

***The Declaration of Independence* Introduction**

On April 19, 1775 the “shot heard round the world” rang out as the Battles of Lexington and Concord began in Massachusetts. This fighting began what would become the American War for Independence. Initially not looking to separate from the British crown, delegates from the colonies met at the Second Continental Congress to try and take steps to repair their relationship with Great Britain. In 1775, they issued two notable documents: the *Olive Branch Petition* and the *Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms*. Both documents reasserted what they believed were their fundamental rights as British subjects while proposing paths to reconciliation. Both failed in their objectives.

In the early summer of 1776, after more than a year of fighting, Congress approved Virginia delegate Richard Henry Lee’s resolution calling for American independence. The resolution also established the Continental Army, and appointed George Washington, also of Virginian, as Commander-in-Chief of that new army.

In the *Declaration of Independence*, Thomas Jefferson, the primary author and another Virginia delegate, sought to express the ideals and principles that the new nation was to be founded upon. Some of the concepts he highlighted included: natural rights, limited government, the equality of mankind, due process of law, and the rule of law. In a list of 27 grievances, Jefferson outlined all of the ways the King and British Parliament were not acting in ways a good government should. The principles expressed in the *Declaration*, and the revolution for which it was fought, would be remembered and honored when it came time to decide on a form and system of government for the new nation.

The Declaration of Independence Excerpts

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 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. 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 suffering 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 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 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 obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers.

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:

He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.

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;

Retrieved from: <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>