

8.23 Declaration of Independence

IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America

Passage 1:

When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another... a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

1. According to the above passage, what do the colonists want to do?

Passage 2:

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... Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient (temporary) causes... But when a long train of abuses... reduce them under absolute Despotism (abuse of power), it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.

1. What “truths” does Thomas Jefferson talk about in this passage?
2. Do you think the statement, “All men are created equal,” meant the same thing then as it does to us today? Explain.
3. According to the second paragraph, what is the source of government power?
4. According to this passage, when do people have the right to overthrow a government?

Passage 3:

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 kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.*
- *For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us*
- *For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world*
- *For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent*

1. Name the specific British policies (acts) that lead to these particular grievances (arguments).
2. If you were a colonist during this time, would you have agreed with this list of grievance? Why or why not?
3. How well did Jefferson express the grievances of the colonists?

Passage 4:

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 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 to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do.

1. What are the main ideas expressed by Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence?
2. Do you agree with Jefferson's belief that people have to suffer many abuses in the process of creating a new government? Why or why not?
3. Do you believe the ideas expressed in the Declaration of Independence have been achieved in the United States of America? Why or why not?