

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

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 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. 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

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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 harass 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:*

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 offenses:*

*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 compleat 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.*

*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, MATTHEW THORNTON. WM. WHIPPLE, Massachusetts Bay

SAML. ADAMS, ROBT. TREAT PAINE, JOHN ADAMS, ELBRIDGE GERRY. Rhode Island

STEP. HOPKINS, WILLIAM ELLERY.

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ROGER SHERMAN, WM. WILLIAMS, SAM'EL HUNTINGTON, OLIVER WOLCOTT. New York

WM. FLOYD, FRANS. LEWIS, PHIL. LIVINGSTON, LEWIS MORRIS. New Jersey

RICHD. STOCKTON, JOHN HART, JNO. WITHERSPOON, ABRA. CLARK. FRAS. HOPKINSON,
Pennsylvania

ROBT. MORRIS, JAS. SMITH, BENJAMIN RUSH, GEO. TAYLOR, BENJA. FRANKLIN, JAMES
WILSON, JOHN MORTON, GEO. ROSS. GEO. CLYMER, Delaware

CAESAR RODNEY, THO. M'KEAN. GEO. READ, Maryland

SAMUEL CHASE, CHARLES CARROLL OF WM. PACA, Carrollton.

THOS. STONE, Virginia

GEORGE WYTHE, THOS. NELSON, jr., RICHARD HENRY LEE, FRANCIS LIGHTFOOT

TH. JEFFERSON, LEE, BENJA. HARRISON, CARTER BRAXTON. North Carolina

WM. HOOPER, JOHN PENN. JOSEPH HEWES, South Carolina

THOS. HEYWARD, THOMAS LYNCH, Junr., ARTHUR MIDDLETON.

EDWARD RUTLEDGE, Georgia

BUTTON GWINNETT, GEO. WALTON. LYMAN HALL

NOTE.—Mr. Ferdinand Jefferson, Keeper of the Rolls in the Department
of State, at Washington, says: "The names of the signers
are spelt above as in the fac-simile of the original, but the
punctuation of them is not always the same; neither do the
names of the States appear in the fac-simile of the original. The
names of the signers of each State are grouped together in the
fac-simile of the original, except the name of Matthew Thornton,
which follows that of Oliver Wolcott."