



The Declaration of Independence: The History and Legacy of America's Founding Document

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*Includes pictures

*Explains the changes made to the initial drafts of the Declaration and the history of how it was voted on

*Includes letters and accounts written by Founding Fathers like Adams and Jefferson

*Profiles every signer

*Includes a bibliography for further reading

*Includes a table of contents

“Resolved, 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.”

Although the Declaration of Independence is now considered one of the most important political documents in history, the men that drafted it did not initially favor such a move at the start of the American Revolution. Despite its assumption of governing duties, the Second Continental Congress never intended, at least initially, to become the governing body of a new nation. Instead, it merely hoped to transform the relationship between Britain and her colonies to allow for greater self-government on their side of the Atlantic. Separation between the two was rarely favored, and this initial sentiment coalesced into the Olive Branch Petition, which sought a reasonable motion of reconciliation between George III and the colonies. It was drafted by one of Virginia’s delegates, Thomas Jefferson.

By the summer of 1776, John Adams, Samuel Adams and others arguing for a formal break with Britain convinced their fellow Congressmen that the time had come to formalize their break from Britain. John, along with Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman and Robert Livingston, were appointed to draft the announcement informing Britain of their intentions. Together they completed the rough draft of the preamble on May. The committee then wanted John to complete the document, but he felt that Jefferson was a better writer. Ultimately the two men worked together to create Declaration of Independence in late June, with Adams providing much of the legal insight and Jefferson the prose.

As a document, the Declaration justified the call for independence by listing grievances against the King and anchoring them with natural and legal rights, which formed the most memorable lines in the document. In addition to summarizing Jefferson's political philosophy, the Declaration was an amalgamation of the words and thoughts of famous political philosophers of the previous century, including Montesquieu and John Locke. Regardless, Jefferson is now remembered as the author of one of the English language’s most timeless passages, “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.”

Throughout June of 1776, Jefferson worked in Philadelphia within short walking distance of the Congress, writing the first rough draft of the Declaration of Independence. In substance, it mostly resembled the final document, with an emphasis on natural rights and self-government. Throughout the editing process, it was

reduced by nearly a quarter through the removal of sentences and redundancies.

Congress approved of the Declaration of Independence on July 2, 1776 but returned it to Adams and Jefferson for some fine tuning before giving it their final approval two days later. Though Independence Day is celebrated on July 4, Adams wrote to Abigail on July 3, 1776 in the belief that it would be July 2 that would be remembered as the important day.

The Declaration of Independence: The History and Legacy of America's Founding Document chronicles the history that brought about America's formal break from Great Britain. Along with pictures and a bibliography, you will learn about the Declaration of Independence like never before, in no time at all.

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Matthew Haley:

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