

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

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, we have recourse to the remedy of a change only when repeated injuries and usurpations have assumed such a character, that a decent respect for the Rights of Mankind requires that they should be stopped, or that the same which, if they continue, will inevitably bring upon us a more absolute Tyranny than ever.

Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies, that they have borne with a tranquillity, which ought not to have been expected from a people so long used to Tyranny, and so long fighting a brave and manly War.

In every stage of our Opposition, we have petitioned for Redress in the most humble Manner; but without success. We have remonstrated and petitioned in vain, until our petitioners were treated with Contumacious and insulting Answers, which plainly shew, that we have been deaf to the Voice of Justice and Reason.

And now, having declared that we are united in the same Sentiments, and that we are united in the same Affection, we have no alternative but to declare that we are separated from Great Britain, and that we are free, independent States, entitled to all the Rights and Liberties to which free and independent States are entitled.

In the Name, and in the Presence of the Deities most Holy, we do hereby sever all connection with Great Britain; that we are, and we ought to be, free and independent States; that we have, and ought to have, full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, enter into Commercials, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of Right do.

And for the Support of this Declaration, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, we have hereunto set our Hands and Seals, this 4th Day of July, 1776.

John Hancock

John Adams

Thomas Jefferson

Benjamin Franklin

Samuel Adams

James Otis