

Breaking Down the Declaration of Independence

Section	In 1776 Speak	We Would Say Now...	#
Preamble	<p>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.</p>	<p>When people decide as a group to separate from one political process to create a new one, especially when their rights are violated, it is their duty to fully explain why they are separating.</p>	1
New Theory of Government (Social Contract and Rights of Man)	<p>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 .</p>	<p>We believe that all people are equal to each other and are granted certain rights by their Creator (life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness) that no government should take away.</p>	2
	<p>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.</p>	<p>Governments are created by people and receive their powers from the people. When a government abuses the rights of the people, the people have the right to change or overthrow the government and create something new that will protect them and treat them civilly and fairly.</p>	3
	<p>Prudence , indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and 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 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.</p>	<p>Changing governments that have been around for a long time should not just occur without good reasons. It is the nature of people to deal with an unjust government than to change it. However, when a government constantly abuses power to the point of one person with absolute power, it is up to the people, and even their right to get rid of the government in order to protect future generations.</p>	4
Indictment of the King	<p>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 these states. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.</p>	<p>We have tolerated the abuse of power from the king (George III) long enough and now it is time to change (leave) the control of the king and establish a new government. Before we do this, we need to explain to the world why.</p>	5

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List of Grievances	He has refused his assent to laws the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.	Several colonies had to submit proposed laws directly to the king for the public good and he rejected them.	6
	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.	Colonial laws passed by local governments were suspended until the king approved them. He often would ignore them for extended periods of time.	7
	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, and formidable to tyrants only.	The king is a tyrant because he refuses to allow new communities to form an elective group of people, denying them their traditional rights of a representative government.	8
	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.	In some situations, meeting sites were conducted far away from where the public records were located to discourage colonists from meeting as a legislature.	9
	He had dissolved representative houses repeatedly, for opposing, with manly firmness, his invasions on the rights of the people.	The British government disbanded colonial government many times in retaliation to protests.	10
	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 and convulsions within.	The colonists were forced to form their own forms of representative government after the assemblies were dissolved by the king. The rights to life, liberty, and property are endangered when people are not allowed to form governments to protect them.	11
	He has endeavored to prevent the population of these states; for that purpose obstructing the laws of naturalization of foreigners, refusing to pass others to encourage their migration hither, and raising the conditions of new appropriations of lands.	The king disallowed migration to the colonies. Also, the colonists strongly believe that all unused lands should be made available to anyone who can settle on them and make them productive.	12
	He has obstructed the administration of justice, by refusing his assent to laws for establishing judiciary powers.	Colonies were denied the right to create their own judicial systems and were forced to depend on the royal courts instead.	13
	He has made judges dependent on his will alone for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.	The king has made the judges dependent on him for their jobs and their salaries.	14
	He has erected a multitude of new offices, and sent hither swarms of officers to harass our people and eat out their substance.	The king has established military courts and added customs officials without the approval of the colonists.	15
He has kept among us, in times of peace, standing armies, without the consent of our legislature.	The colonists did not approve the close supervision of the military in America, violating traditional rights.	16	

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List of Grievances	He has affected to render the military independent of, and superior to, the civil power.	The king has placed the power of the military over the power of the people.	17
	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	The king has cooperated with Parliament to pass legislation that violates traditional English law. The colonies did not have representation in Parliament to argue against the legislation.	18
	For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us;	The Intolerable Acts are a violation against English tradition and law.	19
	For protecting them, by a mock trial, from punishment for any murders which they should commit on the inhabitants of these states;	The government protected soldiers for crimes committed against the colonists.	20
	For cutting off our trade with all parts of the world;	Used the policy of mercantilism against us so we could not trade with other nations.	21
	For imposing taxes on us without our consent;	Colonists were taxed without representation.	22
	For depriving us, in many cases, of the benefits of trial by jury;	Colonists were often placed before military courts instead of civil courts. (No Jury)	23
	For transporting us beyond seas, to be tried for pretended offenses;	Colonists were sometimes sent to England for trial for crimes against the king's property.	24
	For abolishing the free system of English laws in a neighboring 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;	Direct reference to the Quebec Act that extended the boundaries of Quebec into the Ohio Valley. (Preventing the expansion of the 13 colonies) The act also was seen as a bribe to residents in Quebec so they would not protest the abolition of their colonial governments.	25
	For taking away our charters, abolishing our most valuable laws, and altering, fundamentally, the forms of our governments;	The king has abolished colonial laws and legislatures and ignored traditional values and legal precedents.	26
	For suspending our own legislature, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.	Reference to the Declaratory Act (1766) that stated the British government had the right to rule the colonies in any way they saw fit.	27
	He has abdicated government here, by declaring us out of his protection and waging war against us.	The king has declared that he will no longer consider protecting the lives, liberties, and property of the colonists.	28
	He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burned our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.	The king's troops have declared war on us for the reasons listed.	29
	He is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation, and tyranny already begun with circumstances of cruelty and perfidy	The king has hired German mercenaries to attack us.	30
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.	Any American colonist who was captured by the British navy were forced to fight in the British navy against his countrymen.	31	

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List of Grievances	He has excited domestic insurrections among us , and 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, and conditions.	He has encouraged both Indian and slave revolts against the colonists.	32
	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.	We have asked the king numerous times to come to terms with us. Each time we have, he answers with more restrictions and punishments. Therefore, he is a tyrant for not listening and caring for his people.	33
	Nor have we been wanting in attention 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 consanguinity. 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.	<p>We have tried to work with Parliament, asking that they repeat British representative law. We have also reminded them that we are British subjects.</p> <p>They have ignored our inherited rights as British subjects, therefore we are declaring ourselves independent from a government that does not protect our rights and freedoms.</p> <p>We will be their enemy in war, but we hope to be friends in peace.</p>	34
Declaration of Freedom / Independence / War	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;	We declare ourselves independent from Great Britain.	35
	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.	<p>We are no longer associated with the king or Parliament and no longer recognize their authority over us.</p> <p>We are a new nation and have all the rights as an independent nation.</p>	36
	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 honor.	All who have signed this Declaration promise to support our independence with our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.	37