

The Declaration of Independence



Date ★ July 4, 1776

Place ★ Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Type of Source ★ Government Document

Author ★ Second Continental Congress, drafted by Thomas Jefferson with John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman, and Richard Livingston

Context ★ After the French were driven out of North America in 1763, the British government increased control over the colonies. Protests erupted into war in 1775. In 1776, the Second Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration proclaimed that the colonies were no longer under British rule and explained why the separation was necessary.

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 all experience **hath shewn**, that mankind are more disposed 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.

dissolve
discontinue

station
status

impel
motivate or force

self-evident
requiring no proof

endowed
awarded

unalienable
fundamental

Prudence
sound judgment

transient
temporary

hath shewn
has shown

usurpations
seizing by force

invariably
without any change

evinces
demonstrates

Despotism
dictatorship

sufferance
endurance

Tyranny
unlimited power

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 **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 for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and **convulsions** within.

He has **endeavoured** to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for **Naturalization** of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations **hither**, and raising the conditions of new **Appropriations** of Lands.

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 harrass [sic] our people, and eat out their substance.

He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.

He has **affected** to **render** the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power.

He has combined with others 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 protecting them, by a **mock Trial**, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:

For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:

assent
approval

relinquish
give up

inestimable
immeasurable

depository
storehouse

fatiguing
tiring

compliance
agreement

dissolutions
break-ups

Annihilation
elimination

convulsions
disturbances

endeavoured
attempted

naturalization
citizenship

hither
here

Appropriations
allotments

tenure
term

affected
acted

render
make

jurisdiction
administration

quartering
housing

mock trial
a trial conducted only for show

For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:

For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury:

For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences [sic]:

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 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 power 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 & **perfidy** scarcely paralleled 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 executioners of their friends and **Brethren**, or to fall themselves by their Hands.

He has excited domestic **insurrections** amongst us, and has **endeavoured** to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an **undistinguished** destruction of all ages, sexes and **conditions**.

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for **Redress** in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated 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.

Nor have We been **wanting** in attentions to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend 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 **consanguinity**. 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 Friends.

neighbouring Province

refers to Quebec

Arbitrary

totalitarian

Charters

colonies' founding laws

abdicated

abandoned

plundered

looted

Mercenaries

hired soldiers

complete

complete

desolation

ruin

perfidy

betrayal

barbarous

uncivilized

constrained

forced

Brethren

family

insurrections

uprisings

endeavoured

sought

undistinguished

unrestrained

conditions

ranks

Redress

remedy

wanting

lacking

unwarrantable

unjustified

emigration

leaving a country

magnanimity

generosity

conjured

made requests to

kindred, consanguinity

family ties

disavow

deny

acquiesce in

give in to

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.

— *John Hancock*

New Hampshire: Josiah Bartlett, William Whipple, Matthew Thornton

Massachusetts: John Hancock, Samuel Adams, John Adams, Robert Treat Paine, Elbridge Gerry

Rhode Island: Stephen Hopkins, William Ellery

Connecticut: Roger Sherman, Samuel Huntington, William Williams, Oliver Wolcott

New York: William Floyd, Philip Livingston, Francis Lewis, Lewis Morris

New Jersey: Richard Stockton, John Witherspoon, Francis Hopkinson, John Hart, Abraham Clark

Pennsylvania: Robert Morris, Benjamin Rush, Benjamin Franklin, John Morton, George Clymer, James Smith, George Taylor, James Wilson, George Ross

Delaware: Caesar Rodney, George Read, Thomas McKean

Maryland: Samuel Chase, William Paca, Thomas Stone, Charles Carroll of Carrollton

Virginia: George Wythe, Richard Henry Lee, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Harrison, Thomas Nelson, Jr., Francis Lightfoot Lee, Carter Braxton

North Carolina: William Hooper, Joseph Hewes, John Penn

South Carolina: Edward Rutledge, Thomas Heyward, Jr., Thomas Lynch, Jr., Arthur Middleton

Georgia: Button Gwinnett, Lyman Hall, George Walton

rectitude
righteousness

Absolved
released

Allegiance
loyalty

levy
make

Providence
*the creator of the universe;
God*