

Annotated text of the Declaration

The text of the Declaration of Independence can be divided into five sections: the *Introduction*, the *Preamble*, the *Indictment of George III*, the *Denunciation* of the British people, and the *Conclusion*.^[8] (Note that these five headings are not part of the text of the document.)

<p>Introduction</p> <p>These principles show why independence is a necessity.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">In CONGRESS, July 4, 1776.</p> <p>The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen United States of America,</p> <p>1 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 <i>Laws of Nature</i> 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.</p>
<p>Preamble</p> <p>Outlines a general philosophy of government that makes revolution justifiable.^[9]</p>	<p>2 We hold these truths to be <i>self-evident</i>, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed, by their Creator, with certain <i>unalienable Rights</i>, that among these are <i>Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness</i>.</p> <p><i>Enlightenment thinkers – Voltaire, Rousseau, Locke, Diderot</i> <i>Social Contract -</i></p> <p>That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the <i>consent of the governed</i>,</p> <p>3 That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the <i>Right of the People to alter or abolish it</i>, 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 <i>Safety and Happiness</i>.</p> <p>4 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. <i>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.</i></p>
<p>Indictment</p> <p>A bill of particulars documenting the king's "repeated</p>	<p>5 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 <i>King of Great Britain</i> 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 the Facts be submitted to a candid world.</p>

<p>injuries and usurpations" of the Americans' rights and liberties. ^[10]</p>		
<p>Instructions</p>	<p>Choose 5 grievances below that would help you prove colonists were or were not justified in fighting for their rights and put them in your own words and place in your notebook. These 5 choices will help you with the essay you will have to write after we discuss how the colonists gained their independence. When you are asked to put the grievances in your own words, use the ISPICE Cheat Sheet to help summarize the grievances in your own words.</p>	
	<p><i>DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE</i></p>	<p>MEANING</p>
<p><i>He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.</i></p>	<p>1 Colonial laws had to be approved by the British monarch, and Parliament could ban colonial initiatives. For example, the king blocked several colonies' attempts to tax the slave trade, and Parliament banned colonies from printing their own paper money, which colonists felt was essential to their commercial vitality</p>	
<p><i>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.</i></p>	<p>2 In several instances, the king instructed royal governors to block pending colonial legislation (lawmaking). At times, months or years would pass before the king addressed a colonial enactment, if ever.</p>	
<p><i>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.</i></p>	<p>3 The British officials feared large legislative bodies as conservative and democratic, so they sought to restrict their growth. This restriction left many new frontier communities poorly represented in their colonial assemblies.</p>	
<p><i>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.</i></p>	<p>4 In punishment for their resistance to British authority, the assemblies of Massachusetts, Virginia, and South Carolina were ordered for periods of time to assemble at a site other than their normal meeting places where all their critical papers and records were kept</p>	
<p>(5) He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness of his invasions on the rights of the people.</p>	<p>5 By 1776, nearly all the colonial assemblies had been dissolved at some point, for weeks or months, due to their stands against British authority.</p>	

	<p><i>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.</i></p>	<p>6 With their assemblies dissolved and unable to elect new representatives, colonists were in effect without local government.</p>
	<p><i>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.</i></p>	<p>7 King George III considered limiting emigration to the colonies of non-British Europeans, especially Germans, partly because they would not bring with them a traditional allegiance to the Crown. Americans, however, valued the increase of independent settlers (rather than of freed prisoners from British jails). In addition, the king in 1763 had virtually banned American settlement in the Ohio River Valley, a region long coveted by the expanding colonies (the ban was lifted in 1768).</p>
	<p><i>He has obstructed the Administration of Justice by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary Powers.</i></p>	<p>8 From 1773 to 1776 North Carolina had no superior courts due to a tie between its assembly and the governor over the assembly's insistence on allowing "attachments" (similar to garnishment) to seize British debtors' property, a practice banned by Parliament.</p>
	<p><i>He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.</i></p>	<p>9 In 1767 the king removed one essential power of the colonies—paying the salaries of royal officials. Without the "power of the purse," the assemblies could wield little influence over governors, judges, customs commissioners, and other British officials.</p>
	<p><i>He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people and eat out their substance.</i></p>	<p>10 Of the new offices created after 1763, the most unpopular were the British customs agents (tax collectors) who arrived in 1767 with expanded authority to conduct searches of ships and warehouses for goods smuggled into the colonies (a practice, long ignored by Britain, to avoid British import taxes). [The 1789 Bill of Rights bans "unreasonable searches and seizures" (Fourth Amendment).]</p>
	<p><i>He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.</i></p>	<p>11 In 1768 the first British troops sent to the colonies for the sole purpose of enforcing British authority arrived in Boston. The escalating hostility led to the Boston Massacre of 1770 and other violent confrontations.</p>

	<p><i>He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil Power.</i></p>	<p>12 In 1774 the British appointed a general, Thomas Gage, to double as the civil governor of Massachusetts. This offended the Patriots, who wanted a strict separation of the military and civil authority. [The U.S. Constitution assigns the role of commander-in-chief of the military forces to a civil official, the President.]</p>
	<p><i>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:</i></p>	<p>13 After 1763, the king agreed to laws of Parliament that many colonists considered illegitimate, coercive, and punitive (“pretended legislation”), one creating a new colonial Board of Trade (a “jurisdiction foreign to our Constitution”) that enforced new trade laws and taxes.</p>
	<p>(14) For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:</p>	<p>14 In 1764 Parliament required the colonial assemblies to provide funds for food, drink, provisions, and housing (in unoccupied buildings) for British troops in America. [The 1789 Bill of Rights places strict limits on the government’s authority to house soldiers in private dwellings (Third Amendment).]</p>
	<p>(15) For protecting them, by a mock Trial from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States: Boston Massacre</p>	<p>15 In 1774 Parliament authorized that British soldiers accused of murder could be sent to Britain for trial instead of being tried in America with a jury of colonists.</p>
	<p>(16) For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:</p>	<p>16 In 1774, Parliament closed the port of Boston and in 1775, with the outbreak of war, ordered the total blockade of American shipping.</p>
	<p>(17) For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:</p>	<p>17 “Taxation without representation” became a rallying cry against British rule. In 1765 Parliament began imposing direct taxes on the colonies, which had no elected representation in Parliament. [In the U.S. Constitution, money-related bills must begin in the House of Representatives which is directly elected by the people (as is the Senate since 1913, when the 17th Amendment ended senatorial election by state legislatures).]</p>

	<p><i>For depriving us in many cases, of the benefit of Trial by Jury:</i></p>	<p>18 New colonial courts created in 1768 provided for trials of accused smugglers with no jury—the judge alone delivering the verdict—thus removing a right long valued by British subjects. [The 1789 Bill of Rights guarantees trial by jury and other due process rights.]</p>
	<p><i>For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences:</i></p>	<p>19 In 1772, after colonists attacked the Gaspée, a British ship patrolling for smugglers, Parliament held that Americans suspected of crimes against the Crown could be transported to Britain for trial. [The 1789 Bill of Rights guarantees that an accused’s trial be held “in the state and district” where the crime was committed.]</p>
	<p><i>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</i></p>	<p>20 In 1774, Parliament allowed French civil law and official religion (Roman Catholicism) to be maintained in Quebec, Canada, and extended its boundaries to include the Ohio River Valley. The Patriots disliked Catholicism as an authoritarian faith, and they resented the loss of western lands to a province that lacked an elected assembly.</p>
	<p><i>For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:</i></p>	<p>21 In 1774 Parliament revoked the 1691 charter for the colonial government of Massachusetts. That one-sided cancelation infuriated the Patriots as a complete control of power in the hands of Parliament.</p>
	<p><i>For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.</i></p>	<p>22 In 1766, on the same day Parliament repealed the Stamp Act, it passed the Declaratory Act, sternly reminding the colonies that it held supreme authority to legislate for them “in all cases whatsoever.”</p>
	<p><i>He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.</i></p>	<p>23 By waging war on the colonies, the king withdrew his promise to protect his subjects and gave up his authority to govern them.</p>
	<p><i>He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.</i></p>	<p>24 Since the Battle of Lexington and Concord in April 1775 (over a year before the Declaration of Independence was adopted), the British had destroyed Norfolk, Virginia, Charlestown, Massachusetts, and Falmouth, Massachusetts (now Portland, Maine).</p>
	<p><i>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.</i></p>	<p>25 King George III arranged with German princes to send soldiers to fight for Britain in the Revolution, a move deeply resented by Patriots fighting for independence. Up to 30,000 “Hessian mercenaries” fought in the war.</p>

	<p><i>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.</i></p>	<p>26 With the outbreak of war in 1775, Britain permitted the “impressment” (taking) of Americans on captured ships, whereby they were forced to serve in the British navy against the Patriots.</p>
	<p><i>(27) 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.</i></p>	<p>27 In late 1775 the governor of Virginia offered freedom to slaves who would fight with the British, leading to numerous rumors of British-incited slave revolts (“domestic insurrections”) in the southern colonies. Royal governors also incited Indian attacks on backcountry settlers.</p>
	<p><i>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.</i></p>	
<p>Denunciation</p> <p>This section essentially finished the case for independence. The conditions that justified revolution have been shown. ^[11]</p>	<p><i>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.</i></p>	
<p>Conclusion</p> <p>The signers assert that there exist conditions under which people must change their government, that the British have produced such conditions, and by necessity the colonies must</p>	<p>6 <i>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.</i></p>	

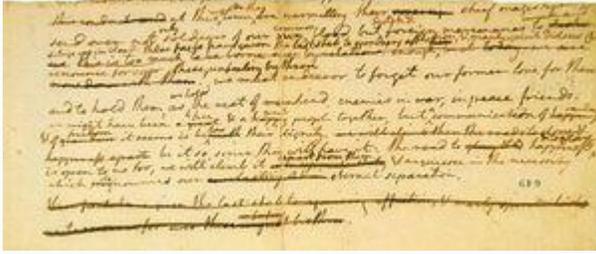
throw off political ties with the British Crown and become independent states. The conclusion contains, at its core, the [Lee Resolution](#) that had been passed on [July 2](#).

Signatures

The first and most famous signature on the engrossed copy was that of John Hancock, President of the Continental Congress. Two future presidents, [Thomas Jefferson](#) and [John Adams](#), were among the signatories. [Edward Rutledge](#) (age 26), was the youngest signer, and [Benjamin Franklin](#) (age 70) was the oldest signer. The fifty-six signers of the Declaration represented the new states as follows (from North to South):^[12]

- *New Hampshire*: [Josiah Bartlett](#), [William Whipple](#), [Matthew Thornton](#)
- *Massachusetts*: [Samuel Adams](#), [John Adams](#), [John Hancock](#), [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*: [George Read](#), [Caesar Rodney](#), [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](#)

[edit] Differences between draft and final versions



Fragment of an early draft of the Declaration

The Declaration went through three stages from conception to final adoption:

1. Jefferson's original draft.^[13]
2. Jefferson's draft with revisions from Franklin and Adams.^[14] This was the document submitted by the [Committee of Five](#) to the Congress.
3. The final version, which included changes made by the full Congress.^[15]

Jefferson's original draft included a denunciation of the [slave trade](#) ("*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.*"), which was later edited out by Congress, as was a lengthy criticism of the English people and parliament. According to Jefferson:

"The pusillanimous idea that we had friends in England worth keeping terms with, still haunted the minds of many. For this reason those passages which conveyed censures on the people of England were struck out, lest they should give them offense."^[16]

[edit] Popular culture

A fictionalized (but generally historically accurate) version of how the Declaration came about is the musical play (and 1972 movie) *1776*, which is usually termed a "musical comedy" but deals frankly with the political issues, especially how disagreement over the institution of slavery almost defeated the Declaration's adoption.

The Declaration of Independence is also the central subject of the 2004 film *National Treasure*, starring [Nicolas Cage](#) and [Diane Kruger](#). In the film, a hidden treasure map on the back of the Declaration leads treasure hunters to a cache of wealth hidden from the British by [Freemasons](#) during the [American Revolutionary War](#).

Anticipating the musical *1776* in a satirical way, [Stan Freberg](#) included a segment about the signing of the Declaration in his album *The United States of America Volume One* to satirize the then-recent "Red Scare". Freberg affected an aged voice to play Franklin, who is skeptical about signing the Declaration document: "You go to a few 'harmless' meetings; sign a few 'harmless' papers; and forget all about it. Years later you wind up in front of a Committee!" Freberg then goes on to sing a song called "A Man Can't Be Too Careful What He Signs These Days".

[edit] Myths

Several myths surround the document:

- Perhaps the biggest misconception about the document is the lack of recognition that the [Lee Resolution](#) had already established the independence declaration on July 2nd.
- Because it is dated *July 4, 1776* (the date of its approval and adoption by the Continental Congress), many people believe it was signed on that date—in fact, most of the delegates signed the Declaration on [August 2, 1776](#).
- While the July 4th Declaration differed from the [Lee Resolution](#) in that it asserted unanimity, the abstaining colony of New York did not pass its own vote for independence until July 9th.
- The famous painting by [John Trumbull](#), which hangs in the Rotunda of the [United States Capitol](#), is (as mentioned in the caption above) usually incorrectly described as the signing of the Declaration, when what it actually shows is the five-man drafting committee presenting its work. Trumbull depicts most of the eventual signers as being present on this occasion, but this gathering never took place.
- The [Liberty Bell](#) was not rung to celebrate independence, as the tower had fallen into disrepair. The Bell was earlier used to call the local inhabitants to public gatherings. Therefore, it certainly did not acquire its crack upon the reading of the document on [July 8](#); that story comes from a children's book of fiction, *Legends of the American Revolution*, by [George Lippard](#). The Liberty Bell was actually named in the early nineteenth century when it became a symbol of the [anti-slavery movement](#).