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Rough Draft of the Declaration of Independence

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By Thomas Jefferson

1776

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Note: Italicized words or phrases were omitted in the final draft.
Bracketed words or phrases were added to the original draft and appear in the final draft.

A Declaration by the Representatives
of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in
General Congress assembled.

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 & 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 *inherent and* [certain] inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, & 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 abolish it, & to institute new government, laying it's foundation on such principles, & organizing it's powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety & happiness. Prudence indeed will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light & 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 & usurpations *begun at a distinguished period and* 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, & to provide new guards for their future security. Such has been the patient sufferance of these colonies; & such is now the necessity which constrains them to *expunge* [alter] their former systems of government. The history of the present king of Great Britain is a history of *unremitting* [repeated] injuries & usurpations, *among*

which appears no solitary fact to contradict the uniform tenor of the rest but all have [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 *for the truth of which we pledge a faith yet unsullied by falsehood*.

HE has refused his assent to laws the most wholesome & necessary for the public good.

HE has forbidden his governors to pass laws of immediate & pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his assent should be obtained; & 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, & 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 & *continually* 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 & 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 migrations hither, & raising the conditions of new appropriations of lands.

HE has *suffered* [obstructed] the administration of justice *totally to cease in some of these states* [by] refusing his assent to laws for establishing judiciary powers.

HE has made *our* judges dependant on his will alone, for the tenure of their offices, & the amount & paiment of their salaries.

HE has erected a multitude of new offices by a *self assumed power* and sent hither swarms of new officers to harass our people and eat out their substance.

HE has kept among us in times of peace standing armies *and ships of war* without the consent of our legislatures.

HE has affected to render the military independent of, & superior to the civil power.

HE has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitutions & 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 neighboring province, establishing therein an arbitrary government, and enlarging it's boundaries, so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these *states* [colonies]:

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

FOR suspending our own legislatures, & declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in allcases whatsoever.

He has abdicated government here *withdrawing his governors, and declaring us out of his allegiance & protection.* [by declaring us out of his protection and waging war against us.]

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns, & destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation & tyranny already begun with circumstanccs of cruelty and perfidy [scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, & 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 & brethren, or to fall themselves by their hands.

He has [excited domestic insurection among us, & 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, & conditions of existence.

He has incited treasonable insurrections of our fellow-citizens, with the allurements of forfeiture & confiscation of our property.

He has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating it's most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. This piratical warfare, the opprobium of INFIDEL Powers, is the warfare of the CHRISTIAN king of Great Britain. Determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought & sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce. And that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished die, he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them, by murdering the people on whom he also obtruded them: thus paying off former crimes committed against the LIBERTIES of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the LIVES of another.

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 injuries.

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 *who mean to be free. Future ages will scarcely believe that the hardiness of one man adventured, within the short compass of twelve years only, to lay a foundation so broad & so undisguised for tyranny over a people fostered & fixed in principles of freedom.*

Nor have we been wanting in attentions to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend a [an unwarrantable] jurisdiction over *these our states* [us].

We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration & settlement here*, no one of which could warrant so strange a pretension: that these were effected at the expense of our own blood & treasure, unassisted by the wealth or the strength of Great Britain: that in constituting indeed our several forms of government, we had adopted one common king, thereby laying a foundation for perpetual league & amity with them: but that submission to their parliament was no part of our constitution, nor ever in idea, if history may be credited: and*, we [have] appealed to their native justice and magnanimity [and we have conjured them by] *as well as* to the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations which *were likely to* [would inevitably] interrupt our connection and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice & of consanguinity, *and when occasions have been given them, by the regular course of their laws, of removing from their councils the disturbers of our harmony, they have, by their free election, re-established them in power. At this very time too they are permitting their chief magistrate to send over not only soldiers of our common blood, but Scotch & foreign mercenaries to invade & destroy us. These facts have given the last stab to agonizing affection, and manly spirit bids us to renounce forever these unfeeling brethren. We must endeavor to forget our former love for them, and hold them as we hold the rest of mankind, enemies in war, in peace friends. We might have been a free and a great people together; but a communication of grandeur & of freedom it seems is below their dignity. Be it so, since they will have it. The road to happiness & to glory is open to us too. We will tread it apart from them, and* [We must therefore] acquiesce in the necessity which denounces our eternal 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 assebled [appealing to the Judge of the World for the recititude of our intentions] do in the name & by authority of the good people of these *states* [colonies] *reject and renounce all allegiance & subjections to the kings of Great Britain & all others who may hereafter claim by, through or under them: we utterly disolve all political connection which may heretofore have subsisted between us & the people or parliment of Great Britain: and finally we do assert and declare these colonies to be free and independent states,* [solemly Publish and Declare that these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be, Free and Independent States; that they are dissolved from 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 allies, establish commerce, & do all other acts & 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, & our sacred honor.

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