



In June 1776, the Second Continental Congress appointed a five person committee including Thomas Jefferson to write a document declaring the Colonies' independence from Britain. BY signing the Declaration, a full scale rebellion was launched against Britain, but tension also mounted within the newly formed United States. John Dickinson, one of the Pennsylvania's representatives to the Second Continental Congress, led the conservative opposition to the Declaration and refused to sign the document, alleging that the colonists were not ready for such a fight. In the excerpt from his autobiography below Jefferson explain some of the problem with the original draft of the document by which he was the main author.

From The Autobiography: The Declaration of Independence by Thomas Jefferson

Congress proceeded the same day to consider the Declaration of Independence, which had been reported and laid on the table the Friday preceding, and on Monday referred to a committee of the whole. The **pusillanimous**¹ 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**² on the people of England were struck out, lest they should give them offence. The clause too, **reprobating**³ the enslaving the inhabitants of Africa, was struck out in **complaisance**⁴ to South Carolina and Georgia, who had never attempted to restrain the importation of slaves, and who, on the contrary, still wished to continue it. Our northern brethren also, I believe, felt a little tender under those censures; for though their people had very few slaves themselves, yet they had been pretty considerable carriers of them to others. The debates having taken up the greater parts of the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th days of July, were, on the evening of the last, closed; the Declaration was reported by the committee, agreed to by the House, and signed by every member present, Except Mr. Dickinson. As the sentiments of men are known not only by what they receive but what they reject also, I will state the form of the Declaration as originally reported. A black line drawn under them shall distinguish the parts struck out by Congress; and those inserted by them shall be placed in the margin, or in a concurrent column.

A Declaration by the Representatives of 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 the Powers of the Earth the separate & 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 **inherent and inalienable**⁵ Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, & 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 abolish it, & to institute new Government, laying it's Foundation on such Principles, & organizing it's Powers in such Form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety & Happiness. Prudence indeed will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light & 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 & **Usurpations** begun at a distinguished period

¹ **Pusillanimous**: cowardly; lacking courage

² **Censures**: strong, disapproving criticisms.

³ **Reprobating**: disapproving; condemning

⁴ **Complaisance**: desire to please

⁵ **Despotism**: rule by a tyrant or king with unlimited power

and-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 their future Security. Such has been the patient Sufferance of these Colonies; & such is now the Necessity which constrains them to expunge «**alter**» their former Systems of Government. The History of the present King of Great-Britain is a History of unremitting «**repeated**» Injuries & Usurpations, among which appears no solitary fact to contradict the uniform tenor of the rest but all have «**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 for the truth of which we pledge a faith yet unsullied by falsehood.

He has refused his **Assent**⁶ to Laws, the most wholesome & 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 to pass laws of immediate and pressing importance, and when so suspended in their operation he was utterly neglected to attend 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 depository of their public records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

He has dissolved Representative 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**⁷ to prevent the Population of these states; for that Purpose obstructing the laws for **Naturalization**⁸ of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their Migrations hither, & raising the Conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.

He has made our Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the **tenure**⁹ of their Offices, & the Amount & payment of their Salaries.

He has erected a Multitude of new Offices by a self assumed power and sent hither Swarms of new 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**¹⁰ to subject us to a Jurisdiction foreign to our Constitution, & unacknowledged by our Laws; giving his Assent to their Acts 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 Offences: For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a **neighboring Province**¹¹, 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 «**Colonies**»: For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments: For suspending our own Legislatures, & declaring themselves invested with Power to legislate for us in all Cases whatsoever.

He has **abdicated**¹² Government here by withdrawing his governors, and declaring us out of his allegiance & protection «**declaring us out of his Protection, and Waging war against us.**»

⁶ **Assent**: agreement

⁷ **endeavored**: attempted; tried

⁸ **naturalization**: the process by which foreigners become citizens.

⁹ **tenure**: length of time office is held.

¹⁰ **Others**: he is referring to members of British Parliament and their supporters.

¹¹ **Neighboring province**: Quebec in Canada.

¹² **Abdicated**: give up responsibility to.

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**¹³ to complete the works of Death, Desolation & Tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty and **Perfidy** «scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous Ages, & 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 & Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.

He has «**excited domestic Insurrections amongst us, & 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, & Conditions of existence.

He has incited treasonable insurrections of our fellow-citizens, with the allurements of forfeiture & confiscation of our property. He has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating it's most sacred rights of life and 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. This piratical warfare, the **opprobrium**¹⁴ of INFIDEL powers, is the warfare of the CHRISTIAN king of Great Britain. Determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought & sold, he has prostituted his **negative**¹⁵ 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**¹⁶, 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 on 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**¹⁷ 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 who mean to be free. Future ages will scarcely believe that the hardiness of one man adventured, within the short compass of twelve years only, to lay a foundation so broad & so undisguised for tyranny over a people fostered & 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 a «**an unwarrantable**» jurisdiction over these our states «us». We have reminded them of the Circumstances of our Emigration & Settlement here, no one of which could warrant so strange a pretension: that these were effected at the expense of our own blood & 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 & 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 have appealed to their native Justice and **Magnanimity**¹⁸ as well as to «, and we have **Conjured**¹⁹ them by» the Ties of our common Kindred to disavow these Usurpations, which were likely to «, **would inevitably**» interrupt our Connection and Correspondence. They too have been deaf to the Voice of Justice & of **Consanguinity**²⁰, 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 & foreign mercenaries to invade & 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 hold them as we hold the rest of mankind, enemies in war, in peace friends. We might have been a free and a great people together; but a communication of grandeur & of freedom it seems is below their dignity. Be it so, since they will have it. The road to happiness & to glory is open to us too. We will tread it apart from

¹³ **Mercenaries**: professional soldiers hired to serve in foreign armies.

¹⁴ **Opprobrium**: shameful conduct

¹⁵ **negative**: veto

¹⁶ **fact of distinguished die**: clear stamp or mark of distinction. Jefferson is being sarcastic.

¹⁷ **Redress**: correction for a wrong done.

¹⁸ **Magnanimity**: nobility of spirit.

¹⁹ **Conjured**: solemnly called upon.

²⁰ **Consanguinity**: kinship; family relationship.

them, and «. **We must therefore**» acquiesce ²¹; in the Necessity which **denounces** our eternal Separation «, **and hold them, as we hold the rest of Mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace, Friends!**»

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, & by the Authority of the good People of these states reject and renounce ²²all allegiance and subjection to the kings of Great Britain and all others who may hereafter claim by, through or under them: we utterly dissolve all political connection which may heretofore have subsided between us and the people or parliament of Great Britain: and finally we do assert and declare these colonies to be free and independent states. «**Colonies, solemnly Publish and Declare, That these United Colonies are, and are of Right 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;**» & that as Free & Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce & to do all other Acts & 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, & our sacred Honor.

The Declaration thus signed on the 4th, on paper, was engrossed on parchment, and signed again on the 2d of August.

Jefferson, Thomas. "from The Autobiography: The Declaration of Independence." *Holt Literature and Language Arts: Essentials of American Literature*. Ed. Beers and Odell. Austin: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 2003. (96-104)

²¹ **Acquiesce**: accept quietly

²² **Renounce**: give up