

Transcription of Thomas Jefferson's Autograph Copy

OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

Before the Declaration of Independence was ratified on July 4, 1776, a number of changes were made to the original draft written by Thomas Jefferson, including the removal of Jefferson's condemnation of the slave trade. Distressed, Jefferson wrote several clean copies of his original text, underlining passages that were changed. Jefferson's underlinings are reproduced here. (Missing or illegible text has been supplied from the other complete surviving copy and is presented within angle brackets.)

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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 and equal station to which the laws of nature & 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 & 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 to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying it's foundation on such principles & organising 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 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 & usurpations, begun at a distinguished period, & 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 their former systems of government. the history of the present king of Great Britain, is a history of unremitting injuries & usurpations, among which appears no solitary fact to contradict the uniform tenor of the rest; but all have 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 neglected utterly to attend to them:
he has refused to pass other laws for the accomodation 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:

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he has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, & 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 the administration of justice totally to cease in some of these states, 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, & sent hither swarms <of> officers to harrass our people & <eat out their substance>:
he has kept among us in times of peace standing armies & ships of war, 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 constitutions, and unacknoleged 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 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 & fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these states;
for taking away our charters, abolishing our most valuable laws, and altering

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fundamentally the forms of our governments;
for suspending our own legislatures & declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever:
he has abdicated government here, withdrawing his governors, & declaring us out of his allegiance & protection:
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 circumstances of cruelty & perfidy unworthy the head of a civilized nation:
he 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 constrained others, taken captives 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 waged cruel war against <human nature> itself, violating it's most sacred <rights> of life & 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 opprobrium 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 dye, 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 upon 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 injury. a prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a people who mean to be free. future ages will scarce believe that the hardiness of one man adventured within the short compass of twelve years only, to build a foundation, so broad & undisguised for tyranny over a people fostered & fixed in principles of freedom.

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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 jurisdiction over these our states. 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 expence 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 appealed to their native justice & magnanimity, as well as to the ties of our common kindred, to disavow these usurpations, which were likely to interrupt our connection & 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 and] 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 to hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, enemies in war, in peace friends. we might have been a free & a great people together; but a communication of grandeur and of freedom, it seems, is below their dignity. be it so, since they will have it: the road to happiness and to glory is open to us too; we will climb it apart from them, and acquiesce in the necessity which denounces our eternal separation!

We therefore the Representatives of the United states of America, in General Congress assembled, do, in the name & by authority of the good people of these states, reject and renounce all allegiance & subjection to the kings of Great Britain, and all others who may hereafter claim by, through, or under them; we utterly dissolve all political connection which may heretofore have subsisted between us & the parliament or people of Great Britain; and finally we do assert these colonies to be free & independent states, and that as free & independant states, they have full power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, & to do all other acts and things which independant states may of right do. And for the support of this declaration, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes & our sacred honor.