

# Declaration of Independence

## Introduction

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During the spring of 1776, colonies, localities, and groups of ordinary Americans—including New York mechanics, Pennsylvania militiamen, and South Carolina grand juries—adopted resolutions endorsing independence. These resolutions encouraged the Continental Congress to appoint a five-member committee to draft a formal declaration of independence. Thomas Jefferson wrote the initial draft of this document, which was then edited by other members of the committee and by Congress as a whole.

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The most radical idea advanced by the American revolutionaries was the proposition set forth in the Declaration of Independence 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.”

In 1776, Peter Timothy of Charleston printed this copy of the Declaration of Independence and brought the news of independence to South Carolina. In doing so, Peter risked his life. The son of French Huguenots who arrived in 1731, Timothy inherited the press after the death of his father. In 1738, he became publisher of the *Gazette* of South Carolina.

Peter Timothy became an ardent supporter of the patriot cause. Fearing the British would confiscate his press, Timothy temporarily disbanded publication from 1775 to 1777. Yet, when news of the Declaration reached Charleston in early August of 1776, he quickly rebuilt his press to spread the news. He paid a high price for his patriotism. He was arrested in 1780 on charges of treason and spent time on a British prisoner-of-war ship before being sent to a prison in St. Augustine, Florida. His family was exiled by the British to Philadelphia. After the war, Peter was sailing to Antigua when he was lost at sea. His wife inherited the printing business.

This broadside is not only the earliest printing of the Declaration in Charleston; it is also the only known existing copy of the document printed by Peter Timothy.

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### Excerpt

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 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 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 the States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid World.

### Questions for Discussion

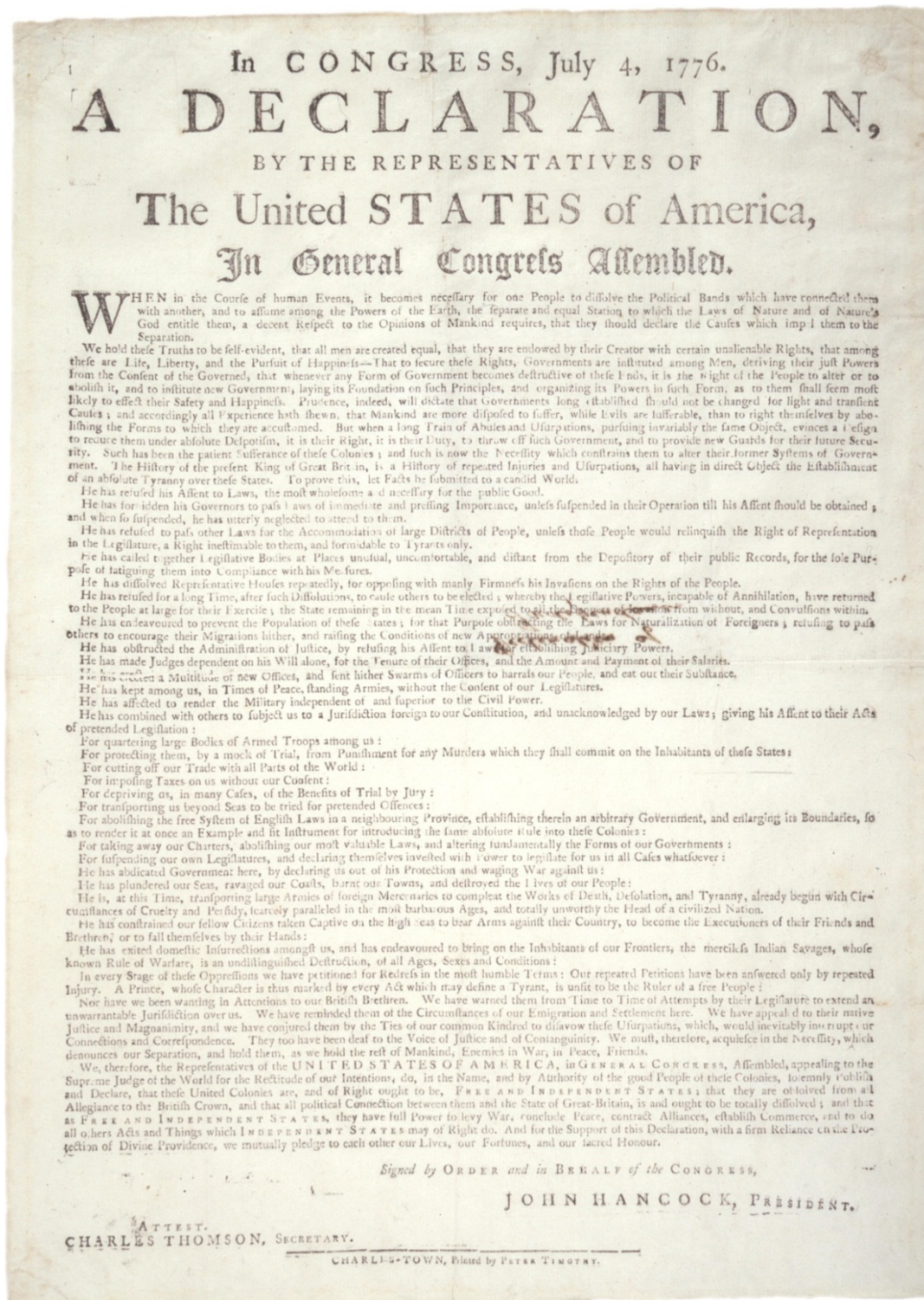
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Read the Introduction and Transcript and view the Document. Use information from these as well as your knowledge of American history to answer the following questions.

1. Define the words “tyrant” and “tyranny.” Locate where those words are inserted into the Declaration. Why do you think Jefferson repeatedly used those words? Defend your answer by referring to the specific text.
2. Why do some consider Peter Timothy as much a true patriot as Revolutionary leaders John Hancock, George Washington, and John Adams?
3. Rather than refer to the “King,” “His Royal Highness,” or “His Majesty,” Thomas Jefferson lists a series of accusations with “He has . . .” Why do you think Jefferson used that style?
4. Identify what you consider to be the five most serious accusations. Explain your selection.
5. To what audience was Jefferson writing the Declaration?
6. How does the Declaration also place considerable blame on the British Parliament?

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Image



Declaration of Independence, Charlestown, South Carolina, August 2, 1776. (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC00959)

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### Transcript

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Declaration of Independence, Charlestown, South Carolina, August 2, 1776. (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC00959)

In CONGRESS, July 4. 1776.

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 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 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 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 Governemnt. 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 the States. To prove this, let Facts be

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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 Accomodations 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 Record, 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 Right 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 Invasion from without, and Convulsions within.

He has endeavoured 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, 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.

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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 of Trial, from Punishment for any Murders which they shall commit on the Inhabitants of these States:

For cutting off our Trade with al 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 pretend Offences:

For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring 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, burnt our Towns, and destroyed the lives of our People:

He is, at this Time, transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat the Works of Death, Desolation, and Tyranny, already begun with Circumstances of Cruelty and Persidy, 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 endeavoured 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:

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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 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 Contiguity. 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 Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly Establish 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 Honour.

Signed by ORDER and in BEHALF of the CONGRESS,  
JOHN HANCOCK, PRESIDENT.

ATTEST.  
CHARLES THOMSON, SECRETARY.

CHARLES-TOWN, Printed by PETER TIMOTHY