

PRIMARY SOURCE

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

1 IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776

2 The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America

3 When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the

4 political bands which have connected them with another

5 and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws

6 of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind

7 requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

8 We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed

9 by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the

10 pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men,

11 deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of

12 Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to

13 abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and

14 organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and

15 Happiness.

16 Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for

17 light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn that mankind are more

18 disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable than to right themselves by abolishing the forms

19 to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing

20 invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is

21 their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their

22 future security. — Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the

23 necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of

24 the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in

25 direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let

26 Facts be submitted to a candid world.

27 He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.

28 He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and

29 pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained;

30 and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them. He has refused to

31 pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would

32 relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and

33 formidable to tyrants only. He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual,

34 uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their Public Records, for the sole purpose of

35 fatiguing them into compliance with his measures. He has dissolved Representative Houses

36 repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people. He has

37 refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected, whereby the

38 Legislative Powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their

39 exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from

40 without, and convulsions within.

41 He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing

42 the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their

43 migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands. He has

44 obstructed the Administration of Justice by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing

45 Judiciary Powers. He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone for the tenure of their

46 offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries. He has erected a multitude of New

47 Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people and eat out their substance. He

48 has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.

49 He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil Power. He has

50 combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and

51 unacknowledged by our laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation: For
52 quartering large bodies of armed troops among us: For protecting them, by a mock Trial from
53 punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States: For
54 cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world: For imposing Taxes on us without our
55 Consent: For depriving us in many cases, of the benefit of Trial by Jury: For transporting us
56 beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences: For abolishing the free System of English
57 Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging
58 its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same
59 absolute rule into these Colonies; For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable
60 Laws and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments: For suspending our own
61 Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases
62 whatsoever. –

63 He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War
64 against us. He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the
65 lives of our people. He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to
66 compleat the works of death, desolation, and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of
67 Cruelty & Perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the
68 Head of a civilized nation. He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high
69 Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and
70 Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands. He has excited domestic insurrections amongst
71 us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian
72 Savages whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and
73 conditions.

74 In every stage of these Oppressions; We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble
75 terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince, whose

76 character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant,
77 is unfit to be the ruler of a free people. Nor have We been wanting in attentions to our British
78 brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an
79 unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our
80 emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and
81 we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations,
82 which would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been
83 deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the
84 necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind,
85 Enemies in War, in Peace Friends. –

86 We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress,
87 Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our in-
88 -tentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly
89 publish and declare, That these united Colonies are, and of Right ought to be **Free and**
90 **Independent States**, that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that
91 all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally
92 dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude
93 Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which
94 Independent States may of right do. — And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm
95 reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives,
96 our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.

97 New Hampshire:

98 Josiah Bartlett, William Whipple, Matthew Thornton

99 Massachusetts:

100 John Hancock, Samuel Adams, John Adams, Robert Treat Paine, Elbridge Gerry

101 Rhode Island:

102 Stephen Hopkins, William Ellery

103 Connecticut:

104 Roger Sherman, Samuel Huntington, William Williams, Oliver Wolcott

105 New York:

106 William Floyd, Philip Livingston, Francis Lewis, Lewis Morris

107 New Jersey:

108 Richard Stockton, John Witherspoon, Francis Hopkinson, John Hart, Abraham Clark

109 Pennsylvania:

110 Robert Morris, Benjamin Rush, Benjamin Franklin, John Morton, George Clymer, James

111 Smith, George Taylor, James Wilson, George Ross

112 Delaware:

113 Caesar Rodney, George Read, Thomas McKean

114 Maryland:

115 Samuel Chase, William Paca, Thomas Stone, Charles Carroll of Carrollton

116 Virginia:

117 George Wythe, Richard Henry Lee, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Harrison, Thomas Nelson,

118 Jr., Francis Lightfoot Lee, Carter Braxton

119 North Carolina:

120 William Hooper, Joseph Hewes, John Penn

121 South Carolina:

122 Edward Rutledge, Thomas Heyward, Jr., Thomas Lynch, Jr., Arthur Middleton

123 Georgia:

124 Button Gwinnett, Lyman Hall, George Walton