the King (all of the ways that the King has violated Part 1).

Part 3: Conclusion

(Since Part 1 is true, Part 2 is true, and attempts to reconcile failed, independence is the only proper course of action).

Part 1: Principles that are (or should be) true for all people and their relationships to government.

These principles clearly reference the ideas of Voltaire, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau:

“all men are created equal”

Governments derive their authority **“from the consent of the governed”**

“it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government”

Part 2: A list of **grievances** with the King
(all of the ways that the King has violated Part 1).

All of these complaints are references to actual historical events. For example, this portion references the various sections of the Coercive Acts:

“For Quartering large bodies of armed troops among us...

For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders..

For cutting of our Trade with all parts of the World...”

Part 3: Conclusion

(Since Part 1 is true, Part 2 is true, and attempts to reconcile failed, independence is the only proper course of action):

“We have warned them...we have appealed to their native justice...They too have been deaf to the voice of justice...

We, therefore...solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are...Free and Independent States.”

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When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such Principles, and organizing its Powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly we experience that Governments have been suffered to pass many a storm with a more patient bearing than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security. 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He has called together legislative Bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their Public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures. He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the People. He has refused for a long time after such Dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative Powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large, whose State remains in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of Oppression from without, and convulsions within. He has endeavoured to prevent the Population of these States, for that purpose obstructing the Law for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to accept others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Land. He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary Powers. He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their Offices, and the amount and Payment of their Salaries. He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither Swarms of Officers to harass our People, and eat out their Substance. He has kept among us in Times of Peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our Legislature. He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil Power. He has combined with them to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our Constitution, and unacknowledged by our Laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation: For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us; For exercising them, by mock Trials, from Punishment for any Offences which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States; For imposing us Taxes without our Consent; For depriving us in many cases of the benefit of Trial by Jury; For transporting us beyond Seas to trial for pretended Offences; For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an arbitrary government, and enlarging it's Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies; For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments; For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with Powers to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever. 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Among the key portions of the *Declaration* removed by Congress was a grievance related to slavery:

“he has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life & liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither.

This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of infidel powers, is the warfare of the Christian king of Great Britain, determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought & sold...**He is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us,** and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them, by murdering the people for whom he also obtruded them thus paying off former crimes committed against the liberties of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the lives of another.”

This grievance **accused the King of a crime against “humanity itself” in the form of slavery.**

It also chastised the King for “Dunmore’s Proclamation.”

Removed to placate southerners.

Jefferson made clear his understanding that slavery was a **moral abomination.**

