

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE (1776)

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On July 4, 1776, the United States officially declared its independence from the British Empire when the Second Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration was authored by a "Committee of Five"—John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Robert Livingston, and Roger Sherman—with Jefferson as the main drafter. But Jefferson himself later admitted that he was merely looking to reflect the "mind of Americans"—bringing together the core principles at the heart of the American Revolution. The Declaration also included a list of grievances against King George III, explaining to the world why the American colonies were separating from Great Britain. The American Revolution ended with the Battle of Yorktown in 1781 and the Treaty of Paris in 1783. A little over two decades after King George III took the throne, the American people had broken from Great Britain and begun a new experiment in republican government.

Excerpt:

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 dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people. . . .
- 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 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 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:

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Module 2: Principles of the American Revolution

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- 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 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 and perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation. . . .

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. .

. . .

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.