

★ The Declaration of Independence ★

Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is for students to examine the Declaration of Independence and ascertain its true intent and its eventual realization.

Objective

1. The student will analyze the Declaration of Independence.
2. The student will summarize the intentions of the Declaration.

Theme-Freedom

The Declaration of Independence was written by the Founding Fathers to express their belief that all people have certain rights. The freedoms written in the laws of the nation have their beginning in the Declaration of Independence.

TEKS

U. S. Government-History. Identify the influence of ideas/philosophies from historic documents including the Declaration of Independence.
U. S. History-Social Studies Skills. Differentiate between, locate, and use primary and secondary sources...to acquire information about the United States.

Time

60 minutes

Materials

- ★ American Heritage handouts
- ★ Declaration of Independence
- ★ Declaration of Independence puzzle
- ★ Dictionaries
- ★ Material to post final product

Preparation

- ★ Copy handouts
- ★ Gather supplies (as needed).

Focus

Anecdote: Explain to the class that you heard this morning of a country very close to us that was having a serious problem. A small group of leading citizens had decided that they should rule the country and were in the process of overthrowing the government. How can a small number of people make such a decision for all the people? What should the government do? What should happen to the rebels if they are not successful? After a brief discussion tell the students that the country was the United States in the 1770s and that the small group of citizens were our Founding Fathers. Today we will look at the actual document that got them into so much trouble with the King of England.

Activity

1. Introduce the handout on “English Tyranny” and read together. Divide the class into small groups and require students to define the perceived hostile acts leading to the Battles at Lexington and Concord from 1763-1775.
2. Share definitions and discuss how these acts made many of the colonists feel. Concentrate especially on the economy of the colonies and the perception of citizenship by colonists.
3. Now pass out the handout on “Unalienable Rights.” Read aloud and encourage students to make notes as you relate the information with examples from today. Students are always interested in what rights they have and will be eager to add to your comments and to ask questions. Whenever a difficult question arises, tell students that their rights are basically defined in two documents and that today you all are looking at one of them. Students can learn and understand the contents.
4. Explain that this declaration of freedom is written in four different parts, a preamble or introduction, a demand, a list of grievances, and an ultimatum or request for action. Pass out the copy of the Declaration and help students see where each part is in the document.
5. Together, read the preamble and discuss what it means to us, to the people who wrote it in 1776, and to the people who read it both in the colonies and in England. What does it actually say? What does it actually mean? Do the same with the next paragraph.
6. You could also have students individually or in groups piece together the cut out and scrambled text of the Declaration. Each student/group may take one different excerpt/segment from the document and read, research/analyze, and discuss its meaning. Students share with the rest of the class the meaning and importance of that specific part of the Declaration.
7. Finally ask each group to examine the list of grievances. Read each one and rewrite it in today’s terms using dictionaries and any other resources available. When a group is finished, it picks two problems that it feels are the most important.
8. Let each group share their top two picks and then have the class vote on the number one reason why the colonists felt that England was violating their rights.
9. Assessment- For homework have each student read the last paragraph and explain what parts of the demand would not go over very well with the King and why.

Closure

The next school day, students can turn in their opinions and discuss them as a class.



The Declaration of Independence

English Tyranny

Since the earliest English settlements in America—Roanoke Island off the coast of what is now North Carolina in 1585 and 1587; Jamestown, Virginia, the first permanent English colony in the new America in 1607; and the first permanent colony settled in New England as established by the Pilgrims (Puritan “separatists”) at Plymouth in 1620—there was very little widespread English government intervention in American colonial affairs for 150 years. The English government had so little interference with the American colonies mostly because it was economically infeasible for them to bother with the mostly destitute colonists. Further, the colonists were for the most part, most of this time, governing themselves, whether by the theocracy that had been set in place in New England or by the House of Burgesses in Virginia. The Americans had had a long taste of self-rule and many became indifferent to monarchical or arbitrary rule--“Ruler’s Law”--by the British.

However, with the ever-widening control of English mercantilism and the expanding production of resources of food and raw materials in the colonies, the English government developed a series of Parliamentary laws that restricted American Colonial shipping, industry, and commerce and became a major source of friction between the Colonies and England. These laws, passed between 1650 and 1775, were called the “Navigation Acts.” These acts forced licensing of all ships going to or from the Colonies. There was a growing list of specific items (tobacco, cotton, sugar) that could only be sold to England and a lengthening list of other items that the colonists were not supposed to manufacture—iron, wool, molasses, and even hats.

These Navigation Acts were not seriously enforced until the end of the French and Indian War in 1763. This war left the British in deep debt, and the royal treasury attempted its recovery by clamping down on the Colonies and colonists. England established Colonial custom houses and named royally appointed judges who tried those who broke the law by disobeying the Acts. This still did not bring in enough revenue to England, but it did help unite the wealthy elite of the Colonies.

First, to thwart the westward expansion of the colonists, the English established the “Proclamation Line of 1763,” supposedly to pacify the Indians west of the Allegheny Mountains

theocracy

A government in which God is regarded as the ruling power. In some of the New England colonies, the religious leaders were the political leaders (though usually the primary minister of the colony was not one).

House of Burgesses

A local representative assembly, established under a new Virginia charter in 1618 by the English government. Because conditions were so harsh in this Colony, it was difficult to attract a steady flow of labor from England. The Virginia Company (London) urged this measure to make the settlement more attractive. The first deliberations took place in July 1619.

mercantilism

Simply, complete control of the economy by the government. Further, a commercial trade policy which had the goal of creating a heavy imbalance in foreign trade, favoring exports over imports. The object was to pile up large holdings of gold in the national treasury; hence, the Navigation Acts.

Additional Reading

- ★ Gaustad, Edwin S. *Faith of Our Founding Fathers: Religion and the New Nation*. San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1987.
- ★ Martin, James Kirby, ed. *Ordinary Courage: The Revolutionary War Adventures of Joseph Plumb Martin*. St. James, New York: Brandywine Press, 1993.
- ★ Donald T. Phillips, *The Founding Fathers on Leadership: Classic Teamwork in Changing Times*. New York: Warner Books, 1997.

and to protect the wildlife. The British forces left in America, however, could not control such a lengthy frontier. Many colonists, especially those who already lived west of the Alleghenies, ignored this proclamation. Further Colonial grievances toward the Crown were the result of stipulations that the colonists could no longer trade with the Indians since they were under royal license. More pointedly, the British government rescinded all land purchases from the Indians west of the Alleghenies, and frontiersmen living in the Ohio River valley were required “forthwith to remove themselves.” This action helped unite frontiersmen and western farmers and others wanting to move west and acquire new land.

The next series of encroachments on colonists was a succession of taxes and other political/military and economic “acts.” The year after the “Proclamation,” the English Parliament passed the Sugar Act (1764). This was at first only noticed by a few, the merchants, but this Act helped bring them together. With the initiation of the Stamp Act (1765) the year after, the colonists’ anger flared-up beyond any previous experience. The Stamp Act affected almost all of the colonists. The tax was for a stamp to be purchased and placed on all printed materials including newspapers, journals, marriage licenses, wills, death certificates, and even the few books that were available. One reaction by colonials to the act was the formation of the “Sons of Liberty.”

The Stamp Act did more to unite the colonists than any other, with the possible exception of the Tea Act of 1773, which led to the famous “Boston Tea Party” initiated by the Sons of Liberty. Americans were irate that they were being taxed by their Mother Country without recourse—“no taxation without representation” became the rally-to-arms. Although the colonists had certain freedoms and a taste of representative government in some places during the previous one and a half centuries, a more formally articulated idea about a government, at least partially representative, from Benjamin Franklin’s “Albany Plan” (1754) was beginning to become more plausible. Americans liked less-and-less the idea of an arbitrary monarchical “government over man.” They were slowly becoming conscious of their unconscious yearnings for independence and self-rule—for “man over government.”

Colonists thought other acts were trespasses as well. The Currency Act (1764) prohibited the colonists from printing their own

encroachment

Gradual or insidious intrusion or infringement upon the property or rights of another; a trespass; advancement beyond proper limits

Colonial quotation about British forces in Boston

“But whatever may be the design of this military appearance; whatever use some persons may intend and expect to make of it: This we all know, and every child in the street is taught to know it; that while a people retain a just sense of Liberty, as blessed be God, this people yet do, the insolence of power will forever be despised.”

Samuel Adams, *Boston Gazette*, 1768

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money, and the Quartering Act (1764) particularly displeased the Americans, for they were then mandated to house and feed British troops in their homes and to furnish them with daily rations of ale or rum. The Declaratory Act (1766) stated that Parliament was sovereign in “all cases whatsoever,” further negating any complaints that the Americans voiced. The Quebec Act of 1774 concerned the colonists in no small way because England established an authoritarian government right across their border in Canada. They thought it likely that the American Colonies could suffer the same fate.

The result of these and other grievances and the subsequent feeling of colonists was “an absolute Tyranny over these States” under King George III of Great Britain. It culminated with representatives from the various Colonies coming together to sign the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, which Thomas Jefferson had been asked to pen.

mandate

To authoritatively command; an order issued by a superior

1763	French and Indian War ends Proclamation of 1763	1771	
		1772	
1764	Sugar Act Quartering Act Currency Act	1773	Tea Act “Boston Tea Party”
1765	Stamp Act Sons of Liberty organized	1774	Coercive (Intolerable) Acts Quebec Act First Continental Congress
1766	Declaratory Act	1775	Lexington and Concord “The shot heard ‘round the world” Second Continental Congress
1767	Townshend Acts Taxes on imports of paper, lead, and glass	1776	Declaration of Independence
1768		1781	United States Victory at the Battle of Yorktown
1769		1783	Treaty of Paris
1770	“Boston Massacre” Customs officials begin strict enforcement of trade laws	1787	United States Constitution

Unalienable Rights

Excerpt from 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” (second paragraph).

What are “unalienable rights”? These rights, according to Thomas Jefferson and the Founding Fathers of the United States of America, are the rights “endowed by their creator.” That is, these rights are “provided gratuitously” (“given unearned or without recompense; costing nothing; free,” *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*) by God. In other words, these rights or “laws of nature and of nature’s God” come directly from God the Creator (first paragraph). It had finally become obvious to the Founding Fathers and to many other colonists that it was up to man to *give his consent* to be ruled and also to be willing to give up *a portion* of his God-given natural rights for the sake of order and security in the larger society.

The American Founders relied heavily on a substantially rich heritage of British political thought and law to further their ultimate aim of independence—notably influenced by Sir William Blackstone, John Locke, John Trenchard, Thomas Gordon, the Scotsman Adam Smith, and others.

Nothing like Blackstone’s (1723-80) *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765-71) had ever appeared in English before, and little has since. Americans used these English *Commentaries* as a basis for some of their own political arguments:

“This law of nature, being co-eval with mankind and dictated by God himself, is of course superior in obligation to any other. It is binding over all the globe, and all countries, and at all times: no human laws are of any validity if contrary to this; and such of them as are valid derive all their force, and all their authority, mediately or immediately from this original” (William S. Clough, ed., *Intellectual Origins of American National Thought*, Corinth Books, New York, 1955, p 235).

This clause makes an especially strong claim: All man-made laws must reflect natural law and be in accord with it in order to be valid and have the force of law. In other words, for laws to be valid, they must be in accord with the “nature of things.” Otherwise, the law would be an attempt to change the very nature of things.

John Locke (1632-1704) looms above all others in his impact upon the Founding Fathers. His *Second Treatise on Civil Government* (1689) may well be the most influential book on political theory ever written, explaining “natural law”:

“To understand political power right, and derive it from the original, we must consider, what state all men are naturally in, and that is, a state of perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions, and

persons [themselves], as they think fit within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man” (Paragraph 4, Chapter II, “Of the State of Nature”).

Trenchard and Gordon’s major contributions occurred primarily in the first half of the eighteenth century. An American edition of their work appeared in New York in 1724 and another in 1740. Here is another explanation of unalienable rights:

“All men are born free; Liberty is a Gift which they receive from God; nor can they alienate the same by Consent, though possibly they may forfeit it by Crimes . . . ” (Quoted in David L. Jacobson, ed., *The English Libertarian Heritage*, Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis, 1965, p xvii).

Traditional American political philosophy, freely borrowing from the British, teaches that the individual man is endowed at birth with rights which are unalienable because given by his Creator.

The concept of man’s rights being unalienable is based solely upon belief in their Divine origin. Lacking this belief, there is no moral basis for any claim that these rights are unalienable or for any claim to the great benefits flowing from this concept. God-given rights, sometimes called natural rights, are possessed by the individual man under the law of nature, meaning under the laws of God’s Creation and therefore the gift of God. Man does not have the power to alienate or dispose of, by surrender or consent, his God-given rights, according to this American political philosophy.

Colonial quotations about unalienable rights

“The God who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time; the hand of force may destroy, but cannot disjoin them.”

Thomas Jefferson, “Rights of British America,” 1774

“ . . . as all men by nature are free . . . that no man can be deprived of liberty, and subjected to perpetual bondage and servitude, unless he has forfeited his liberty as a malefactor ”

Town-meeting Resolution, Pittsfield, Massachusetts, 1779

“All eyes are opened, or opening, to the rights of man. The general spread of the light of science has already laid open to every view of the palpable truth, that the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, by the grace of God.”

Thomas Jefferson, Letter to R.C. Weightman, June 24, 1826

“Government is founded immediately on the necessities of human nature, and ultimately on the will of God, the author of nature, who has not left it to man in general to choose, whether they will be members of a society or not, but at the hazard of their senses if not of their lives. Yet it is left to every man as he comes of age to choose what society he will continue to belong to” (Max Beloff, ed., *The Debate on the American Revolution: 1761-1783*, Sheridan House, Dobbs Ferry, New York, 1989, p 57).

James Otis, *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved*, Boston, July 1764

Earlier Colonial “Plans for Union”

A variety of “plans for union” emerged as early as 1697, three-quarters of a century before the Declaration of Independence. Probably the earliest “Plan for Union” for the English Colonies in America was written in 1697 by William Penn, the Quaker founder of Pennsylvania. Although this was a “call for union,” it was not to incite separation or independence from England. To the contrary, it was a call to union so as the Colonies could “be more useful to the crown and one another’s peace and safety with an universal concurrence” (Commager, pp 39-40).

“The Albany Plan of Union” penned by Benjamin Franklin in 1754 was another matter. This call for union pointed toward resolution of the antagonisms brought about by the British Empire, particularly by the Navigation Acts. Already the germs of ideas concerning “rule by law” or “man over government” had been spawned. The idea of “government over man” or “Ruler’s Law” was slowly becoming distasteful to the Americans. But it was still too early, as reflected in the reservations of early proposals, for major changes in government:

“It is *proposed* that *humble application* be made for an act of Parliament of Great Britain, by virtue of which one general government may be formed in America, including all the said colonies, within and under which each government *may retain* its present constitution

1. That the said general government be administered by a President-General, to be *appointed and supported by the crown*; and a Grand Council, to be chosen by representatives of the people of the several Colonies met in their respective assemblies” (Commager, 43-45). (italics added)

Although this Plan was rejected by the colonists, one can easily see that it was not yet even close to a true call for separation or independence. It seemed, in fact, like almost a groveling in its “humble application.” Why would the Parliament, representing “King’s Rule” or “Ruler’s Law,” intentionally give up any of its power to any form of representative government wherein the custom would be for “self-rule” or “man over government”? It would not—and it did not.

On September 28, 1774, a proposal, supposedly to resolve the continuing problem of home rule, was raised at the Continental Congress gathered in Philadelphia to coordinate Colonial actions against the Crown. “Galloway’s Plan of Union” was a carefully worked out “plan” between England and her angry Colonies. Joseph Galloway, who most agreed was an ardent “friend of liberty,” came up with something so similar to Franklin’s Albany Plan from twenty years earlier that he had likely read and copied from it. Galloway called for a “royally appointed President-General” and a Colonial legislature empowered with “all rights, liberties and privileges of Parliament.” It was defeated in the Congress by only one vote. Apparently, as late as the Continental Congress meeting in September 1774, there was still quite a contingency of colonials that were not yet ready to abandon England for full independence. Eventually Galloway fled America for England following the Philadelphia campaign. Because he thought the Revolution was treasonous, he chose to fight alongside the British.

In reality, the real “plan of union” was the Continental Congress itself, not a document. Representatives, each chosen by their respective Colonies, came together to somehow address grievances against the English Crown. And following Galloway’s Plan, the next step closer

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to the Declaration of Independence was taken during the same Continental Congress only two weeks later.

The four Coercive Acts, or Intolerable Acts as they were called by the colonists, which were passed by Parliament following the Boston Tea Party, were finally taking their toll on the Americans. The Crown sought to punish and humiliate the Colonies, but the Acts backfired. The Acts further united the colonists in common defense of their liberties. The “Declaration and Resolves of the First Continental Congress,” on October 14, 1774, claimed:

“That the inhabitants of the English Colonies in North America, by the immutable laws of nature, the principles of the English constitution, and in the several charters or compacts, have the following Rights:

Resolved,

1. That they are entitled to life, liberty, and property, & *they have never ceded to any sovereign power whatever*, a right to dispose of either without their consent (Commager, pp. 82-4). (italics added)

Within sixteen days during the Continental Congress, the rhetoric of the American colonists changed dramatically. With their new language the colonists claimed that they had never consented to give up their natural rights, in effect reclaiming the rule which the Crown assumed under its authority. There were nine other claims and further accusations:

“*Resolved*, that the following acts of Parliament are infringements and violations of the rights of the colonists; and that the repeal of them is essentially necessary, in order to restore harmony between Great Britain and the American colonies, . . .” (Commager, p. 84). (italics in the original)

This new determination and sense of purpose resulted in not only the reclamation of their sovereignty but the stipulation of the terms of peace.

Furthermore, on September 27, 1774, the Continental Congress voted “non-intercourse” with Great Britain, halting all commerce. Three days later, a committee was formed to consider a plan of action. The committee offered its suggestions twelve days later on October 12. A resolution was adopted on October 18 and signed on October 20. It read: “The signature of the Association may be considered as the commencement of the American Union.”

The Battle of Lexington and Concord was the opening skirmish of the American Revolution (1775-83). An anonymous pistol-shot rang out on April 19, 1775, and unceremoniously “the shot heard ‘round the world” began the American Revolutionary War. It was not until the War was more than a year old that Thomas Jefferson was commissioned to write the first draft of a Declaration of Independence, a radical departure from earlier colonial “Plans for Union.”

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 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. 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.

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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 meantime exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.

He has endeavored to prevent the population of these states; for that purpose obstructing the laws for naturalization of foreigners, refusing to pass others to encourage their migration 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 harass 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 offenses;

For abolishing the free system of English laws in a neighboring 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;

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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, burned our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation, and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of cruelty and 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 endeavored 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 British 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 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 out 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.

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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 offenses;
For abolishing the free system of English laws in a neighboring 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, burned our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.
He is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation, and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of cruelty and 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 endeavored 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 British 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.
