

★ THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE ★

The Second Continental Congress appointed Jefferson, Adams, Franklin, Sherman, and Livingston to prepare a declaration of independence. Their task was to clarify why the colonies felt separation was the only solution to long standing problems with England. When it was signed, the Declaration of Independence did something that was perhaps even more important—it established many of the key principles for a federal system of government.



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. . . . But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce [a people] 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. . . .

We, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, Assembled . . . do, in the Name, and by the 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; . . . 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.