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.

Natural Rights
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.—

LEFT: Thomas Jefferson
Colonists’ Complaints against the King

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 endeavored 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 legislature.

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\textsuperscript{17} 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 neighboring
Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary\textsuperscript{18} government, and enlarging its
Boundaries so as to render\textsuperscript{19} 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 Legislature, and declaring themselves invested
with Power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.
He has abdicated\textsuperscript{20} 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\textsuperscript{21} to
complete the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with
circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy\textsuperscript{22} scarcely paralleled in the most bar-
barous 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\textsuperscript{23} amongst us, and has endeav-
ored 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\textsuperscript{24} 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\textsuperscript{25} over us. We have reminded them of the cir-
cumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to
their native justice and magnanimity,\textsuperscript{26} and we have conjured\textsuperscript{27} them by
the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which, would
inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have
done deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity.\textsuperscript{28} We must, therefore,
aquiesce\textsuperscript{29} in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold
them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.
An Independent and United Nation

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
President of Massachusetts

GEORGIA
Button Gwinnett
Lyman Hall
George Walton

NORTH CAROLINA
William Hooper
Joseph Hewes
John Penn

SOUTH CAROLINA
Edward Rutledge
Thomas Heyward, Jr.
Thomas Lynch, Jr.
Arthur Middleton

MARYLAND
Samuel Chase
William Paca
Thomas Stone
Charles Carroll of Carrollton

VIRGINIA
George Wythe
Richard Henry Lee

NEW JERSEY
Benjamin Franklin
Thomas Jefferson
Thomas Nelson, Jr.
Francis Lightfoot Lee
Carter Braxton

 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

NEW YORK
William Floyd
Philip Livingston
Francis Lewis
Lewis Morris

NEW JERSEY
Richard Stockton
John Witherspoon
Francis Hopkinson
John Hart
Abraham Clark

NEW HAMPSHIRE
Josiah Bartlett
William Whipple
Matthew Thornton

Massachusetts
Samuel Adams
John Adams
Robert Treat Paine
Elbridge Gerry

RHODE ISLAND
Stephen Hopkins
William Ellery

CONNECTICUT
Roger Sherman
Samuel Huntington
William Williams
Oliver Wolcott

rectitude: rightness

Exploring the Document

On July 4, 1776, Congress adopted the final draft of the Declaration of Independence. A formal copy, written on parchment paper, was signed on August 2, 1776.

From whom did the Declaration's signers receive their authority to declare independence in 1776?

Exploring the Document

The following is part of a passage that the Congress removed from Jefferson's original draft: "He has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither." Why do you think the Congress deleted this passage?
Declaration of Independence (1776)

In 1776, soon after the beginning of the American Revolutionary War, the leaders of the war got together to write a letter to the King of England. They wanted to explain why they were fighting to be their own country, independent of England. This is what they had to say (but in easier words):

Sometimes one group of people decide to split off from another group, and to become an independent country, as the laws of Nature and of God say that they can. But when this happens, if they want other people to respect them, they should explain why they are splitting off.

We think these things are obviously true:

- That all men are created equal
- That all men have some rights given to them by God
- That among these rights are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

So whenever any government is getting in the way of these rights, people have the right to change it or get rid of it, and to make a new government, in whatever way seems most likely to make them safe and happy.

People should not change their government without a good reason, so people usually suffer as long as they can under the government they have, rather than change it. But when there have been a lot of problems for a long time, it is their right and their duty to throw off that government, and to set up a better government.

We here in America have suffered for a very long time, and now we should change our government. The king of England has done many bad things to us - here is a list:
• He won't let us pass laws we need for everybody's good.
• Even when we do pass laws, he won't sign them so they can go into effect.
• He tried to force men to give up their right to make laws.
• He calls men together to make laws in the most inconvenient times and places, so that they won't be able to go discuss the new laws.
• He won't let new settlers come to America, and he won't let the settlers take over new land from the Native Americans.
• He won't let us choose our own judges, and instead he chooses them all himself, so they're all on his side.
• He sends lots of new government officials that we don't want, and he makes us pay for them.
• He sends lots of English soldiers here when there isn't even a war, and makes us let them live in our own houses.
• He tells us these soldiers can do whatever they want and don't have to obey the law.
• He won't let us buy and sell things from wherever we want. We can only buy things from England.
• He makes us pay all kinds of taxes without asking us about it.
• He won't let us have a jury for our trials, only a judge.
• He sends people accused of crimes far away to England for their trials.
• He tries to get people to revolt and tries to get the "Indian Savages" to attack us.

When we ask him to stop, he just keeps on doing more bad things. We have tried to talk to the other people who live in England. We asked them to stop these crimes against us, but they have acted as though they were deaf. So we have to separate from England, and they will be our enemies during the war, though we hope they'll be our friends when there is peace.

So we think that God will see that we are doing the right thing when we declare that the
United States are now completely independent of the King of England. We have no more political connection to England at all. And as independent states, we say that each state has the right to make war, to make peace, to make alliances with other countries, trade with other countries, and do everything else that countries do. And we promise that we will fight for our independence with the help of God - we promise by our lives, our property, and our sacred honor.

Among the men who signed this declaration of independence were Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson. This Declaration of Independence was an exciting letter to write - it laid out a lot of new ideas about the rights that all people should have. On the other hand, all of the people involved in writing the Declaration were rich white men. Even though they thought they themselves should have these rights, they were pretty vague about whether the same rights should apply to poor people, women, black people, or Native Americans - most of the people living in the United States at this time. Representatives of all these groups asked to be included, but in 1776, only rich white Christian men signed the Declaration of Independence. But even though the Declaration of Independence only applied to some people, it was a very important statement of the idea that everybody has rights.