

= United States Declaration of Independence =

The Declaration of Independence is the statement adopted by the Second Continental Congress meeting at Philadelphia , Pennsylvania on July 4 , 1776 , which announced that the thirteen American colonies , then at war with the Kingdom of Great Britain , regarded themselves as thirteen newly independent sovereign states , and no longer under British rule . Instead they formed a new nation ? the United States of America . John Adams was a leader in pushing for independence , which was passed on July 2 with no opposing vote cast . A committee of five had already drafted the formal declaration , to be ready when Congress voted on independence . The term " Declaration of Independence " is not used in the document itself .

John Adams persuaded the committee to select Thomas Jefferson to compose the original draft of the document , which Congress would edit to produce the final version . The Declaration was ultimately a formal explanation of why Congress had voted on July 2 to declare independence from Great Britain , more than a year after the outbreak of the American Revolutionary War . The next day , July 3 , John Adams wrote to his wife Abigail : " The Second Day of July 1776 , will be the most memorable Epocha , in the History of America . " But the national birthday , Independence Day , is celebrated on July 4 , the date that the Declaration of Independence was signed .

After ratifying the text on July 4 , Congress issued the Declaration of Independence in several forms . It was initially published as the printed Dunlap broadside that was widely distributed and read to the public . The source copy used for this printing has been lost , and may have been a copy in Thomas Jefferson 's hand . Jefferson 's original draft , complete with changes made by John Adams and Benjamin Franklin , and Jefferson 's notes of changes made by Congress , are preserved at the Library of Congress . The best known version of the Declaration , a signed copy that is popularly regarded as the official document , is displayed at the National Archives in Washington , D.C. This engrossed copy was ordered by Congress on July 19 , and signed primarily on August 2 .

The sources and interpretation of the Declaration have been the subject of much scholarly inquiry . The Declaration justified the independence of the United States by listing colonial grievances against King George III , and by asserting certain natural and legal rights , including a right of revolution . Having served its original purpose in announcing independence , references to the text of the Declaration were few in the following years . Abraham Lincoln made it the centerpiece of his rhetoric ( as in the Gettysburg Address of 1863 ) , and his policies . Since then , it has become a well @-@ known statement on human rights , particularly its second sentence :

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 .

This has been called " one of the best @-@ known sentences in the English language " , containing " the most potent and consequential words in American history " . The passage came to represent a moral standard to which the United States should strive . This view was notably promoted by Abraham Lincoln , who considered the Declaration to be the foundation of his political philosophy , and argued that the Declaration is a statement of principles through which the United States Constitution should be interpreted .

The United States Declaration of Independence inspired many other similar documents in other countries in the 18th and 19th centuries , spreading to the Low Countries , and then to the Caribbean , Spanish America , the Balkans , West Africa , and Central Europe in the decades up to 1848 .

= = Background = =

Believe me , dear Sir : there is not in the British empire a man who more cordially loves a union with Great Britain than I do . But , by the God that made me , I will cease to exist before I yield to a connection on such terms as the British Parliament propose ; and in this , I think I speak the sentiments of America .

By the time the Declaration of Independence was adopted in July 1776 , the Thirteen Colonies and

Great Britain had been at war for more than a year . Relations between the colonies and the mother country had been deteriorating since 1763 . Parliament enacted a series of measures to increase revenue from the colonies . Parliament believed that these acts , such as the Stamp Act of 1765 and the Townshend Acts of 1767 , were a legitimate means of having the colonies pay their fair share of the costs to keep the colonies in the British Empire .

Many colonists , however , had developed a different conception of the empire . Because the colonies were not directly represented in Parliament , colonists argued that Parliament had no right to levy taxes upon them . This tax dispute was part of a larger divergence between British and American interpretations of the British Constitution and the extent of Parliament 's authority in the colonies . The orthodox British view , dating from the Glorious Revolution of 1688 , was that Parliament was the supreme authority throughout the empire , and so by definition anything Parliament did was constitutional . In the colonies , however , the idea had developed that the British Constitution recognized certain fundamental rights that no government ? not even Parliament ? could violate . After the Townshend Acts , some essayists even began to question whether Parliament had any legitimate jurisdiction in the colonies at all . Anticipating the arrangement of the British Commonwealth , by 1774 American writers such as Samuel Adams , James Wilson , and Thomas Jefferson were arguing that Parliament was the legislature of Great Britain only , and that the colonies , which had their own legislatures , were connected to the rest of the empire only through their allegiance to the Crown .

= = = Congress convenes = = =

The issue of Parliament 's authority in the colonies became a crisis after Parliament passed the Coercive Acts ( known as the Intolerable Acts in the colonies ) in 1774 to punish the Province of Massachusetts for the Boston Tea Party of 1773 . Many colonists saw the Coercive Acts as a violation of the British Constitution and thus a threat to the liberties of all of British America . In September 1774 , the First Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia to coordinate a response . Congress organized a boycott of British goods and petitioned the king for repeal of the acts . These measures were unsuccessful because King George and the ministry of Prime Minister Lord North were determined not to retreat on the question of parliamentary supremacy . As the king wrote to North in November 1774 , " blows must decide whether they are to be subject to this country or independent " .

Even after fighting in the American Revolutionary War began at Lexington and Concord in April 1775 , most colonists still hoped for reconciliation with Great Britain . When the Second Continental Congress convened at the Pennsylvania State House in Philadelphia in May 1775 , some delegates hoped for eventual independence , but no one yet advocated declaring it . Although many colonists no longer believed that Parliament had any sovereignty over them , they still professed loyalty to King George , whom they hoped would intercede on their behalf . They were to be disappointed : in late 1775 , the king rejected Congress 's second petition , issued a Proclamation of Rebellion , and announced before Parliament on October 26 that he was considering " friendly offers of foreign assistance " to suppress the rebellion . A pro @-@ American minority in Parliament warned that the government was driving the colonists toward independence .

= = Toward independence = =

In January 1776 , just as it became clear in the colonies that the king was not inclined to act as a conciliator , Thomas Paine 's pamphlet Common Sense was published . Paine , who had only recently arrived in the colonies from England , argued in favor of colonial independence , advocating republicanism as an alternative to monarchy and hereditary rule . Common Sense introduced no new ideas , and probably had little direct effect on Congress 's thinking about independence ; its importance was in stimulating public debate on a topic that few had previously dared to openly discuss . Public support for separation from Great Britain steadily increased after the publication of Paine 's enormously popular pamphlet .

Although some colonists still held out hope for reconciliation , developments in early 1776 further strengthened public support for independence . In February 1776 , colonists learned of Parliament 's passage of the Prohibitory Act , which established a blockade of American ports and declared American ships to be enemy vessels . John Adams , a strong supporter of independence , believed that Parliament had effectively declared American independence before Congress had been able to . Adams labeled the Prohibitory Act the " Act of Independency " , calling it " a compleat Dismemberment of the British Empire " . Support for declaring independence grew even more when it was confirmed that King George had hired German mercenaries to use against his American subjects .

Despite this growing popular support for independence , Congress lacked the clear authority to declare it . Delegates had been elected to Congress by thirteen different governments ? which included extralegal conventions , ad hoc committees , and elected assemblies ? and were bound by the instructions given to them . Regardless of their personal opinions , delegates could not vote to declare independence unless their instructions permitted such an action . Several colonies , in fact , expressly prohibited their delegates from taking any steps towards separation from Great Britain , while other delegations had instructions that were ambiguous on the issue . As public sentiment for separation from Great Britain grew , advocates of independence sought to have the Congressional instructions revised . For Congress to declare independence , a majority of delegations would need authorization to vote for independence , and at least one colonial government would need to specifically instruct ( or grant permission for ) its delegation to propose a declaration of independence in Congress . Between April and July 1776 , a " complex political war " was waged to bring this about .

= = = Revising instructions = = =

In the campaign to revise Congressional instructions , many Americans formally expressed their support for separation from Great Britain in what were effectively state and local declarations of independence . Historian Pauline Maier identified more than ninety such declarations that were issued throughout the Thirteen Colonies from April to July 1776 . These " declarations " took a variety of forms . Some were formal , written instructions for Congressional delegations , such as the Halifax Resolves of April 12 , with which North Carolina became the first colony to explicitly authorize its delegates to vote for independence . Others were legislative acts that officially ended British rule in individual colonies , such as on May 4 , when the Rhode Island legislature became the first to declare its independence from Great Britain . Many " declarations " were resolutions adopted at town or county meetings that offered support for independence . A few came in the form of jury instructions , such as the statement issued on April 23 , 1776 , by Chief Justice William Henry Drayton of South Carolina : " the law of the land authorizes me to declare ... that George the Third , King of Great Britain ... has no authority over us , and we owe no obedience to him . " Most of these declarations are now obscure , having been overshadowed by the declaration approved by Congress on July 4 .

Some colonies held back from endorsing independence . Resistance was centered in the middle colonies of New York , New Jersey , Maryland , Pennsylvania , and Delaware . Advocates of independence saw Pennsylvania as the key : if that colony could be converted to the pro @-@ independence cause , it was believed that the others would follow . On May 1 , however , opponents of independence retained control of the Pennsylvania Assembly in a special election that had focused on the question of independence . In response , on May 10 Congress passed a resolution , which had been promoted by John Adams and Richard Henry Lee , calling on colonies without a " government sufficient to the exigencies of their affairs " to adopt new governments . The resolution passed unanimously , and was even supported by Pennsylvania 's John Dickinson , the leader of the anti @-@ independence faction in Congress , who believed that it did not apply to his colony .

= = = May 15 preamble = = =

As was the custom , Congress appointed a committee to draft a preamble to explain the purpose of the resolution . John Adams wrote the preamble , which stated that because King George had rejected reconciliation and was hiring foreign mercenaries to use against the colonies , " it is necessary that the exercise of every kind of authority under the said crown should be totally suppressed " . Adams 's preamble was meant to encourage the overthrow of the governments of Pennsylvania and Maryland , which were still under proprietary governance . Congress passed the preamble on May 15 after several days of debate , but four of the middle colonies voted against it , and the Maryland delegation walked out in protest . Adams regarded his May 15 preamble effectively as an American declaration of independence , although a formal declaration would still have to be made .

= = = Lee 's resolution and the final push = = =

On the same day that Congress passed Adams 's radical preamble , the Virginia Convention set the stage for a formal Congressional declaration of independence . On May 15 , the Convention instructed Virginia 's congressional delegation " to propose to that respectable body to declare the United Colonies free and independent States , absolved from all allegiance to , or dependence upon , the Crown or Parliament of Great Britain " . In accordance with those instructions , Richard Henry Lee of Virginia presented a three @-@ part resolution to Congress on June 7 . The motion , which was seconded by John Adams , called on Congress to declare independence , form foreign alliances , and prepare a plan of colonial confederation . The part of the resolution relating to declaring independence read :

Resolved , 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 .

Lee 's resolution met with resistance in the ensuing debate . Opponents of the resolution , while conceding that reconciliation with Great Britain was unlikely , argued that declaring independence was premature , and that securing foreign aid should take priority . Advocates of the resolution countered that foreign governments would not intervene in an internal British struggle , and so a formal declaration of independence was needed before foreign aid was possible . All Congress needed to do , they insisted , was to " declare a fact which already exists " . Delegates from Pennsylvania , Delaware , New Jersey , Maryland , and New York were still not yet authorized to vote for independence , however , and some of them threatened to leave Congress if the resolution were adopted . Congress therefore voted on June 10 to postpone further discussion of Lee 's resolution for three weeks . Until then , Congress decided that a committee should prepare a document announcing and explaining independence in the event that Lee 's resolution was approved when it was brought up again in July .

Support for a Congressional declaration of independence was consolidated in the final weeks of June 1776 . On June 14 , the Connecticut Assembly instructed its delegates to propose independence , and the following day the legislatures of New Hampshire and Delaware authorized their delegates to declare independence . In Pennsylvania , political struggles ended with the dissolution of the colonial assembly , and on June 18 a new Conference of Committees under Thomas McKean authorized Pennsylvania 's delegates to declare independence . On June 15 , the Provincial Congress of New Jersey , which had been governing the province since January 1776 , resolved that Royal Governor William Franklin was " an enemy to the liberties of this country " and had him arrested . On June 21 , they chose new delegates to Congress and empowered them to join in a declaration of independence .

Only Maryland and New York had yet to authorize independence towards the end of June . Previously , when the Continental Congress had adopted Adams 's radical May 15 preamble , Maryland 's delegates walked out and sent to the Annapolis Convention for instructions . On May 20 , the Annapolis Convention rejected Adams 's preamble , instructing its delegates to remain against independence , but Samuel Chase went to Maryland and , thanks to local resolutions in favor of independence , was able to get the Annapolis Convention to change its mind on June 28 . Only the

New York delegates were unable to get revised instructions . When Congress had been considering the resolution of independence on June 8 , the New York Provincial Congress told the delegates to wait . But on June 30 , the Provincial Congress evacuated New York as British forces approached , and would not convene again until July 10 . This meant that New York 's delegates would not be authorized to declare independence until after Congress had made its decision .

= = Draft and adoption = =

While political maneuvering was setting the stage for an official declaration of independence , a document explaining the decision was being written . On June 11 , 1776 , Congress appointed a " Committee of Five " , consisting of John Adams of Massachusetts , Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania , Thomas Jefferson of Virginia , Robert R. Livingston of New York , and Roger Sherman of Connecticut , to draft a declaration . Because the committee left no minutes , there is some uncertainty about how the drafting process proceeded ? accounts written many years later by Jefferson and Adams , although frequently cited , are contradictory and not entirely reliable . What is certain is that the committee , after discussing the general outline that the document should follow , decided that Jefferson would write the first draft . The committee in general , and Jefferson in particular , thought Adams should write the document , but Adams persuaded the committee to choose Jefferson and promised to consult with Jefferson personally . Considering Congress 's busy schedule , Jefferson probably had limited time for writing over the next seventeen days , and likely wrote the draft quickly . He then consulted the others , made some changes , and then produced another copy incorporating these alterations . The committee presented this copy to the Congress on June 28 , 1776 . The title of the document was " A Declaration by the Representatives of the United States of America , in General Congress assembled . "

Congress ordered that the draft " lie on the table " . For two days Congress methodically edited Jefferson 's primary document , shortening it by a fourth , removing unnecessary wording , and improving sentence structure . Congress removed Jefferson 's assertion that Britain had forced slavery on the colonies , in order to moderate the document and appease persons in Britain who supported the Revolution . Although Jefferson wrote that Congress had " mangled " his draft version , the Declaration that was finally produced , according to his biographer John Ferling , was " the majestic document that inspired both contemporaries and posterity . "

On Monday , July 1 , having tabled the draft of the declaration , Congress resolved itself into a committee of the whole , with Benjamin Harrison of Virginia presiding , and resumed debate on Lee 's resolution of independence . John Dickinson made one last effort to delay the decision , arguing that Congress should not declare independence without first securing a foreign alliance and finalizing the Articles of Confederation . John Adams gave a speech in reply to Dickinson , restating the case for an immediate declaration .

After a long day of speeches , a vote was taken . As always , each colony cast a single vote ; the delegation for each colony ? numbering two to seven members ? voted amongst themselves to determine the colony 's vote . Pennsylvania and South Carolina voted against declaring independence . The New York delegation , lacking permission to vote for independence , abstained . Delaware cast no vote because the delegation was split between Thomas McKean ( who voted yes ) and George Read ( who voted no ) . The remaining nine delegations voted in favor of independence , which meant that the resolution had been approved by the committee of the whole . The next step was for the resolution to be voted upon by the Congress itself . Edward Rutledge of South Carolina , who was opposed to Lee 's resolution but desirous of unanimity , moved that the vote be postponed until the following day .

On July 2 , South Carolina reversed its position and voted for independence . In the Pennsylvania delegation , Dickinson and Robert Morris abstained , allowing the delegation to vote three @-@ to @-@ two in favor of independence . The tie in the Delaware delegation was broken by the timely arrival of Caesar Rodney , who voted for independence . The New York delegation abstained once again , since they were still not authorized to vote for independence , although they would be allowed to do so by the New York Provincial Congress a week later . The resolution of

independence had been adopted with twelve affirmative votes and one abstention . With this , the colonies had officially severed political ties with Great Britain . In a now @-@ famous letter written to his wife on the following day , John Adams predicted that July 2 would become a great American holiday . Adams thought that the vote for independence would be commemorated ; he did not foresee that Americans ? including himself ? would instead celebrate Independence Day on the date that the announcement of that act was finalized .

After voting in favor of the resolution of independence , Congress turned its attention to the committee 's draft of the declaration . Over several days of debate , Congress made a few changes in wording and deleted nearly a fourth of the text , most notably a passage critical of the slave trade , changes that Jefferson resented . On July 4 , 1776 , the wording of the Declaration of Independence was approved and sent to the printer for publication .

There is a distinct change in wording from this original Broadside printing of the Declaration to the final official engrossed copy . The word " unanimous " was inserted as a result of a Congressional resolution passed on July 19 , 1776 :

Resolved , That the Declaration passed on the 4th , be fairly engrossed on parchment , with the title and stile of " The unanimous declaration of the thirteen United States of America , " and that the same , when engrossed , be signed by every member of Congress .

= = Annotated text of the engrossed Declaration = =

The Declaration is not divided into formal sections ; but it is often discussed as consisting of five parts : Introduction , the Preamble , the Indictment of King George , the Denunciation of the British people , and the Conclusion .

= = Influences and legal status = =

Historians have often sought to identify the sources that most influenced the words and political philosophy of the Declaration of Independence . By Jefferson 's own admission , the Declaration contained no original ideas , but was instead a statement of sentiments widely shared by supporters of the American Revolution . As he explained in 1825 :

Neither aiming at originality of principle or sentiment , nor yet copied from any particular and previous writing , it was intended to be an expression of the American mind , and to give to that expression the proper tone and spirit called for by the occasion .

Jefferson 's most immediate sources were two documents written in June 1776 : his own draft of the preamble of the Constitution of Virginia , and George Mason 's draft of the Virginia Declaration of Rights . Ideas and phrases from both of these documents appear in the Declaration of Independence . They were , in turn , directly influenced by the 1689 English Declaration of Rights , which formally ended the reign of King James II . During the American Revolution , Jefferson and other Americans looked to the English Declaration of Rights as a model of how to end the reign of an unjust king . The Scottish Declaration of Arbroath ( 1320 ) and the Dutch Act of Abjuration ( 1581 ) have also been offered as models for Jefferson 's Declaration , but these models are now accepted by few scholars .

Jefferson wrote that a number of authors exerted a general influence on the words of the Declaration . The English political theorist John Locke , whom Jefferson called one of " the three greatest men that have ever lived " , is usually cited as one of the primary influences . In 1922 , historian Carl L. Becker wrote that " Most Americans had absorbed Locke 's works as a kind of political gospel ; and the Declaration , in its form , in its phraseology , follows closely certain sentences in Locke 's second treatise on government . " The extent of Locke 's influence on the American Revolution has been questioned by some subsequent scholars , however . Historian Ray Forrest Harvey declared in 1937 , as he argued for the dominant influence of the Swiss jurist Jean Jacques Burlamaqui , that Jefferson and Locke were at " two opposite poles " in their political philosophy , as evidenced by Jefferson 's use in the Declaration of Independence of the phrase " pursuit of happiness " instead of " property " . Other scholars emphasized the influence of

republicanism rather than Locke 's classical liberalism . Historian Garry Wills argued that Jefferson was influenced by the Scottish Enlightenment , particularly Francis Hutcheson , rather than Locke , an interpretation that has been strongly criticized .

Legal historian John Phillip Reid has written that the emphasis on the political philosophy of the Declaration has been misplaced . The Declaration is not a philosophical tract about natural rights , argues Reid , but is instead a legal document ? an indictment against King George for violating the constitutional rights of the colonists . Historian David Armitage has argued that the Declaration was strongly influenced by de Vattel 's *The Law of Nations* , the dominant international law treatise of the period , and a book that Benjamin Franklin said was " continually in the hands of the members of our Congress " . Armitage writes that because " Vattel made independence fundamental to his definition of statehood " , the primary purpose of the Declaration was " to express the international legal sovereignty of the United States " . If the United States were to have any hope of being recognized by the European powers , the American revolutionaries had first to make it clear that they were no longer dependent on Great Britain . The Declaration of Independence does not have the force of law domestically , but nevertheless it may help to provide historical and legal clarity about the Constitution and other laws .

= = Signing = =

The Declaration became official when Congress voted for it on July 4 ; signatures of the delegates were not needed to make it official . The handwritten copy of the Declaration of Independence that was signed by Congress is dated July 4 , 1776 . The signatures of fifty @-@ six delegates are affixed ; however , the exact date each person signed it has long been the subject of debate . Jefferson , Franklin , and Adams all wrote that the Declaration had been signed by Congress on July 4 . But in 1796 , signer Thomas McKean disputed that the Declaration had been signed on July 4 , pointing out that some signers were not then present , including several who were not even elected to Congress until after that date .

According to the 1911 record of events by the U.S. State Department , under Secretary Philander C. Knox , the Declaration was transposed on paper , adopted by the Continental Congress , and signed by John Hancock , President of the Congress , on July 4 , 1776 . On August 2 , 1776 , a parchment paper copy of the Declaration was signed by 56 persons . Many of these signers were not present when the original Declaration was adopted on July 4 . One signer , Matthew Thornton from New Hampshire , who was seated in the Continental Congress in November , asked for and received the privilege of adding his signature at that time , and signed on November 4 , 1776 .

Historians have generally accepted McKean 's version of events , arguing that the famous signed version of the Declaration was created after July 19 , and was not signed by Congress until August 2 , 1776 . In 1986 , legal historian Wilfred Ritz argued that historians had misunderstood the primary documents and given too much credence to McKean , who had not been present in Congress on July 4 . According to Ritz , about thirty @-@ four delegates signed the Declaration on July 4 , and the others signed on or after August 2 . Historians who reject a July 4 signing maintain that most delegates signed on August 2 , and that those eventual signers who were not present added their names later . Two future U.S. presidents , Thomas Jefferson and John Adams , were among the signatories .

The most famous signature on the engrossed copy is that of John Hancock , who , as President of Congress , presumably signed first . Hancock 's large , flamboyant signature became iconic , and John Hancock emerged in the United States as an informal synonym for " signature " . A commonly circulated but apocryphal account claims that after Hancock signed , the delegate from Massachusetts commented , " The British ministry can read that name without spectacles . " Another apocryphal report indicates that Hancock proudly declared , " There ! I guess King George will be able to read that ! "

Various legends about the signing of the Declaration emerged years later , when the document had become an important national symbol . In one famous story , John Hancock supposedly said that Congress , having signed the Declaration , must now " all hang together " , and Benjamin Franklin

replied : " Yes , we must indeed all hang together , or most assuredly we shall all hang separately . " The quotation did not appear in print until more than fifty years after Franklin 's death .

The Syng inkstand , used at the signing , was also used at the signing of the United States Constitution in 1787 .

= = Publication and reaction = =

After Congress approved the final wording of the Declaration on July 4 , a handwritten copy was sent a few blocks away to the printing shop of John Dunlap . Through the night Dunlap printed about 200 broadsides for distribution . Before long , the Declaration was read to audiences and reprinted in newspapers across the thirteen states . The first official public reading of the document was by John Nixon in the yard of Independence Hall on July 8 ; public readings also took place on that day in Trenton , New Jersey , and Easton , Pennsylvania . A German translation of the Declaration was published in Philadelphia by July 9 .

President of Congress John Hancock sent a broadside to General George Washington , instructing him to have it proclaimed " at the Head of the Army in the way you shall think it most proper " . Washington had the Declaration read to his troops in New York City on July 9 , with thousands of British troops on ships in the harbor . Washington and Congress hoped the Declaration would inspire the soldiers , and encourage others to join the army . After hearing the Declaration , crowds in many cities tore down and destroyed signs or statues representing royal authority . An equestrian statue of King George in New York City was pulled down and the lead used to make musket balls .

British officials in North America sent copies of the Declaration to Great Britain . It was published in British newspapers beginning in mid @-@ August , it had reached Florence and Warsaw by mid @-@ September , and a German translation appeared in Switzerland by October . The first copy of the Declaration sent to France got lost , and the second copy arrived only in November 1776 . It reached Portuguese America by Brazilian medical student ' Vendek ' José Joaquim Maia e Barbalho , who had met with Thomas Jefferson in Nîmes . Though the Spanish @-@ American authorities banned the circulation of the Declaration , it was widely transmitted and translated , by the Venezuelan Manuel García de Sena , by the Colombian Miguel de Pombo , by the Ecuadorian Vicente Rocafuerte and by the New Englanders Richard Cleveland and William Shaler , who distributed the Declaration and the United States Constitution among creoles in Chile and Indians in Mexico in 1821 . The North Ministry did not give an official answer to the Declaration , but instead secretly commissioned pamphleteer John Lind to publish a response , which was entitled Answer to the Declaration of the American Congress . British Tories denounced the signers of the Declaration for not applying the same principles of " life , liberty , and the pursuit of happiness " to African Americans . Thomas Hutchinson , the former royal governor of Massachusetts , also published a rebuttal . These pamphlets challenged various aspects of the Declaration . Hutchinson argued that the American Revolution was the work of a few conspirators who wanted independence from the outset , and who had finally achieved it by inducing otherwise loyal colonists to rebel . Lind 's pamphlet had an anonymous attack on the concept of natural rights , written by Jeremy Bentham , an argument which he would repeat during the French Revolution . Both pamphlets asked how the American slaveholders in Congress could proclaim that " all men are created equal " without freeing their own slaves .

William Whipple , a signer of the Declaration of Independence who had fought in the war , freed his slave , Prince Whipple , because of revolutionary ideals . In the postwar decades , other slaveholders also freed their slaves ; from 1790 to 1810 , the percentage of free blacks in the Upper South increased to 8 @. @ 3 percent from less than one percent of the black population . All Northern states abolished slavery by 1804 .

= = History of the documents = =

The official copy was the one printed on July 4 , 1776 , under Jefferson 's supervision . It was sent to the states and the Army , and was widely reprinted in newspapers . The slightly different "



engrossed copy " ( shown at the top of this article ) was made later for members to sign . The engrossed version is the one widely distributed in the 21st century . Note the opening lines of the two version differ .

The copy of the Declaration that was signed by Congress is known as the engrossed or parchment copy . It was probably engrossed ( that is , carefully handwritten ) by clerk Timothy Matlack . Because of poor conservation of the engrossed copy through the 19th century , a facsimile made in 1823 , rather than the original , has become the basis of most modern reproductions . In 1921 , custody of the engrossed copy of the Declaration , along with the United States Constitution , was transferred from the State Department to the Library of Congress . After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 , the documents were moved for safekeeping to the United States Bullion Depository at Fort Knox in Kentucky , where they were kept until 1944 . In 1952 , the engrossed Declaration was transferred to the National Archives , and is now on permanent display at the National Archives in the " Rotunda for the Charters of Freedom " .

Although the document signed by Congress and enshrined in the National Archives is usually regarded as the Declaration of Independence , historian Julian P. Boyd argued that the Declaration , like Magna Carta , is not a single document . Boyd considered the printed broadsides ordered by Congress to be official texts as well . The Declaration was first published as a broadside that was printed the night of July 4 by John Dunlap of Philadelphia . Dunlap printed about 200 broadsides , of which 26 are known to survive . The 26th copy was discovered in The National Archives in England in 2009 . In 1777 , Congress commissioned Mary Katherine Goddard to print a new broadside that , unlike the Dunlap broadside , listed the signers of the Declaration . Nine copies of the Goddard broadside are known to still exist . A variety of broadsides printed by the states are also extant .

Several early handwritten copies and drafts of the Declaration have also been preserved . Jefferson kept a four @-@ page draft that late in life he called the " original Rough draught " . How many drafts Jefferson wrote prior to this one , and how much of the text was contributed by other committee members , is unknown . In 1947 , Boyd discovered a fragment of an earlier draft in Jefferson 's handwriting . Jefferson and Adams sent copies of the rough draft , with slight variations , to friends .

During the writing process , Jefferson showed the rough draft to Adams and Franklin , and perhaps other members of the drafting committee , who made a few more changes . Franklin , for example , may have been responsible for changing Jefferson 's original phrase " We hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable " to " We hold these truths to be self @-@ evident " . Jefferson incorporated these changes into a copy that was submitted to Congress in the name of the committee . The copy that was submitted to Congress on June 28 has been lost , and was perhaps destroyed in the printing process , or destroyed during the debates in accordance with Congress 's secrecy rule .

= = Legacy = =

Having served its original purpose in announcing the independence of the United States , the Declaration was initially neglected in the years immediately following the American Revolution . Early celebrations of Independence Day , like early histories of the Revolution , largely ignored the Declaration . Although the act of declaring independence was considered important , the text announcing that act attracted little attention . The Declaration was rarely mentioned during the debates about the United States Constitution , and its language was not incorporated into that document . George Mason 's draft of the Virginia Declaration of Rights was more influential , and its language was echoed in state constitutions and state bills of rights more often than Jefferson 's words . " In none of these documents " , wrote Pauline Maier , " is there any evidence whatsoever that the Declaration of Independence lived in men 's minds as a classic statement of American political principles . "

= = = Influence in other countries = = =

Many leaders of the French Revolution admired the Declaration of Independence but were also

interested in the new American state constitutions . The inspiration and content of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen ( 1789 ) emerged largely from the ideals of the American Revolution . Its key drafts were prepared by Lafayette , working closely in Paris with his friend , Thomas Jefferson . It also borrowed language from George Mason 's Virginia Declaration of Rights . The declaration also influenced the Russian Empire . The document had a particular impact on the Decembrist revolt and other Russian thinkers .

According to historian David Armitage , the Declaration of Independence did prove to be internationally influential , but not as a statement of human rights . Armitage argued that the Declaration was the first in a new genre of declarations of independence that announced the creation of new states .

Other French leaders were directly influenced by the text of the Declaration of Independence itself . The Manifesto of the Province of Flanders ( 1790 ) was the first foreign derivation of the Declaration ; others include the Venezuelan Declaration of Independence ( 1811 ) , the Liberian Declaration of Independence ( 1847 ) , the declarations of secession by the Confederate States of America ( 1860 ? 61 ) , and the Vietnamese Proclamation of Independence ( 1945 ) . These declarations echoed the United States Declaration of Independence in announcing the independence of a new state , without necessarily endorsing the political philosophy of the original .

Some other countries that used the Declaration as inspiration or directly copied sections from it is the Haitian declaration of January 1 , 1804 from the Haitian Revolution , the United Provinces of New Granada in 1811 , the Argentine Declaration of Independence in 1816 , the Chilean Declaration of Independence in 1818 , Costa Rica in 1821 , El Salvador in 1821 , Guatemala in 1821 , Honduras in ( 1821 ) , Mexico in 1821 , Nicaragua in 1821 , Peru in 1821 , Bolivian War of Independence in 1825 , Uruguay in 1825 , Ecuador in 1830 , Colombia in 1831 , Paraguay in 1842 , Dominican Republic in 1844 , Texas Declaration of Independence in March 1836 , California Republic in November 1836 , Hungarian Declaration of Independence in 1849 , Declaration of the Independence of New Zealand in 1835 , and the Czechoslovak declaration of independence from 1918 drafted in Washington D.C. with Gutzon Borglum among the drafters . The Rhodesian declaration of independence , ratified in November 1965 , is based on the American one as well , however , it omits the phrases " all men are created equal " and " the consent of the governed " . The South Carolina declaration of secession from December 1860 also mentions the U.S. Declaration of Independence , though it , like the Rhodesian one , omits references to " all men are created equal " and " consent of the governed " .

= = = Revival of interest = = =

Interest in the Declaration was revived in the 1790s with the emergence of the United States 's first political parties . Throughout the 1780s , few Americans knew , or cared , who wrote the Declaration . But in the next decade , Jeffersonian Republicans sought political advantage over their rival Federalists by promoting both the importance of the Declaration and Jefferson as its author . Federalists responded by casting doubt on Jefferson 's authorship or originality , and by emphasizing that independence was declared by the whole Congress , with Jefferson as just one member of the drafting committee . Federalists insisted that Congress 's act of declaring independence , in which Federalist John Adams had played a major role , was more important than the document announcing that act . But this view , like the Federalist Party , would fade away , and before long the act of declaring independence would become synonymous with the document .

A less partisan appreciation for the Declaration emerged in the years following the War of 1812 , thanks to a growing American nationalism and a renewed interest in the history of the Revolution . In 1817 , Congress commissioned John Trumbull 's famous painting of the signers , which was exhibited to large crowds before being installed in the Capitol . The earliest commemorative printings of the Declaration also appeared at this time , offering many Americans their first view of the signed document . Collective biographies of the signers were first published in the 1820s , giving birth to what Garry Wills called the " cult of the signers " . In the years that followed , many stories about the writing and signing of the document would be published for the first time .

When interest in the Declaration was revived , the sections that were most important in 1776 ? the announcement of the independence of the United States and the grievances against King George ? were no longer relevant . But the second paragraph , with its talk of self @-@ evident truths and unalienable rights , were applicable long after the war had ended . Because the Constitution and the Bill of Rights lacked sweeping statements about rights and equality , advocates of marginalized groups turned to the Declaration for support . Starting in the 1820s , variations of the Declaration were issued to proclaim the rights of workers , farmers , women , and others . In 1848 , for example , the Seneca Falls Convention , a meeting of women 's rights advocates , declared that " all men and women are created equal " .

= = = Slavery and the Declaration = = =

The contradiction between the claim that " all men are created equal " and the existence of American slavery attracted comment when the Declaration was first published . As mentioned above , although Jefferson had included a paragraph in his initial draft that strongly indicted Great Britain 's role in the slave trade , this was deleted from the final version . Jefferson himself was a prominent Virginia slave holder having owned hundreds of slaves . Referring to this seeming contradiction , English abolitionist Thomas Day wrote in a 1776 letter , " If there be an object truly ridiculous in nature , it is an American patriot , signing resolutions of independency with the one hand , and with the other brandishing a whip over his affrighted slaves . " In the 19th century , the Declaration took on a special significance for the abolitionist movement . Historian Bertram Wyatt @-@ Brown wrote that " abolitionists tended to interpret the Declaration of Independence as a theological as well as a political document " . Abolitionist leaders Benjamin Lundy and William Lloyd Garrison adopted the " twin rocks " of " the Bible and the Declaration of Independence " as the basis for their philosophies . " As long as there remains a single copy of the Declaration of Independence , or of the Bible , in our land , " wrote Garrison , " we will not despair . " For radical abolitionists like Garrison , the most important part of the Declaration was its assertion of the right of revolution : Garrison called for the destruction of the government under the Constitution , and the creation of a new state dedicated to the principles of the Declaration .

The controversial question of whether to add additional slave states to the United States coincided with the growing stature of the Declaration . The first major public debate about slavery and the Declaration took place during the Missouri controversy of 1819 to 1821 . Antislavery Congressmen argued that the language of the Declaration indicated that the Founding Fathers of the United States had been opposed to slavery in principle , and so new slave states should not be added to the country . Proslavery Congressmen , led by Senator Nathaniel Macon of North Carolina , argued that since the Declaration was not a part of the Constitution , it had no relevance to the question .

With the antislavery movement gaining momentum , defenders of slavery such as John Randolph and John C. Calhoun found it necessary to argue that the Declaration 's assertion that " all men are created equal " was false , or at least that it did not apply to black people . During the debate over the Kansas ? Nebraska Act in 1853 , for example , Senator John Pettit of Indiana argued that " all men are created equal " , rather than a " self @-@ evident truth " , was a " self @-@ evident lie " . Opponents of the Kansas ? Nebraska Act , including Salmon P. Chase and Benjamin Wade , defended the Declaration and what they saw as its antislavery principles .

= = = Lincoln and the Declaration = = =

The Declaration 's relationship to slavery was taken up in 1854 by Abraham Lincoln , a little @-@ known former Congressman who idolized the Founding Fathers . Lincoln thought that the Declaration of Independence expressed the highest principles of the American Revolution , and that the Founding Fathers had tolerated slavery with the expectation that it would ultimately wither away . For the United States to legitimize the expansion of slavery in the Kansas @-@ Nebraska Act , thought Lincoln , was to repudiate the principles of the Revolution . In his October 1854 Peoria speech , Lincoln said :

Nearly eighty years ago we began by declaring that all men are created equal ; but now from that beginning we have run down to the other declaration , that for some men to enslave others is a " sacred right of self @-@ government . ? Our republican robe is soiled and trailed in the dust . Let us repurify it . ? Let us re @-@ adopt the Declaration of Independence , and with it , the practices , and policy , which harmonize with it . ? If we do this , we shall not only have saved the Union : but we shall have saved it , as to make , and keep it , forever worthy of the saving .

The meaning of the Declaration was a recurring topic in the famed debates between Lincoln and Stephen Douglas in 1858 . Douglas argued that " all men are created equal " in the Declaration referred to white men only . The purpose of the Declaration , he said , had simply been to justify the independence of the United States , and not to proclaim the equality of any " inferior or degraded race " . Lincoln , however , thought that the language of the Declaration was deliberately universal , setting a high moral standard for which the American republic should aspire . " I had thought the Declaration contemplated the progressive improvement in the condition of all men everywhere , " he said . During the seventh and last joint debate with Steven Douglas at Alton , Illinois on October 15 , 1858 Lincoln said about the declaration :

I think the authors of that notable instrument intended to include all men , but they did not mean to declare all men equal in all respects . They did not mean to say all men were equal in color , size , intellect , moral development , or social capacity . They defined with tolerable distinctness in what they did consider all men created equal ? equal in " certain inalienable rights , among which are life , liberty , and the pursuit of happiness . " This they said , and this they meant . They did not mean to assert the obvious untruth that all were then actually enjoying that equality , or yet that they were about to confer it immediately upon them . In fact , they had no power to confer such a boon . They meant simply to declare the right , so that the enforcement of it might follow as fast as circumstances should permit . They meant to set up a standard maxim for free society which should be familiar to all , constantly looked to , constantly labored for , and even , though never perfectly attained , constantly approximated , and thereby constantly spreading and deepening its influence , and augmenting the happiness and value of life to all people , of all colors , everywhere .

According to Pauline Maier , Douglas 's interpretation was more historically accurate , but Lincoln 's view ultimately prevailed . " In Lincoln 's hands , " wrote Maier , " the Declaration of Independence became first and foremost a living document " with " a set of goals to be realized over time " .

Like Daniel Webster , James Wilson , and Joseph Story before him , Lincoln argued that the Declaration of Independence was a founding document of the United States , and that this had important implications for interpreting the Constitution , which had been ratified more than a decade after the Declaration . Although the Constitution did not use the word " equality " , Lincoln believed that " all men are created equal " remained a part of the nation 's founding principles . He famously expressed this belief in the opening sentence of his 1863 Gettysburg Address : " Four score and seven years ago [ i.e. in 1776 ] our fathers brought forth on this continent , a new nation , conceived in Liberty , and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal . "

Lincoln 's view of the Declaration as a moral guide to interpreting the Constitution became influential . " For most people now , " wrote Garry Wills in 1992 , " the Declaration means what Lincoln told us it means , as a way of correcting the Constitution itself without overthrowing it . " Admirers of Lincoln , such as Harry V. Jaffa , praised this development . Critics of Lincoln , notably Willmoore Kendall and Mel Bradford , argued that Lincoln dangerously expanded the scope of the national government , and violated states ' rights , by reading the Declaration into the Constitution .

= = = Women 's suffrage and the Declaration = = =

In July 1848 , the first Woman 's Rights Convention , the Seneca Falls Convention , was held in Seneca Falls , New York . The convention was organized by Elizabeth Cady Stanton , Lucretia Mott , Mary Ann McClintock , and Jane Hunt . In their " Declaration of Sentiments " , patterned on the Declaration of Independence , the convention members demanded social and political equality for women . Their motto was that " All men and women are created equal " and the convention demanded suffrage for women . The suffrage movement was supported by William Lloyd Garrison

and Frederick Douglass .

= = = Legacy = = =

The adoption of the Declaration of Independence was dramatized in the 1969 Tony Award ? winning musical play 1776 , and the 1972 movie of the same name , as well as in the 2008 television miniseries John Adams .

The text of the Declaration was chosen to become the first e @-@ book available on the Internet in 1971 .

The Declaration is featured in The Probability Broach ( 1980 ) , an alternative history novel , when one word is added to the document , to read that governments " derive their just power from the unanimous consent of the governed " .

In 1984 the Memorial to the 56 Signers of the Declaration was dedicated in Constitution Gardens on the National Mall in Washington , D.C. , where the signatures of all the original signers are carved in stone with their names , places of residences and occupations .

The Declaration document is at risk in Honour Among Thieves ( 1993 ) , a novel by Jeffrey Archer in which Saddam Hussein tries to steal the Declaration to burn it publicly on July 4 .

The engrossed copy of the Declaration is central to the 2004 Hollywood film National Treasure , in which the main character steals the document because he believes it has secret clues to a treasure hidden by some of the Founding Fathers .

The signing of the Declaration is featured on the back of the United States two @-@ dollar bill .

The One World Trade Center building in New York City is 1776 feet high to symbolize the year the Declaration of Independence was signed .