**The Final Text of the Declaration of Independence July 4 1776**

**Introduction**

On June 7, 1776, Richard Henry Lee introduced into Congress a resolution,(adopted on July 2) which asserted that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, fee and independent States. While this resolution was being discussed, on June 11 a committee, consisting of John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Robert R. Livingston , and Roger Sherman was appointed to draft a Declaration of Independence. In his Autobiography written in 1805, Adams states that the committee of five decided upon "which the declaration was to consist", and it then appointed Jefferson and himself to form a subcommittee to really write them down. Now Jefferson and Adams have two completely different versions of what happened then. Adams says:

Jefferson proposed to me to make the draught, I said I will not; You shall do it. Oh no! Why will you not? You ought to do it. I will not. Why? Reasons enough. What can be your reasons? Reason 1st. You are a Virginian and a Virginian ough to appear at the head of this business. Reason 2nd. I am obnoxious, suspected and unpopular; you are very much otherwise. Reason 3rd. You can write ten times better than I can. 'Well", said Jefferson, 'if you are decided I will do as well as I can'. Very well, when you have drawn it up we will have a meeting.

Jefferson's version is completely different. In a letter to Maddison of 1823 he writes:

Mr. Adams memory has led him into unquestionable error. At the age of 88 and 47 years after the transactions, . . . this is not wonderful. Nor should I . . . venture to oppose my memory to his, were it not supported by written notes, taken by myself at the moment and on the spot. . . The Committee of 5 met, no such thing as a sub-committee was proposed, but they unanimously pressed on myself alone to undertake the draught. I consented; I drew it; but before I reported it to the committee I communicated it separately to Dr. Franklin and Mr. Adams requesting their corrections;. . . and you have seen the original paper now in my hands, with the corrections of Dr. Franklin and Mr. Adams interlined in their own handwriting. Their alterations were two or three only, and merely verbal. I then wrote a fair copy, reported it to the committee, and from them, unaltered to the Congress.

The draft was presented to Congress on June 28 and adopted by Congress on July 4, after a number of changes had been made. There are no journals on the debates and the amendments. The most important of these were the excision of a passage indicting the slave trade and a number of passages were reworded in a more pious form.. A formal parchment copy of the Declaration, adopted in Congress 4 July 1776, was available for signing on August 2, and most of the 55 signatures were inscribed upon it on that date. The intention of the Declaration, Jefferson later wrote, was not saying some- thing new, but to

*place before mankind the common sense of the subject, in terms so plain and firm as to command their assent... Neither aiming at originality of principles or sentiments, nor yet copied from any particular and previous writing. It was intended to be an expression of the American mind.*

**Draft version of the Declaration of Independence, June 28, 1776**

There is still another version of the text, the so-called Lee-version. This is the text that Jefferson sent to Lee. This may be a better version of the draft. See Carl L. Becker, The declaration of independence. A study in the history of political ideas (New York, 1922) page 174.

One of the inspirations for the American Declaration of Independence was the Plakkaat van Verlatinghe of 1581 in which the Dutch abjured the King of Spain as their sovereign.

This is the final version of the text. Some phrases are different in the first drafts. These are indicated as a link to the first draft. There you can read the original wording.

**The Declaration of Independence**

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bonds 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 to 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.

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 legislature.

He has affected to render the military independent of and superior to 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 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 in 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 undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.

In Jefferson's draft there is a part on slavery here

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 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 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. 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 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; 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.

**STRUCTURE AND KEY IDEAS**

The Declaration of Independence can be divided into four main parts.

-The first part is an introduction that states the purpose of the document, which was to explain why the American people were declaring independence from the government of Great Britain.

-The second part is a theory of good government and individual rights generally accepted by Americans from the 1770s until today. In this theory, all individuals are equal in their possession of certain immutable rights. These rights are not granted by the government. Rather, they are inherent to human nature. Therefore, the first purpose of a good government is to secure or protect these rights. Further, a good government is based on the consent of the governed -- the people -- who are the sole source of the government's authority. If their government persistently violates this theory of good government, then the people have the right to overthrow it.

-The third part of the document is a list of grievances against King George III, who was singled out to represent the actions of the British government. These grievances are examples of actions that violated the criteria for good government stated in the second part of the Declaration of Independence. These grievances, therefore, justify separation from the King's bad government and establishment of a good government to replace it.

- The fourth and final part of the document is an unqualified assertion of sovereignty by the United States of America. It proclaims the determination of Americans to defend and maintain their independence and rights.

Summary of the Declaration of Independence

The Declaration of Independence is the founding document of American history. It has been included among one of the most important documents ever to be written in the history of the United States of America. We refer to it still today as we recall the Bill of Rights and the Constitution. The following summary of the Declaration of Independence will briefly describe its content.

Although the declaration is not officially divided into sections, it is commonly referred to in five distinct parts; the Introduction, the Preamble, the Indictment of King George III, the Denunciation of the British people, and the Conclusion.

**The Introduction**

The Introduction of the Declaration of Independence refers to the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitling the people to assume any type of political independence. The introduction also acknowledges that the reason for independence must be of reasonable terms. The Declaration therefore must be concise and explained thoroughly.

**The Preamble**

The Preamble contains probably the most famous lines of the Declaration, “we hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal.”? The Preamble states that there are certain unalienable rights that government should never violate. Those rights include the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Should those rights be violated and the government fails to protect them, the people have the right to protect those rights themselves by overthrowing the government.

**The Indictment**

The Indictment begins by stating the suffering of the American colonies and the feeling of absolute constraint in forming a new system of government. The Indictment also refers to the numerous and repeated injuries that King George III placed upon the colonies and then go on to include factual information as to the many things that King George III had committed.  
The King is accused of twenty seven specific abuses; interfering with colonists’ rights to self government and a fair judicial system; instituting legislation that affected colonies without their consent, increasing taxes on colonists; requirement to quarter British soldiers; right to trial by jury; preventing them from trading freely, for example. Also, the King had refused to protect the borders of the colonies thus resulting in the destruction of American life and property. These are among the twenty seven accusations the colonists made in direct relation with King George the III in the Indictment portion of the Declaration of Independence.

**The Denunciation**

The Denunciation portion of the Declaration of Independence basically covers and finishes their case for separating from England in the hopes for a peaceful resolution, but with the clear understanding that war is almost inevitable. This section of the Declaration also notes the attempts that had been made to peacefully work things out as many of the Americans still felt that England was their brother and had appealed to more prominent people among the British. Still to their utter disappointment and their requests the colonies remained ignored and unsuccessful.

**The Conclusion**  
In conclusion, the representatives of the United States of America and the people of the colonies had seen existent conditions that required a change in government structure and policy. The conclusion states 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.”? The conclusion of the Declaration also contains the core of Lee’s Resolution that had been passed on July 2.

A summary of the Declaration of Independence will always take something away from the true words written by Thomas Jefferson, but will give you an idea of what the declaration is about.