**The Declaration of Independence: A Transcription**

**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.**

#1

**We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.--Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.**

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#2

He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.  
He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.  
He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only.   
He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.   
He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.  
He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.  
He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.  
He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers.  
He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.  
He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harrass our people, and eat out their substance.  
He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.  
He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power.  
He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation: For Quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:  
For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:  
For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:  
For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:   
For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury:  
For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences  
For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies:  
For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:  
For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.  
He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.  
He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.   
He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation.  
He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.   
He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.

#6

**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.**

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**Nor have We been wanting in attentions to our Brittish brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which, would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.**

#7

**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.**

#8

*The Declaration ends with 56 signatures from the delegates, including the following from North Carolina: William Hooper, Joseph Hewes and John Penn. Other signers of note are Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and Samuel Adams.*

**Declaration of Independence Notes**

Listed below are numbered notes about the Declaration of Independence. As you read through the document, find the reference for each numbered note below, and highlight it.

1. States that the purpose of the Declaration is as a courtesy to explain why they are breaking away from Britain.
2. All men are created equal and have certain **unalienable rights** (they cannot be taken away). They are \_\_life\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_liberty\_\_\_\_, and the \_\_\_pursuit of happiness\_\_\_\_\_\_.
3. Reason for “abolishing:” one form of government:

… to secure these rights, Governments are instituted (created) among Men, deriving (getting) 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 (change) or to abolish (destroy) it, and to institute (create) new Government.

Rewrite the reason for abolishing the previous government in your own words.

1. This section describing the offenses in detail. Highlight 2 problems that we discussed in class. (EX: Quartering Act, Proclamation of 1763, putting an army in North America, French and Indian War)
2. By his actions, King George III has given up his right to govern the colonies.
3. We have tried to solve this, but you have not given us what we needed:

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress (help) in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince (George III), whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

1. They name the new country and declare independence.
2. They will stand behind their independence no matter what.

**The Declaration of Independence**

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| Date/Author | July 4, 1776; Thomas Jefferson |
| Purpose | To declare independence from Great Britain. A courtesy to explain why. |
| Main Parts | 1. Statement of Individual Rights 2. The colonists’ grievances 3. The formal declaration of Independence |
| Signers | 56 delegates from the colonies |

1. Who do you think is the intended audience for the Declaration?

The colonists and Great Britain/The king.

1. At what point would Jefferson say it is acceptable to overthrow your government? Do you agree with him? When a government becomes destructive. When it is not doing its job of protecting the people and their rights.
2. Where does Jefferson believe that Governments get their power? What does he believe is the purpose of government? He believes Governments should get their power from the consent of the governed (the people). He believes the purpose of government is to secure the rights of men.
3. What do you think is meant by “the pursuit of happiness”?

The pursuit of wealth, happiness, freedom, etc. The “American Dream”

1. At what point might someone be denied their right to their “pursuit of happiness”?

Where a government tries to deny you of these rights, or if a person commits a crime and goes to prison.

1. Thomas Jefferson did not come up with the “Life and Liberty” part himself; he borrowed the phrase from John Locke. However, Locke wrote that all people were entitled to “Life, Liberty and Property”. Why do you think Jefferson changed the last part? Because Jefferson owned slaves—He also believed people have the right to pursue these things, but they have to work for it—it shouldn’t just be given to them.
2. What might be considered contradictory about the “all men are created equal” statement?

Women and slaves were not included in the statement.

1. What does the following phrase mean?

“Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes.” Governments should not change their ideals, etc. (not on a whim). There should be good and justifiable reason and it should not be taken lightly.

1. What were the signers of the Declaration risking?

Their lives, their fortunes, and their honor.

1. Did the Declaration of Independence make America a free country on July 4, 1776? Why or why not? Not technically. The declaration just declared their independence from Great Britain. The colonies still had to fight for their freedom—The American Revolution.