

# American Revolution

## The Declaration of Independence

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The [thirteen colonies](#) in the America's had been at war with Britain for around a year when the Second Continental Congress decided it was time for the colonies to officially declare their independence. This meant that they were breaking away from British rule. They would no longer be a part of the British Empire and would fight for their freedom.

### Who wrote the Declaration of Independence?

On June 11, 1776 the Continental Congress appointed five leaders, called the Committee of Five, to write a document explaining why they were declaring their independence. The five members were [Benjamin Franklin](#), [John Adams](#), Robert Livingston, Roger Sherman, and [Thomas Jefferson](#). The members decided that Thomas Jefferson should write the first draft.



*Declaration of Independence* by John Trumbull

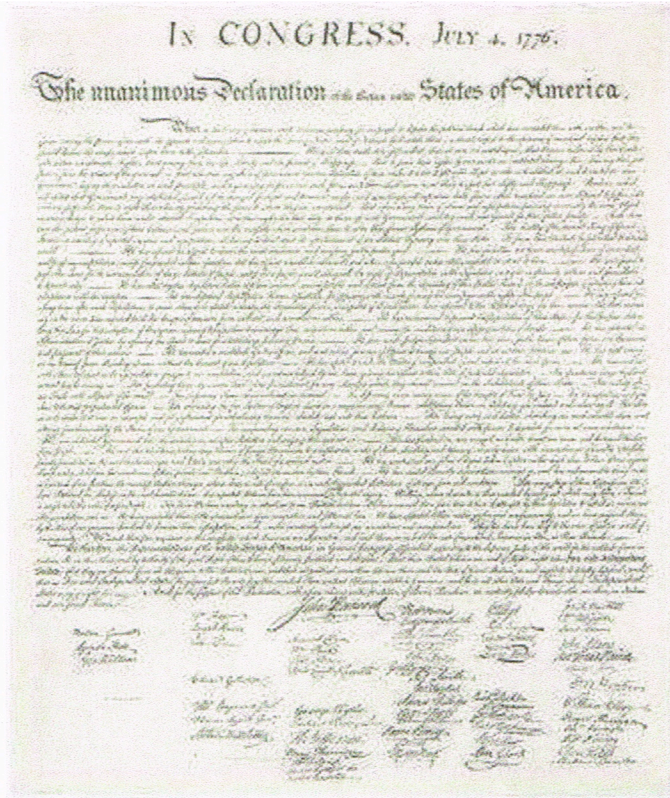
Thomas Jefferson wrote the first draft over the next few weeks and, after some changes made by the rest of the committee, they presented it to Congress on June 28, 1776.

### Did everyone agree?

Not everyone agreed at first on declaring independence. Some wanted to wait until the colonies had secured stronger alliances with foreign countries. In the first round of voting South Carolina and Pennsylvania voted "no" while New York and [Delaware](#) chose not to vote. The Congress wanted the vote to be unanimous, so they continued to discuss the issues. The next day, July 2nd, South Carolina and Pennsylvania reversed their votes. Delaware decided to vote "yes" as well. This meant that the agreement to declare independence passed with 12 yes votes and 1 abstention (meaning New York chose not to vote).

### July 4, 1776

On July 4, 1776 the Congress officially adopted the final version of the Declaration of Independence. This day is still celebrated in the United States as Independence Day.



*Declaration of Independence*  
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After the signing, the document was sent to a printer to make copies. Copies were sent to all the colonies where the declaration was read aloud in public and published in newspapers. A copy was also sent to the British government.

### Famous Words

The Declaration of Independence did more than just say the colonies wanted their freedom. It explained why they wanted their freedom. It listed all the bad things that the king had done to the colonies and that the colonies had rights which they felt they should fight for.

Perhaps one of the most famous statements in the history of the United States is in the Declaration of Independence:

*"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."*

Look here to [read the full Declaration of Independence](#).

Look here for a [list of who signed the Declaration of Independence](#).

### Fun Facts about the Declaration of Independence

- The movie National Treasure says that there is a secret written on the back of the original document. There isn't a secret, but there is some writing. It says "Original Declaration of Independence dated 4th July 1776".
- Fifty-six members of Congress signed the Declaration.
- You can see the Declaration of Independence at the National Archives in [Washington, DC](#). It's on display in the Rotunda for the Charters of Freedom.
- John Hancock's famous signature is almost five inches long. He was also the first to sign the document.
- Robert R. Livingston was a member of the Committee of Five, but didn't get to sign the final copy.

- One member of Congress, John Dickenson, did not sign the Declaration of Independence because he still hoped that they could have peace with Britain and remain a part of the British Empire.
- Two signers of the Declaration that later became president of the United States were Thomas Jefferson and John Adams.