



THE DECLARATION of INDEPENDENCE

250 YEARS LATER

Adopted July 4, 1776

Prepared by a Committee of Five—composed of John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson (the primary drafter), Robert Livingston, and Roger Sherman—appointed by the Second Continental Congress. The Declaration set forth the common principles uniting the 13 former colonies in armed revolt against King George III.

Changes to Jefferson's Initial Draft

Jefferson's initial draft underwent several revisions, including removal of a grievance accusing King George III of waging "war against human nature itself" by encouraging the slave trade and Franklin's substitution that, "We hold these truths to be sacred & undeniable [self-evident]".

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES



"[A]ll men are
created equal"

Revolutionary claim of inherent rights; later invoked in anti-slavery, suffrage, and civil rights movements



"[C]onsent of
the governed"

Made popular sovereignty the core principle of legitimate government authority



"Life, Liberty and the
Pursuit of Happiness"

Asserted inalienable rights; reflects Enlightenment ideals of human freedom

▶ TRIGGERING EVENTS

Stamp Act



1765

British Troops
Occupy Boston



1768

Boston
Massacre



1770

Boston
Tea Party



1773

Intolerable
Acts



1774

Battles of
Lexington &
Concord



1775

GRIEVANCES

The Declaration lists 27 grievances against the British government justifying rebellion.



Taxation & Trade

Imposed taxes without colonial consent and cut off foreign trade



Self-government

Dissolved colonial legislatures and denied representative government



Military

Kept peacetime standing army; quartered troops; military control of civilian government



Justice & Courts

Obstructed colonial judicial systems; denied jury trials; tried colonists in England

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