

Declaration of Independence, 1776

Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776

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.

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 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 mean time, exposed to all the dangers of invasions 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 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 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 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, 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 insurrection among us, and has endeavored 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.

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 our attentions 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. 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.

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 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.

Declaration of Independence

GREVIANCE LISTED IN THE CONSTITUTION (listed in the order in which they appear in the Constitution)

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 invasions from without and convulsions within.

HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THIS GREVIANCE

Colonial laws had to be approved by the British monarch, and Parliament could ban colonial initiatives

In several instances, the king instructed royal governors to block pending colonial legislation

British officials feared large legislative bodies as parochial and democratic, so they sought to restrict their growth. This left frontier communities poorly represented.

In retribution to their resistance to British authority, assemblies in Massachusetts, Virginia and South Carolina were ordered to convene at sites other than usual, and where critical records were kept.

By 1776, nearly all colonial assemblies had been dissolved

With their assemblies dissolved and unable to elect new representatives, colonists were in effect without local government.

I M P A C T !

Commentary to connect this event/fact to the future foundation documents

In the Bill of Rights (1791) - the first ten amendments of the Constitution - Amendments 4-8 explicitly address legal protections individuals have.

The Constitution and the structure of the nation (both in the Articles and Constitution) allows for Pluralism, recognizing a layer of state-level government exists which is not subservient to the federal-level.

Pluralism allows for separate spheres of influence, and the national executive can not exert control over the state executive or state legislature

The Bill of Rights (1791) holds the 1st Amendment, which guarantees freedom of speech, the press, and right to assemble.

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.

King George III considered limiting emigration to the colonies of non-British Europeans, particularly Germans (who have no allegiance to the Crown). Americans valued independent settlers. The Crown from 1763 to 1765 also banned settlement in the west

The Constitution gave the authority to create laws regarding naturalization and immigration to the Congress.

He has obstructed the administration of justice, by refusing his assent to laws for establishing judiciary powers.

From 1773 to 1776, North Carolina had no Superior Courts due to stalemate between assembly and governor.

The Constitution established that separation of powers exist between the different branches of government

He has made judges dependent on his will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

In 1767, the king removed one essential power of the colonies – paying the salaries of royal officials. Without ‘power of the purse’, there was little control over British officials.

The Constitution allows for federal judges to be appointed for life terms, making them immune from executive-level pressure.

He has erected a multitude of new offices, and sent hither swarms of officers to harass our people and eat out their substance.

Of the new officers created after 1763, the least popular was tax collector, who also has authority to search for smuggled goods.

The Bill of Rights (1791) includes the 4th Amendment, which bans "unreasonable searches and seizures"

He has kept among us, in times of peace, standing armies, without the consent of our legislatures.

In 1768, the first British troops were sent to the colonies for the sole purpose of enforcing British authority.

The Bill of Rights (1791) includes the 3rd Amendment, which prohibits forced housing of soldiers during peace time.

He has affected to render the military independent of, and superior to, the civil power.

In 1774, the British appointed General Gage to double as the military general and as the civil governor of Massachusetts.

The US Constitution assigns the role of commander-in-chief of the military forces to a civilian official, the President.

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:

After 1763, the king assented to laws of Parliament which colonists considered illegitimate, coercive and punitive ("pretended legislation"), one creating a new colonial Board of Trade ("a jurisdiction foreign to our Constitution")



For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us;

In 1764, Parliament required the colonial assemblies to provide funds for food, drink and housing (in unoccupied buildings) for troops

The Bill of Rights (1791) includes the 3rd Amendment, which places strict limits on the government's authority to house soldiers in private dwellings.

For protecting them, by a mock trial, from punishment for any murders which they should commit on the inhabitants of these states;

In 1774, Parliament authorized that British soldiers accused of murder could be returned to Britain for trial, instead of American jury trial.

There is an emphasis on legal jurisdiction in the early amendments

For cutting off our trade with all parts of the world;

As punishment for the Boston Tea Party (1773), in 1774 Parliament closed the port of Boston, and in 1775, it ordered total blockade of American shipping.

For imposing taxes on us without our consent;

"Taxation without representation" became a rallying cry against British rule. In 1765, Parliament began imposing direct taxes on the colonies, which had no elected representation in Parliament.

In the US Constitution, all money-related bills must begin in the House of Representatives which is directly elected by the people (as is the Senate since 1913, with the 17th Amendment). Under Article I, all states have representation in the House.

For depriving us, in many cases, of the benefits of trial by jury;

New colonial courts created in 1768 provided for trials of accused smugglers with no jury.

The Bill of Rights (1791) guarantees trial by jury (7th Amendment) and other due process rights.

For transporting us beyond seas, to be tried for pretended offenses;

In 1772, after colonists attacked Gaspee (a British ship patrolling for smugglers), Parliament held that Americans suspected for crimes against the Crown could be transported to Britain for trial

The Bill of Rights (1791) guarantees that an accused's trial be held "in the state and district" where the crime was committed.

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 into these colonies;

In 1774, Parliament allowed French civil law and Official religion (Roman Catholicism) to be maintained in Canada and extend to the boundaries of the Ohio River Valley. The Patriots disliked Catholicism as an authoritarian faith, and they resented the loss of western lands.

The US Constitution sought to address (and limit) the absolute power of the monarchy with concepts like checks-and-balances, impeachment, and elections

For taking away our charters, abolishing our most valuable laws, and altering fundamentally the forms of our governments;

In 1774, Parliament revoked the 1691 charter for the colonial government of Massachusetts.

Pluralism retains state sovereignty in the face of attempted national overreach

For suspending our own legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

In 1766, on the same day it repealed the Stamp Act, Parliament passed the Declaratory Act, which reiterated that it has the supreme authority to legislate all colonies.

He has abdicated government here, by declaring us out of his protection and waging war against us.

By waging war on the colonies, the king rescinded his promise to protect his subjects and renounced his authority to govern them

"treason" is one of the few clearly enumerated actions which could lead to impeachment

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burned our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

Since the battles at Lexington and Concord in April 1775 (over a year before the Declaration of Independence), the British had destroyed towns in Virginia and Massachusetts

"treason" is one of the few clearly enumerated actions which could lead to impeachment

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 insurrection among us, and has endeavored 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.

King George III arranged with German princes to send "Hessian" mercenaries to fight for Britain in the Revolution. Over 30,000 will fight in support of the Crown.

With the outbreak of war in 1775, British permitted the "impressment" of Americans on captured ships, whereby they were forced to serve in the British navy against the Patriots.

In late 1775, the governor of Virginia offered freedom to slaves who would fight with the British, leading to numerous rumors of British-incited slave revolts ("domestic insurrections") in the southern colonies. Royal governors also incited Indian attacks on back-county settlers.

Early advocacy for the 2nd Amendment was as much (if not more) about enabling protection against possible slave uprisings as they were about threats from a foreign power.