



The Declaration of Independence

“Fair Copy” made by Thomas Jefferson for Richard Henry Lee, 8 July 1776.

The following text is very likely the closest we can come to the so-called “fair copy” that the Committee of Five (Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Robert Livingston, and Roger Sherman) presented to the Second Continental Congress on 28 June 1776. Revisions and corrections were made by the full Congress 2 - 4 July 1776.

Nearly all the work here was originally done by Carl Becker¹ in his famous study of *The Declaration*. Pauline Maier² also used Becker’s text for her own very different study, though she made one small correction.³

Formatting, spelling, punctuation, and Jefferson’s idiosyncratic capitalization (or lack of it) are taken directly from the manuscript he sent to Richard Henry Lee, as reprinted by Julian Boyd⁴ in his study of the text.

¹ Carl Becker, *The Declaration of Independence: A Study in the History of Ideas* (1922), pp. 174 - 184.

² Pauline Maier, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence* (1996), pp. 236 - 241.

³ In the final paragraph Becker has “people or parliament” which is the phrase from the “Rough Draft.” Maier inverts this to “parliament or people” to conform with the Lee manuscript.

⁴ Julian P. Boyd, *The Declaration of Independence: The Evolution of the Text* (1999; originally published 1943), pp. 79 - 84.



A Declaration by the Representatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA in General Congress assembled.

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 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.

We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with *certain un*inherent and inalienable 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 power 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 it's foundation on such principles and organizing it's power 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 & 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, ~~begun at a distinguished period &~~ 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 & to provide new guards for future



security. such has been the patient sufferings of the colonies; & such is now the necessity which constrains them to ^{alter} expunge their former systems of government. the history of the present king of Great Britain is a history of ^{repeated} unremitting injuries and usurpations, among which appears no solitary fact to contradict the uniform tenor of the rest, but all ^{having} have in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states. to prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world, ~~for the truth of which we pledge a faith yet unsullied by falsehood.~~

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 & pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has ^{utterly} neglected ~~utterly~~ 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, & formidable to tyrants only.

he has called together legislative bodies at places usual, uncomfortable, & distant from the depository of their public records for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

he has dissolved Representatives houses repeatedly ~~& continually~~, 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 meantime exposed to all the dangers of invasion from



without, & convulsions within.

he has endeavored to prevent the population of these states; for that purpose obstructing the laws for naturalization for foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither; & raising the conditions of new appropriations of lands:

he has ^{obstructed} ~~suffered~~ the administration of justice ^{by} ~~totally to cease in some of these states,~~ refusing his assent to laws for establishing judiciary powers.

he has made ~~our~~ 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 ~~by a self-assumed power,~~ & 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 ~~and ships of war,~~ without the consent of our legislatures.

he has affected to render the military, independent of, & superior to, the civil power.

he has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitutions and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his assent to their act of pretended legislation

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;



for transporting us beyond seas to be tried for pretended offenses;
for abolishing the free system of English laws in a neighboring province, establishing therein an arbitrary government, and enlarging it's boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these states;

for taking away our charters, abolishing our most valuable laws and altering fundamentally the forms of our governments;

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} ~~withdrawing his governors,~~ and declaring us out of his ~~allegiance and protection.~~ ^{and waging war against us}

he has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns & destroyed the lives of our people.

he is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to compleat the works of death, ^{scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages and totally} desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of cruelty & perfidy ^{unworthy} the head of a civilized nation.

he has ^{excited domestic insurrection amongst us and has} endeavored 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 of existence.

~~he has incited treasonable insurrections of our fellow citizens, with the allurements of forfeiture & confiscation of our property.~~



our fellow citizens

he has constrained ~~others~~, taken captives on the high seas to bear arms against their country, to become executioners of their friends & brethren, or to fall themselves by their hands.

~~he has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating it's most sacred rights of life & 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. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of infidel powers, is the warfare of the Christian king of Great Britain. determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought and sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce and that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished die, he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them, by murdering the people upon whom he also obtruded them: thus paying off former crimes committed against the liberties of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the lives of another.~~

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 people ^{*free*} ~~who mean to be free. future ages will scarce believe that the hardiness of one man, adventured within the short compass of twelve years only, to build a foundation so broad and undisguised for tyranny, over a people fostered and fixed in principles of freedom.~~

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} a jurisdiction over ^{us} these our states. we have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here, ~~no one of which could warrant so strange a pretension: that these were effected at the expense of our own blood and treasure, unassisted by the wealth or the strength of Great Britain: that in constituting indeed our several forms of government, we had adopted one common king, thereby laying a foundation for perpetual league and amity with them: but that submission to their parliament was no part of our constitution, nor ever in idea, if history may be credited: and we appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, as well as to the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations which would inevitably~~ ^{and we have conjured them by} were likely to interrupt our connection ^s & correspondence. they too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity; ~~and when occasions have been given them, by the regular course of their laws, of removing from their councils the disturbers of our harmony, they have by their free election re-established them in power. at this very time too they are permitting their chief magistrate to send over not only soldiers of our common blood, but Scotch and foreign mercenaries to invade and destroy us. these facts have given the last stab to agonizing affection, and manly spirit bids us to renounce forever these unfeeling brethren. we must endeavor to forget our former love for them, and to hold them as we hold the rest of mankind, enemies in war, in peace friends. We might have been a free & a great people together, but a communication of grandeur and of freedom it seems is below their dignity. Be it so, since they will have it, the road to happiness and to glory is open to all of us too; we will climb it apart from them, and acquiesce~~ ^{and bold them, as we bold the rest of mankind,} in the necessity which denounces our eternal separation. ^{enemies in war, in peace friends.}



We therefore the representatives of the United states of America in General Congress
appealing to the supreme judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions
assembled, do, in the name & by authority of the good people of these states, reject and
colonies, solemnly publish and declare, that these united colonies are and of right ought to be free and
renounce all allegiance and subjection to the kings of Great Britain, & all others who may
independent states; that they are absolved from all allegiances to the British Crown, and that
hereafter claim by, through, or under ~~them~~, we utterly dissolve all political connection which may
heretofore have subsisted between ~~us~~ and the ~~parliament or people~~ of Great Britain, and finally
is and ought to be totally dissolved;
~~we do assert and declare these colonies to be free and independent states,~~ & that as free &
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
with a firm reliance on the protection of divine providence,
the support of this declaration, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our
sacred honour.