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***By the summer of 17*7*6,* A*merican colonists had been at* w*ar* w*ith Britain for 14 months. During that time colonists debated whether th*ey were *fighting for more rights from Britain or for total independenc*e. A*s the fighting went on, more and more colonists argued that peace with Britain* w*as no longer possible. In June 1776 members of the Second Continental Congress asked* 33-*year-old Thomas Jeffe****rson (1743-1826) of Virginia to* **w*rite a statement explaining why the colonies ought to be independent. Read the Declaration of Independence that Jefferson wrote and the not*e*s of explanation beside it.* N*otice Jefferson's ideas about governm*e*nt, rebellion, and people's rights. Notice also what injustices he accuses King George III of Great Britain of having committed against the colonists. flow do King George's actions take away the rights that Jefferson belie*v*es people and governments should have*?**

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**The Preamble**

At certain times in history, it is a **necessa**ry for a group of people to break away from the government that has ruled them and to form a new, independent nation. At such a time, **their reasons for separat**ion and inde pendence should be clearly **stated.**

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***When in the Course of huma*n e*ven*ts,** 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 sta tion to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God enti tle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

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**A Declaration of Rights** :*:*. W**e believe that everyone agrees** on certain basic ideas: All people are **created** equal and they ha**ve basic** rights that can never be **taken awa*y*.** People have the right to live, the right **to be fre**e, and the right to **seek** happiness.

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, Liber ty, and the pursuit of Happiness

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**To preserve t**hese rights, people **create gov**ernments. Every g**overn** ment must have the support of the people it governs.

That, to ensure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the consent of the governed.

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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, lay ing 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.

If a government loses this support or tries to take away basic freedoms, people have the right to change their *g*overnment or to get rid of it and **form a new gove**rnment that will pro **tect t**heir rights.

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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 suffer able, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But, when a long train of abus es 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 Govern ment, and to provide new Guards for their future security.

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However, people should not change governments that have long been in power for minor or tempo rary problems. We have learned from history that people are usually more willing to put up wi**th a bad govern** ment than to get rid of it. But when people see their government misusing **its powe**r and mistreating its people time after time, it is the right and duty of the people to get rid of their gove ernment and to form a new one. **A List of Abuses**

The colonie**s have suffered** patiently long enough, and it is now **time t**o change our government. King George III of Great Britain has ruled badly for many years. His main goal has **been to est**ablish total control over the colonies.

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.

**These statements are proven by** the following facts:

King George Ill has rejected much-needed laws passed by the **colonists.**

He has not permitted important **laws to be passe**d by his governors in **America.**

He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of imme- . diate 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 accommoda tion 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.

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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 refused to redraw the** borders of large voting districts unless the people living there agreed to give up their right to be represented in the legislature.

**He has ordered lawmakers in the** colonies to meet far from their homes and offices in places that are unusual. and difficult to get to. His onl**y reason** for doing this has been to tire out the lawmakers so that they will accept his **rule.**

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When lawmakers have criticized the king for attacking their rights, he has broken up the legislature's meet

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing, with manly firmness, his invasions on the rights of the people.

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After breaking up their meetings, the king ha**s refused to allow ne*w*** elections. As a result, colonists have been living in danger, unable to protect **themselves or pass new laws.**

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He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative Pow ers, 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.

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He has tried to stop colonists **from moving west an**d settling in new lands. He has also tried to prevent people from foreign countries from settling in America by making it hard **for newcomers t**o become citizens.

He has endeavoured to prevent the Population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws of Naturaliza tion of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migration hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.

In some places, he has not let colonists set up a **system of courts.**

He has obstructed the Administration of justice. by refus ing his Assent to Laws for establishing judiciary Powers.

He has forced colonial judges to obey him by deciding how long they **can serve** and how much they are paid.

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 sent officials from Britain to fill new government offices in the colonies. These officials ha**ve mistreat** ed people and demanded unfair **taxes.**

In times of peace, he has kept sol diers in the colonies even though Americans did not want them.

He has tried to give soldiers **powe*r o*v**er colonial legislatures.

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

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

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He and other leaders in Great Britain have passed laws for the colonies that Americans did not want. In these laws the British government

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdic tion foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation:

**has:**

For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:

forced colonists to house and feed British soldiers;

protected these soldiers by giving them phony trials and not punishing them for murdering colonists;

For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from Punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabi tants of these States:

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For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:

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For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:

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**cut off trade between Americans** and people in other parts of the world; **demanded taxes th**at colonists never agreed to;

**prevented** colonists accused of crimes from having their trials decided fairly by a jury;

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For depriving us, in many cases, of the benefits of Trial

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For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretend ed 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:

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brought colonists falsely accused of crimes to Great Britain to be put on trial;

extended the borders of the neighboring province of Quebec to include lands stretching to the Ohio River, thus forcing colonists in this region to obey harsh French laws rather than English laws. The goal of the British government is to force all colonists to obey these harsh laws;

taken away our charters, or docu ments that make governments legal, canceled important laws, and com pletely changed our forms of govern ment;

broken up our legislatures and claimed that Great Britain has the right to pass all laws for the colonies.

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For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valu able 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.

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

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

King George III has ended govern ment in the colonies by waging war against us and not protecting us.

He has robbed American ships at sea, burned down our towns, and ruined people's lives.

He is right now bringing foreign soldiers to the colonies to commit horrible and brutal deeds. These actions by the king are some of the cruelest ever committed in the history of the world.

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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.

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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 forced colonists captured **at sea** to join the British navy and to fight and kill Americans.

He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our fron tiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.

He has urged enslaved people in the colonies to rebel, and he has tried to get Native Americans to fight against colonists.

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Peti tions 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.

**Statement of Independence**

For years we have asked King George Ill to correct these probems and safe-guard our rights. Unfortu nately, the king has refused to listen to our complaints and he continues to **treat us** badly. The king is such an unfair ruler that he is not fit to rule the free people of America.

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**We have also asked** the British people for help. We have told them many times of our problems and pointed out the unfai**r laws passed by** their government. *W*e hoped they would listen to us because they believed in reason and justice. We hoped they would listen to us because **we ar**e related to each other and have much in common. But **we were wrong:**

The British people have not listened to us at all. They have ignored our pleas for justice. We must, therefore, break away from Great Britain and become a separate nation.

Nor have We been wanting in attention 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 circum stances 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 inter rupt 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.

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**Signers Button Gwinnett (Ga.) Lyman Hall (Ga.) George Walton (Ga.)**

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**William Hooper (N.C.) Joseph Hewes (N.C.) John Penn (N.C.) Edward Rutledge (S.C.*)* Thomas Heyward, Jr. (S.C.) Thomas Lynch, Jr. (S.C.) Arthur Middleton (S.C.)**

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**John Hancock (Mass.) Samuel Chase *(*Md.) William Paca (Md.) Thomas Stone *(*Md.) Charles Carroll of Carrollton (Md.) George Wythe (Va.) Richard Henry Lee *(*Va.) Thomas Jefferson (*V*a.) Benjamin Harrison (Va.) Thomas Nelson, Jr. (Va.) Francis Lightfoot Lee (*V*a.*)* Carter Braxton (Va.)**

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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 con nection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Indepen dent 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 Honour.

In the name of the American peo ple, we members of the Continental Congress declare that the United States of America is no longer a colony of Great Britain but is, instead, a free and independent nation. The United States now cuts all its relations with Great Britain. As a free nation, the United States has the right and **power to make wa**r and peace, make **agreements** with other nations. con duct trade, and do all the things that independent nations have the right to do. To support this Declaration of Independence, we promi**se to each** other our lives, our fortunes, and our personal honor

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**Matthew Th*or*nton**

**Robert Morris (Pa.) Benjamin Rush (Pa.) Benjamin Franklin (Pa.) John Morton (Pa.) George Clymer (Pa.) James Smith (Pa.) George Taylor (Pa.*)* James Wilson (Pa.) George Ross (Pa.) Cæsar Rodney (Del.) George Read (Del.)**

**Thomas McKean *(*Del.)**

**William Floyd (NY) Philip Livingston (NY) Francis Lewis (NY) Lewis Morris (N.Y.) Richard Stockton (N.J.) John Witherspoon (N.J.) Francis Hopkinson (R.I.) John Hart (N.).) Abraham Clark (N.p.)**

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**Josiah Bartlett (N.H.) William Whipple (N.H.) Samuel Adams (Mass.) John Adams (Mass.) Robert Treat Paine (Mass.) Elbridge Gerry (Mass.) Stephen Hopkins (R.I.) William Ellery (R.I.) Roger Sherman (Conn.) Samuel Huntington (Conn.) William Williams (Conn.) Oliver Wolcott (Conn.) Matthew Thornton (N.H.)**

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