

The Declaration of Independence



Chronology of Declaration Events

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- **June 7, 1776** Congress, meeting in Philadelphia, receives Richard Henry Lee's resolution urging Congress to declare independence.
- **June 11** Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman, and Robert R. Livingston appointed to a committee to draft a declaration of independence. American army retreats to Lake Champlain from Canada.

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- **June 12-27** Jefferson, at the request of the committee, drafts a declaration, of which only a fragment exists. Jefferson's clean, or "fair" copy, the "original rough draft," is reviewed by the committee. Both documents are in the manuscript collections of the Library of Congress.
- **June 28** A fair copy of the committee draft of the Declaration of Independence is read in Congress.
- **July 1-4** Congress debates and revises the Declaration of Independence.

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- **July 2** Congress declares independence as the British fleet and army arrive at New York.
- **July 4** Congress adopts the Declaration of Independence in the morning of a bright, sunny, but cool Philadelphia day. John Dunlap prints the Declaration of Independence. These prints are now called "Dunlap Broad sides." Twenty-four copies are known to exist, two of which are in the Library of Congress. One of these was Washington's personal copy.

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- **July 5** John Hancock, president of the Continental Congress, dispatches the first of Dunlap's broad sides of the Declaration of Independence to the legislatures of New Jersey and Delaware.
- **July 6** Pennsylvania Evening Post of July 6 prints the first newspaper rendition of the Declaration of Independence.
- **July 8** The first public reading of the Declaration is in Philadelphia.


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- **July 9** Washington orders that the Declaration of Independence be read before the American army in New York
- **July 19** Congress orders the Declaration of Independence engrossed (officially inscribed) and signed by members.
- **August 2** Delegates begin to sign engrossed copy of the Declaration of Independence. A large British reinforcement arrives at New York after being repelled at Charleston, S.C.

***Life, Liberty and
The Pursuit of Happiness***


IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.
A DECLARATION
BY THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,
IN GENERAL CONGRESS ASSEMBLED.




- It was the summer of 1776. The American colonies had been fighting a War of Independence from Britain since April 19, 1775 when the **first battle** took place at Lexington.
- The colonists were sick of paying taxes to **George III**. They were tired of laws (like the **Stamp Act**) passed by a Parliament whose members they did not elect. Colonial America had "grown up." The people wanted to be free of colonial status, parliamentary laws and Crown authority. Enter **Thomas Jefferson**.

WHO WAS THOMAS JEFFERSON?

- A lawyer, Tom Jefferson was about 34 years old that important summer. He was a tall man, 6 feet 2 1/2 inches. People seemed to like him. He was married to Marsha Randolph Jefferson who ran the family's household at **Monticello**, their Virginia home.
- During the summer of 1776, Jefferson wrote one of the most important documents ever written in the world of law. **The Declaration of Independence**, approved by the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776, created the United States of America. It was the crowning achievement of Jefferson's career. He always said nothing else he ever did mattered as much as writing that Declaration.



THE ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS



- Today it is possible to actually see the rough draft of the Declaration, written in Jefferson's own hand. The **first page** contains the well-known words, "When in the course of human events..." and "all men are created equal." The **second, third and fourth** pages complete the entire first draft.
- If we compare Jefferson's notes to the actual Declaration written by the **committee**, signed by the **patriots**, and adopted by the **Continental Congress**, we can verify Jefferson was the principal author.
- Even more interesting than the "first draft" is the only known **surviving fragment** of Jefferson's preliminary thoughts. This fragment, establishing the idea of independence, is one of the greatest treasures owned by the Library of Congress.

**THE IDEAS:
WHERE HE GOT THEM
WHAT HE DID WITH THEM**

- How did Jefferson come up with such an incredible statement of independence? Where did he get the knowledge he needed to so boldly tell Great Britain: *You don't own the American colonies anymore?*
- He knew the **works of John Locke**, an English philosopher. That's where he got the concept of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."
- Jefferson went on to become the third President of the United States. Although he served from 1801-1809, he never much liked the world of politics. When he left the presidency, he retired to his beloved home, **Monticello**.

**THE IDEAS:
WHERE HE GOT THEM
WHAT HE DID WITH THEM**

- Did Jefferson really believe the words he wrote in the Declaration of Independence? A statement he made in **one of the last letters** he ever wrote sums up his lifelong beliefs:
...the mass of mankind has not been born, with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few bootied and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately. By the grace of God, these are grounds of hope for others.
- Ten days after he wrote **those words**, Tom Jefferson died. It was July 4th, 1826 - fifty years to the day after his Declaration of Independence had created the United States of America.

**WHAT IS SO SPECIAL ABOUT THE
DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE?**

- This is the Declaration of Independence. It was adopted on July 4, 1776. It created a nation by a purposeful act, upon a specific day.



WHAT IS SO SPECIAL ABOUT THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE?

- It built that nation upon a foundation of universal principle. The principle referred not merely to the people who would live in that nation. It applied to all people, in all places, in all times.



WHAT IS SO SPECIAL ABOUT THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE?

- The Declaration remains the most noble, famous, and powerful statement of the basis of government ever written. It is unique. It has shaped a people and a nation, and it has helped to shape the world.



WHAT IS SO SPECIAL ABOUT THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE?

- Most countries do not begin with a statement of why they are beginning. Most cannot produce a document that says why the country is being built, and for what it will stand. Of those that do begin in this way, one has stated a powerful defense of human freedom, based upon the facts of human nature, applicable to all human beings, in all times.



**WHAT IS SO SPECIAL ABOUT THE
DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE?**

- The United States of America has a birthday. It celebrates the adoption, by an elected assembly, of a certain resolution. It celebrates the "Unanimous Declaration of the thirteen United States of America."