

Thomas Jefferson, The Declaration of Independence

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THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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 shown, 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 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 of Naturalization of
Foreigners;
refusing to pass others to encourage their migration 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 offences:

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 of 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 attention 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 the 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.

Button Gwinnett
Lyman Hall
George Walton

William Hooper
Joseph Hewes
John Penn

Edward Rutledge
Thomas Heyward, Jr.
Thomas Lunch, Jr.
Arthur Middleton

John Hancock

Samuel Chase
William Paca
Thomas Stone
Charles Carroll of Carrollton

George Wythe
Richard Henry Lee
Thomas Jefferson
Benjamin Harrison
Thomas Nelson, Jr.
Francis Lightfoot Lee

Carter Braxton

Robert Morris

Benjamin Rush

Benjamin Franklin

John Morton

George Clymer

James Smith

George Taylor

James Wilson

George Ross

Caesar Rodney

George Read

Thomas McKean

William Floyd

Philip Livingston

Francis Lewis

Lewis Morris

Richard Stockton

John Witherspoon

Francis Hopkinson

John Hart

Abraham Clark

Josiah Bartlett

William Whipple

Samuel Adams

John Adams

Robert Treat Paine

Elbridge Gerry

Stephen Hopkins

William Ellery

Roger Sherman

Samuel Huntington
William Williams
Oliver Wolcott