**The Declaration of Independence: A Transcription**

**IN CONGRESS, July 4, 1776.**

**The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen United States of America,**

1. **Preamble**

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 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.

1. **Declaration of Natural Rights**

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.

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 to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers 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 and 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 and usurpations, 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, and to provide new Guards for their future security.

1. **List of Grievances**

Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, 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.

1. He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.
2. He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.
3. 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.
4. He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.
5. He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.
6. 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 mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.
7. He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.
8. He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers.
9. He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.
10. He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harrass our people, and eat out their substance.
11. He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.
12. He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power.
13. He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation:
14. For Quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:
15. For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:
16. For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:
17. For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:
18. For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury:
19. For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences
20. For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies:
21. For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:
22. For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.
23. He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.
24. He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.
25. He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation.
26. 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 and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.
27. He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured 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.

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 free people.

Nor have We been wanting in attentions to our Brittish brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which, would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.

1. **Resolution of Independence by the United States**

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, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, 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; and that as Free and 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 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 and our sacred Honor.

1. **Signatures**

**Column 1**  
**Georgia:**  
   Button Gwinnett  
   Lyman Hall  
   George Walton

**Column 2**  
**North Carolina:**  
   William Hooper  
   Joseph Hewes  
   John Penn  
**South Carolina:**  
   Edward Rutledge  
   Thomas Heyward, Jr.  
   Thomas Lynch, Jr.  
   Arthur Middleton

**Column 3**  
**Mass:**  
John Hancock  
**Maryland:**  
Samuel Chase  
William Paca  
Thomas Stone  
Charles Carroll of Carrollton  
**Virginia:**  
George Wythe  
Richard Henry Lee  
Thomas Jefferson  
Benjamin Harrison  
Thomas Nelson, Jr.  
Francis Lightfoot Lee  
Carter Braxton

**Column 4**  
**Penn:**  
   Robert Morris  
   Benjamin Rush  
   Benjamin Franklin  
   John Morton  
   George Clymer  
   James Smith  
   George Taylor  
   James Wilson  
   George Ross  
**Delaware:**  
   Caesar Rodney  
   George Read  
   Thomas McKean

**Column 5**  
**New York:**  
   William Floyd  
   Philip Livingston  
   Francis Lewis  
   Lewis Morris  
**New Jersey:**  
   Richard Stockton  
   John Witherspoon  
   Francis Hopkinson  
   John Hart  
   Abraham Clark

**Column 6**  
**New Hamp:**  
   Josiah Bartlett  
   William Whipple  
**Mass:**  
   Samuel Adams  
   John Adams  
   Robert Treat Paine  
   Elbridge Gerry  
**Rhode Island:**  
   Stephen Hopkins  
   William Ellery  
**Connecticut:**  
   Roger Sherman  
   Samuel Huntington  
   William Williams  
   Oliver Wolcott  
**New Hamp:**  
   Matthew Thornton

[IDENTITY AND EQUITY](https://www.aspeninstitute.org/topics/identity-equity/)

**The Paradox of the Declaration of Independence**

JULY 1, 2016  • [LESLIE GREENE BOWMAN](https://www.monticello.org/site/about/leslie-greene-bowman)

At the dawn of the American Revolution, a young member of Virginia’s elite planter class penned the sentence that has reverberated throughout history:

“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.”

For 240 years, the ideas Thomas Jefferson expressed in the Declaration of Independence have ignited imaginations, inspired song and verse, and aroused political campaigns, social movements, and revolutions around the world: “let freedom ring” … “God bless America” … “We shall overcome.”

But for America’s black population, freedom didn’t ring in 1776. It would take 87 years and a bloody civil war for most African Americans to gain their “unalienable Rights,” and another 100 years of courageous protests before those rights could be fully exercised. That duality played out across the country, and on Jefferson’s plantations.

Of the 607 men, women, and children Jefferson owned throughout his life, only 10 were freed on or before his death, at which time approximately 130 individuals had to be sold, along with Monticello, to account for his debts. Jefferson’s notion of liberty, while visionary for his time, did not extend to all people. Yet many enslaved individuals knew of his stirring words and were inspired by the Declaration’s proclamation of equality.

1. **The Fight for Freedom’s Promise**

Jefferson’s words left an indelible imprint of freedom’s promise on enslaved families and their descendants, many of whom pursued equality and racial justice for their people.

Two examples: Peter Fossett was born a slave at Monticello (Jefferson’s plantation), and settled in Ohio after his family purchased his freedom. As a free man, Fossett became a church pastor and an Underground Railroad conductor, bravely guiding his brethren to liberty.

William Monroe Trotter — a descendant of Elizabeth Hemings, enslaved at Monticello — founded the *Boston Guardian* newspaper, helped found the Niagara Movement, precursor to the NAACP, and vociferously challenged President Woodrow Wilson’s segregationist policies.

1. **Challenging Slavery**

In early America, enslaved people struggled for their independence — in small but significant ways — every day.

In addition to the better-known slave revolts of the 18thand 19thcenturies, slaves undertook daily actions to challenge their condition and assert autonomy — including work slowdowns, truancy, and feigned illness.

1. **The African Colonization Movement**

Jefferson believed that blacks and whites could not co-exist in the American nation.

Along with political allies James Madison and James Monroe, Jefferson supported the American Colonization Society, a campaign advocating for African Americans to migrate to Africa. Many did, including members of Monticello’s enslaved community, settling in what became Liberia. In 1847, that fledgling nation incorporated ideas from America’s Declaration of Independence into its founding document.

1. **Jefferson’s Civil War Prediction**

At the same time, Jefferson thought that the paradox of freedom in an age of slavery would ultimately destroy the new nation.

In “Notes on the State of Virginia,” Jefferson wrote, “I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep forever…” He believed that to keep slaves in bondage, with part of America in favor of abolition and part of America in favor of perpetuating slavery, would result in civil war. Jefferson’s prediction was correct: in 1861, the contest over slavery sparked a bloody civil war and the creation of two nations — Union and Confederacy — in the place of one.

1. **Frederick Douglass’ Independence Day Speech**

In his 1850 Independence Day speech, Frederick Douglass, the great abolitionist and former slave, invoked the Declaration’s principles to excoriate America for the hypocrisy of its founding.

“What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than any other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is a constant victim.” Yet Douglass also found hope in those principles. “While drawing encouragement from the Declaration of Independence, the great principles it contains, and the genius of American Institutions,” he said “my spirit is also cheered by the obvious tendencies of the age.”

1. **Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have A Dream” Speech**

In his famous “I have a dream” speech, delivered in 1963 from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, Martin Luther King, Jr. also drew upon the Declaration’s promise to advance civil rights.

Borrowing from the Sage of Monticello, King shared his vision for America: “I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up, live out the true meaning of its creed: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.” Dr. King’s call was answered on July 2, 1964, when President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act, outlawing racial discrimination in the United States.

1. **The** **Black Panther Party**

In 1966, the Black Panther Party was founded in Oakland, California, to advocate for the constitutional rights of black Americans, rallying around a Ten-Point Program that referred back to Jefferson’s words.

The program, a call-to-action for party members, closed with a modified version of the Declaration of Independence’s most famous paragraph: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal…it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security.”

1. **Women’s Rights and the Seneca Falls Convention**

Another population who could not fully enjoy the liberties outlined in 1776 — women — drew upon the words of the Declaration of Independence to advance their social, civil, and religious rights at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848.

Drafted by suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the Declaration of Sentiments, following the structure of the original Declaration of Independence, was read and debated at the Seneca Falls Convention. The document called for equality with men before the law, in education, and employment. It was signed by 68 women and 32 men on July 20, 1848.

1. **The Global Impact of the Declaration of Independence**

Beyond American borders, the ideas expressed in the Declaration of Independence have been echoed in hundreds of like declarations around the globe.

More than half of the countries represented at the United Nations have a founding document that can be called a declaration of independence — from Venezuela, Armenia, and the Republic of Ireland, to Yugoslavia, Korea, and even Haiti, the only nation borne out of a slave revolt.

1. **American Presidents Who Owned Slaves**

Twelve American presidents were slaveholders. However, thanks to Jefferson’s copious record-keeping, we know more about plantation life at Monticello, and its enslaved community, than can be known about the vast majority of early American historical sites.

Ultimately, Jefferson’s most enduring legacy is not what he intended the Declaration of Independence to mean, but how succeeding generations have drawn inspiration from its words. History has proven that the prospect of equality and human freedom — life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness*—*belongs to all people, in all ages.

The Paradox of the Declaration of Independence

Answering the following questions in complete sentences.

1. What does the author mean by the phrase, “The Paradox of the Declaration of Independence”?
2. How did the former slaves and their descendants continue the fight for the ideals laid out in the Declaration after gaining their freedom?
3. Give three examples of how future generations were influenced by the Declaration of Independence.
4. Do you think that idea “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,” holds true today? Explain why or why not.