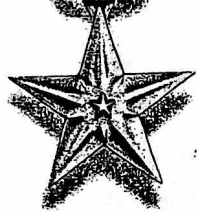


1776



Exploring the Document

Thomas Jefferson wrote the first draft of the Declaration in a little more than two weeks. How is the Declaration's idea about why governments are formed still important to our country today?

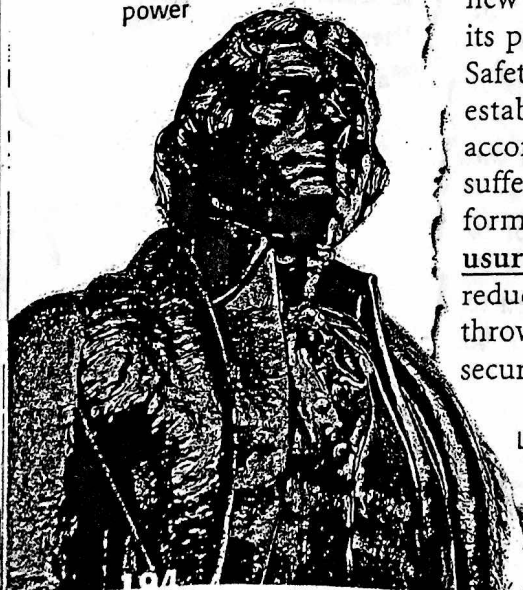
¹impel: force

²endowed: provided

³usurpations: wrongful seizures of power

⁴evinces: clearly displays

⁵despotism: unlimited power



THE DECLARATION *of* INDEPENDENCE

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 impel¹ them to the separation.

Natural Rights

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed² 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 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,³ pursuing invariably the same Object evinces⁴ a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism,⁵ it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.—

LEFT: Thomas Jefferson

Colonists' Complaints against the King

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 Tyranny⁶ over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid⁷ 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 relinquish⁸ the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable⁹ to them and formidable¹⁰ 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,¹¹ 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 convulsions¹² within.

→ He has endeavored to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws of Naturalization of Foreigners;¹³ refusing to pass others to encourage their migration hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.¹⁴

→ 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 tenure¹⁵ of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

→ He has erected a multitude of¹⁶ 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 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:

⁶**tyranny:** oppressive power exerted by a government or ruler

⁷**candid:** fair

Exploring the Document

Here the Declaration lists the charges that the colonists had against King George III. How might the language and content of the list appeal to people's emotions?

⁸**relinquish:** release, yield

⁹**inestimable:** priceless

¹⁰**formidable:** causing dread

¹¹**annihilation:** destruction

¹²**convulsions:** violent disturbances

¹³**naturalization of foreigners:** the process by which foreign-born persons become citizens

¹⁴**appropriations of land:** setting aside land for settlement

¹⁵**tenure:** term

¹⁶**a multitude of:** many