



Dear Principal,

The American Village serves the Nation as an educational institution whose mission is to strengthen and renew the foundations of American liberty and constitutional self-government by engaging and inspiring citizens and leaders with a special emphasis on programs for young people.

Though we are based in Montevallo, Alabama, our experiential programs and classroom resources now reach schools nationwide. Our special America 250 Toolkit has already been downloaded by teachers in more than 25 states, and we're excited to share these high-quality, ready-to-use lesson plans and activities with you as well.

These materials are especially timely and valuable during Patriots' Day week (the week of April 20, 2026).

Whether you teach elementary, middle, or high school, you'll find flexible resources perfect for the lead-up to the 250th anniversary of America's founding.

We hope these tools make your teaching easier and more impactful this spring.

In the PDF download linked below we have included ready-to-print posters or handouts explaining the importance of our founding document, the Declaration of Independence. We encourage you to hang the posters in the classrooms or hallways because it is a special year. You can make the posters bigger if you like, and share as a handout for teachers, students, and parents.

Thank you for the important work you do in shaping the next generation of American citizens.

Best regards,

Col. Alan B. Miller, USMC (Ret.)
President & CEO
American Village Citizenship Trust
Montevallo, Alabama
www.americanvillage.org



This year,

2026

the United States is celebrating its 250th birthday.



Why? The **Declaration of Independence** was adopted 250 years ago on July 4th.



The Declaration, signed by the Founders, stated:

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.

The United States became the first nation in world history to recognize officially three principles:

That all human beings are equal.

That basic human rights cannot be taken away by the government because rights are natural and "endowed by their Creator."

That all governments derive their power from its citizens.

The United States became a republic independent of Great Britain by fighting for their freedoms given to them by their Creator.

The American Revolution lasted eight years — 25,000 men and women died for our freedom.





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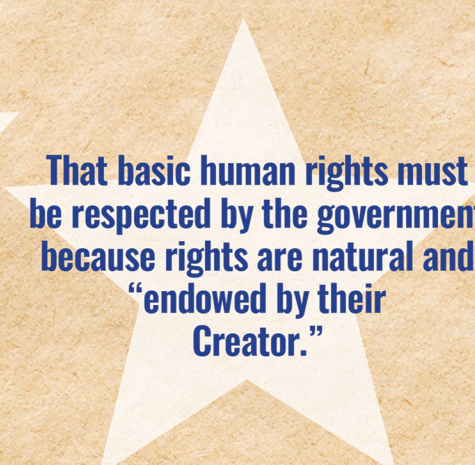
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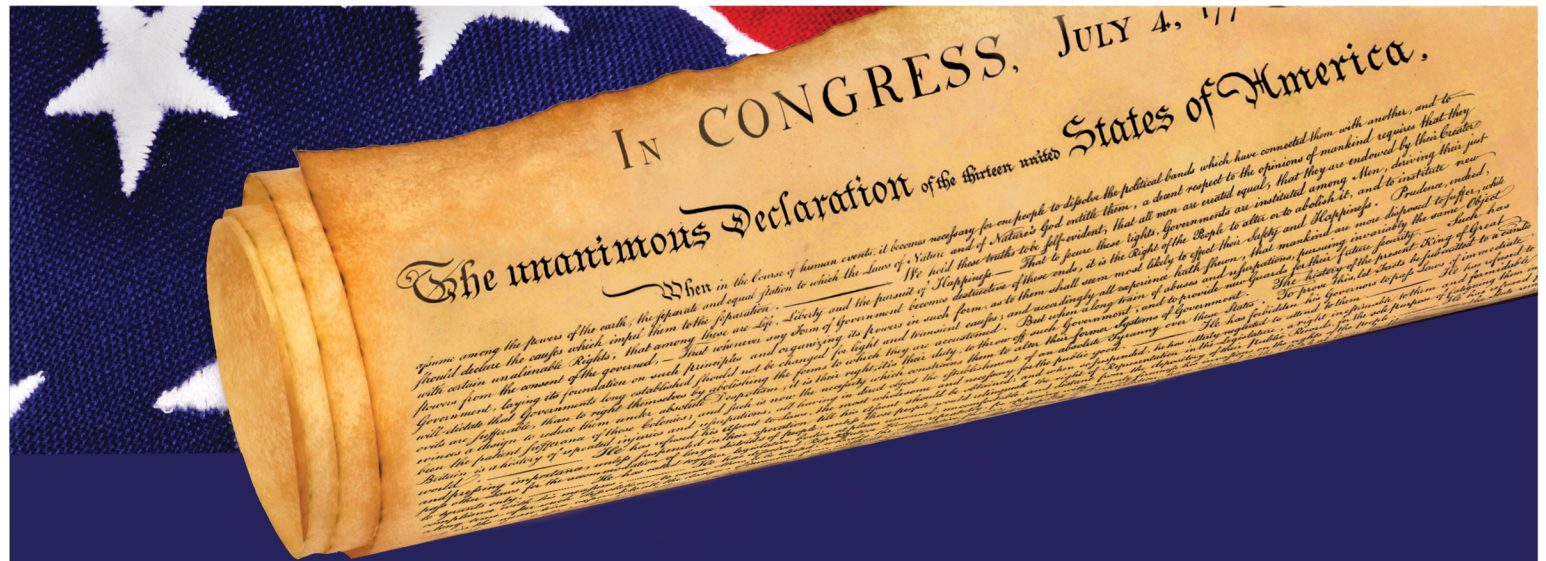


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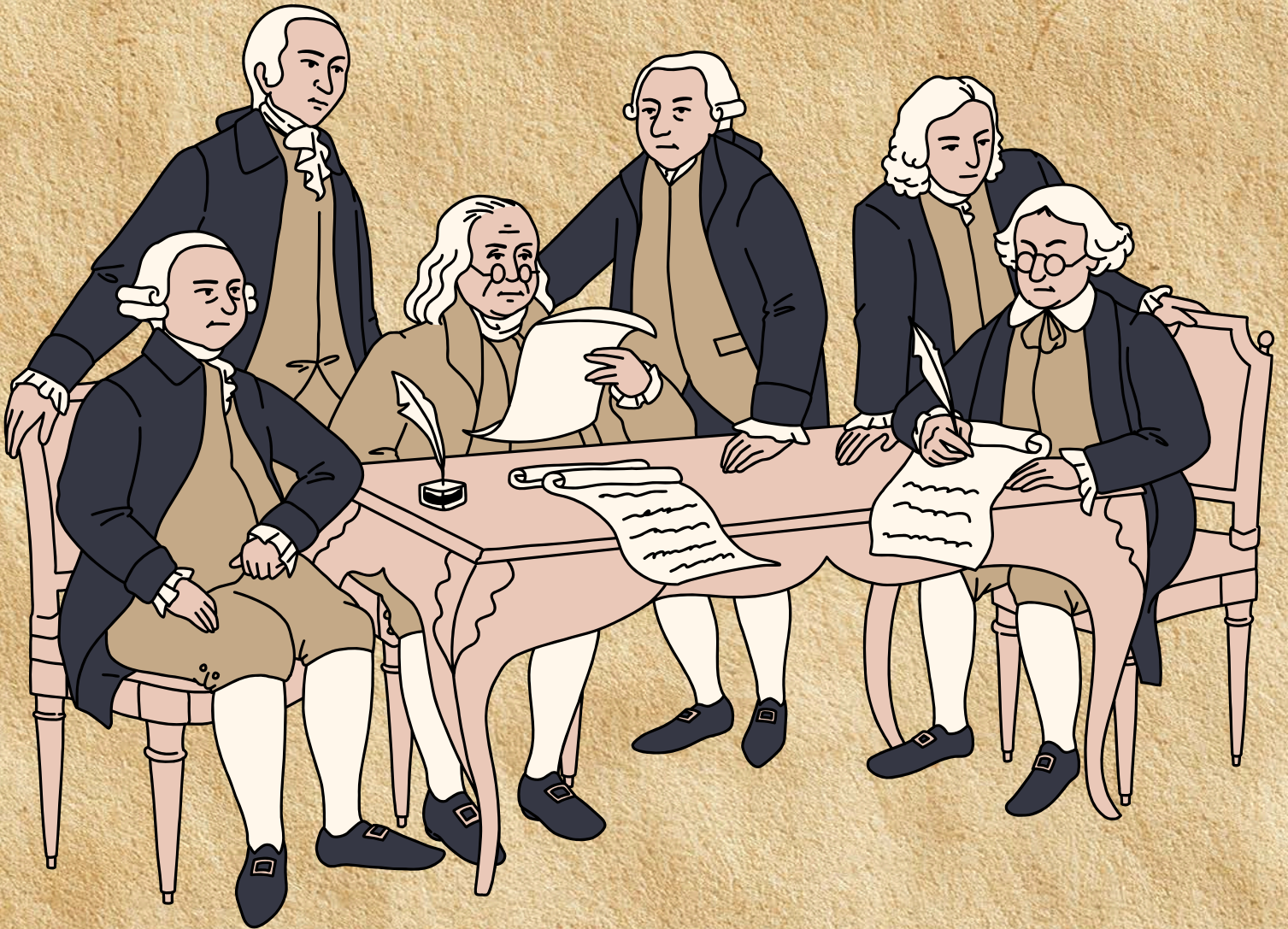
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The Preamble to the
Declaration of Independence



AMERICA



ALABAMA



The American Village is excited to share the enclosed lesson plans with you to assist in your celebration of the 250th anniversary of American Independence.

This document contains lesson plans to help you tackle the ideas detailed in the preamble of the Declaration of Independence for all grade levels. These lessons were designed to help students connect the ideas of the Founders to their own lives and understand why those principles still matter today as well as allowing students to begin to take their place as informed leaders in our nation.

For more lesson plans, please check out the America250AL Digital Toolkit at www.america250al.org or scan the QR code below.

Looking to continue the celebration with a field trip? Please contact Jessica Averett at javerett@americanvillage.org for more information on programs and ways to join in on the fun!



The Preamble of the

Declaration of Independence

“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.”

The ideas of
John Locke

John Locke was an English Enlightenment thinker who strongly influenced the ideas behind the American Revolution and the Declaration. He argued that all people have natural rights given by our Creator, not by government.

Locke believed that natural rights included life, liberty, and property. According to him, the main purpose of government is to protect these rights. If a government fails to do this, the people have the right to change or get rid of it.

He also believed in the idea of consent of the governed, which means a government's power comes from the consent of the people it rules. This idea appears in the Declaration of Independence's Preamble and throughout the document. It states that governments get "their just powers from the consent of the governed" and that people have the right to overthrow a government that does not protect their rights. The Declaration also changes Locke's phrase "life, liberty, and property" to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," showing how his ideas directly shaped America's founding principles.

The Preamble of the
Declaration of Independence

Learning Target: Students will be able to explain what it means to be treated fairly and equally.

Engage:

- What does fair mean?
- How do you feel when something is unfair?

Explore:

- Scenarios
 - Introduce a few scenarios to the students that will allow them to decide whether it was a fair or unfair situation.
 - Waiting for the teacher to finish speaking.
 - Everyone gets a turn to ride the scooter in PE.
 - Going up the slide when others are trying to go down.
 - Cutting in line at the water fountain.

Explain:

- 250 years ago, the King of England and his friends (leaders in Parliament) were treating the people in America unfairly. These leaders did not allow the people in America to have a vote or choice in the choices England was making. Americans decided that they were tired of being treated like this and tried to work things out. When the King refused to work things out, the Americans decided to break up with England and wrote the Declaration of Independence.
- In this document, it says "...all men are created equal...."
 - What does this mean?
 - Do you think people were always treated equally?
 - How can we make sure to treat people fairly and equally?

Elaborate:

- Create a class preamble. Choose 3-5 things after brainstorming together and have students sign the final document like the Founders did!

Evaluate:

- Allow students to draw or write about situations in which people are treated unfairly and how they can correct the situation.

The Preamble of the
Declaration of Independence

Learning Target: Students will be able to explain why it's important for a government to respect the basic rights of their people.

Engage:

- If you started your own country, what rights would people have?

Explore:

- Gallery Walk - Using posters, sticky notes, etc., allow students to write their own definition of the following words: life, liberty, pursuit of happiness, equality.
- Discuss answers and come up with a definition for each.

Explain:

- 250 years ago, the people living in America were tired and frustrated with the English government. They had protested and tried to work things out with England, but it was no use. The constant lack of representation in Parliament and lack of respect for the voice of Americans led the Americans to the decision to separate from England through the Declaration of Independence.
- In this document, it says "...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."
 - What does this mean?
 - What are these rights and why are they important to have?
 - Why is it important for a government to respect these rights?
 - Many people believed kings were chosen by God to rule. How is the idea that rights come from a Creator for all people different from the idea that a king has special power to rule?

Elaborate:

- Students will engage in a creative writing exercise that allows them to write a breakup letter to England, explaining what they have learned about the acts of the British Government and the need for basic rights to be provided to the people.
- Have students answer the comprehension and critical thinking questions on the next page.

Evaluate:

- Using a rubric of your choosing, evaluate their writing.
- Exit Ticket

The Preamble of the

Declaration of Independence

Directions: Answer the following questions in complete sentences based on your learning, resources, and the Declaration of Independence!

1. Who was on the Committee of Five and who was the main author of the Declaration of Independence?
2. Were there possible consequences for signing the Declaration of Independence? If so, what were they?
3. Does liberty mean you can do whatever you want? Why or why not?
4. What is a self-evident truth?
5. What is a natural right?
6. What does unalienable mean?
7. What does the government's power come from?
8. The American colonists said their rights did not come from the king. How did this idea challenge the power of King George III?
9. What does "...all men are created equal..." mean?

The Preamble of the
Declaration of Independence

Learning Target: Students will be able to explain the basic ideas from the preamble of the Declaration of Independence.

Engage:

- What is revolution?
- What are natural rights?

Explore:

- Provide students with 4 colored highlighters and a copy of the preamble of the Declaration of Independence.
- Have students identify the preamble into four parts - need for separation, natural rights, purpose of government, and right to overthrow the government.

Explain:

- Mini-lesson on natural rights and government by consent
 - John Locke was an English Enlightenment thinker who strongly influenced the ideas behind the American Revolution and the Declaration. He argued that all people have natural rights given by our Creator, not by government.
 - Locke believed that natural rights included life, liberty, and property. According to him, the main purpose of government is to protect these rights. If a government fails to do this, the people have the right to change or get rid of it.
 - He also believed in the idea of consent of the governed, which means a government's power comes from the consent of the people it rules. This idea appears in the Declaration of Independence's Preamble and throughout the document. It states that governments get "their just powers from the consent of the governed" and that people have the right to overthrow a government that does not protect their rights. The Declaration also changes Locke's phrase "life, liberty, and property" to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," showing how his ideas directly shaped America's founding principles.
- Relate ideas to Jefferson's words.
- How was the idea that rights come from a Creator different from the belief that kings ruled because of divine right?
 - How did this idea challenge the authority of King George III?
 - Why was it important for the colonists to argue that their rights did not come from the British government?

Elaborate:

- Have students answer the following question:
 - Why is it important for government to respect the natural rights of people?
- Use the questions provided.

Evaluate:

- Using a rubric of your choosing, evaluate their writing.
- Exit Ticket

The Preamble of the

Declaration of Independence

Directions: Answer the following questions in complete sentences based on your learning, resources, and the Declaration of Independence!

1. What are "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God?"
2. What is a self-evident truth?
3. According to the Declaration of Independence, from where do natural rights come?
4. What does it mean to say that "all men are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights?"
5. From where does the government's power come?
6. How does the fact that America was founded with the words of the Declaration of Independence make America unique in the history of nations?

The Preamble of the
Declaration of Independence

Learning Target: Students will be able to explain the basic ideas from the preamble of the Declaration of Independence.

Engage:

- Do human rights come from government or from a source beyond government?
- Use Document Based Questions document.

Explore:

- Provide students with 4 colored highlighters and a copy of the preamble of the Declaration of Independence.
- Have students identify the preamble into four parts - the claim about equality, the source of rights, the purpose of government, and the justification for revolution.
- Discuss where the government gets its power.

Explain:

- Mini-lesson on natural rights and government by consent
- Compare Jefferson and John Locke's words and discuss why Jefferson may have chosen to rephrase some of them.
 - Natural Rights: Life, Liberty, and Property vs. Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness

Elaborate:

- Discussion
 - Do rights exist without government, or does government create them?
 - How was the idea that rights come from a Creator different from the belief that kings ruled because of divine right?
 - How did this idea challenge the authority of King George III?
 - Why was it important for the colonists to argue that their rights did not come from the British government?
 - Is revolution sometimes an obligation?
 - What was equality in 1776?
- Modern Application
 - How do you think Jefferson would view freedom of speech on social media?
 - Would he approve the way algorithms work to keep you occupied with only one side of the argument?
 - How should a free society handle disagreement?

Evaluate:

- Using a rubric of your choosing, evaluate their writing.
- Exit Ticket: Is the Preamble a philosophical or political argument?

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The Preamble of the
Declaration of Independence

Document Based Questions

Directions: Answer the following questions in complete sentences based on your learning, resources, and the Declaration of Independence!

1. How does the Declaration of Independence define the purpose of government, and what role do the people have in it? Use specific evidence from the text to support your answer.
2. What are two specific complaints the colonists have against King George III, and what do these grievances reveal about colonial concerns? What do you feel is the most significant complaint and why?
3. According to the Declaration, under what conditions do people have the right to overthrow their government? Do you think the colonists justified this action? Explain using evidence.
4. The document states that "all men are created equal." What did this mean in 1776, and who was included at the time and how has that changed over time? Support your response with historical content.
5. Why was it significant that individuals such as Thomas Jefferson signed the Declaration? What risks did they take, and what does this reveal about their commitment?



Teacher Support Guide & Flexible Answer Key

The Preamble to the Declaration of Independence

Aligned to American Village Lesson Plans • Classroom-Ready

Instructional Framing for Teachers

The Declaration of Independence teaches that all people are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights. This was the Founders' explanation for why those rights belong to all people and cannot be taken away by government.

Teachers should present this as a historical and philosophical argument for students to understand and discuss. Students are not expected to adopt this belief, but to understand how this idea shaped the founding of the United States and the principle of limited government.

Grades 3–5 Key Questions & Guidance

Question: What does “all men are created equal” mean?

Sample Response: It means all people have equal value and should be treated justly, because the Declaration teaches that all people are created equal with no regard for gender, ethnicity, wealth, or beliefs. No one has a privileged position before the law.

What to Listen For: Equality connected to shared rights that apply to everyone.

Question: What is a natural right?

Sample Response: A natural right is a right all people have because they are endowed by their Creator with those rights, not because government gives them.

What to Listen For: Rights are not granted by rulers or laws.

Question: Where does government power come from?

Sample Response: Government gets its power from the consent of the governed, meaning the people who are its citizens.

What to Listen For: Students connect power to the people, not rulers.

Grades 6–8 Key Questions & Guidance

Question: What are natural rights?

Sample Response: Natural rights are rights all people have, such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, which the Declaration teaches are endowed by our Creator and not from government.

What to Listen For: Students distinguish rights from privileges and understand their source.

Question: Why did the Founders say rights come from a Creator?

Sample Response: The Founders argued that rights come from a Creator so that those rights would apply to all people and could not be taken away by government.

What to Listen For: Understanding this as the reason for limiting and directing government power.

Teacher Note: Keep focus on the Declaration’s argument, not theology.

Question: What is consent of the governed?

Sample Response: Governments are given their power, for example, to enact and enforce laws, by the consenting action of the people, which at present we know as voting.

What to Listen For: Students understand that voting is their form of giving consent and participating in the making of government.

Grades 9–12 Discussion Guidance

Question: Do rights exist without government?

Sample Response: The Founders believed that human beings are “endowed by their Creator” with inherent dignity and rights. Therefore, our rights exist prior to government, and it is the responsibility of governments to respect human dignity and protect those rights.

What to Listen For: Students can explain the argument even if they disagree.

Question: When is revolution justified?

Sample Response: The Declaration argues that revolution is justified when the government becomes destructive of the people’s rights and their inherent dignity.

What to Listen For: Students connect justification to evidence in the text of the Declaration.

Question: What did equality mean in 1776?

Sample Response: Equality meant different things in 1776 depending on where you lived. Great Britain was an empire with a monarchy that looked upon its American colonists as second-class citizens with no right, for example, to consent to taxation.

What to Listen For: Students recognize both ideal and historical reality.

Document-Based Question (DBQ) Support

Strong responses should include:

- Direct reference to the language of the Declaration
- Explanation in the student's own words
- Connection to historical or modern context

Question: What is the purpose of government?

Sample Response: The purpose of government is to protect the rights of the people, which come from the Creator, God, and not from government itself.

What to Listen For: Reference 'to secure these rights' from the text.

Question: Where does government power come from?

Sample Response: Government derives its just powers from the consent of the governed.

What to Listen For: Students identify the role of the people in granting authority.

Final Guidance for Teachers

Focus on helping students understand the reasoning of the Declaration rather than memorizing exact wording. Student responses may vary, but should demonstrate understanding that the Founders argued rights are natural because they are endowed by a Creator and that government exists to protect those rights.

*Note: The following text is a transcription of the Stone Engraving of the parchment Declaration of Independence (the document on display in the Rotunda at the National Archives Museum). **The spelling and punctuation reflect the original.***

In Congress, July 4, 1776

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America, 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.

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 shewn, 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.--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.

He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and 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 should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to 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 the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, 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 mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.

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.

He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers.

He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harrass our people, and eat out their substance.

He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.

He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power.

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:

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 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:

For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:

For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

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.

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.

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.

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.