

The Declaration of Independence



The 4th of July

Everyone knows what to expect on the 4th of July... Just look up at the sky!!



- July 4, 1776: This day commemorates the adoption of the Declaration of Independence from Britain
 - Official declared our freedom on July 2, 1776 (voted on the doc)
 - Took 2 days to edit it and then sent to the printer
 - The document was not actually signed for another month—August 2, 1776

The Declaration of Independence

For many years, most colonists believed that the British Empire provided them protection and opportunity. Their mother country consumed colonists' goods, defended them from Native Americans and European aggressors. In return, colonists traded exclusively with Britain, obeyed British laws and customs, and pledged their loyalty to the crown. The relationship between the two began to decline during the Seven Years' War/ French & Indian War.

During this conflict against France, Britain wracked up debt and looked to the American colonies to help pay for the war. They issued heavy taxes and were unwilling to compromise with colonists.

The first formal proposal for independence was not made in the Continental Congress until June 7, 1776. Many citizens and members of Congress wanted to work things out with Britain. However, a drafting committee was nominated.

Thomas Jefferson was not happy with his draft of the Declaration. He was especially unhappy that a section he wrote condemning the slave trade was removed due to the opinions of other delegates.

The Declaration was spread by word of mouth, delivered on horseback and by ship, read aloud before troops, published in newspapers, and sent to Europe.

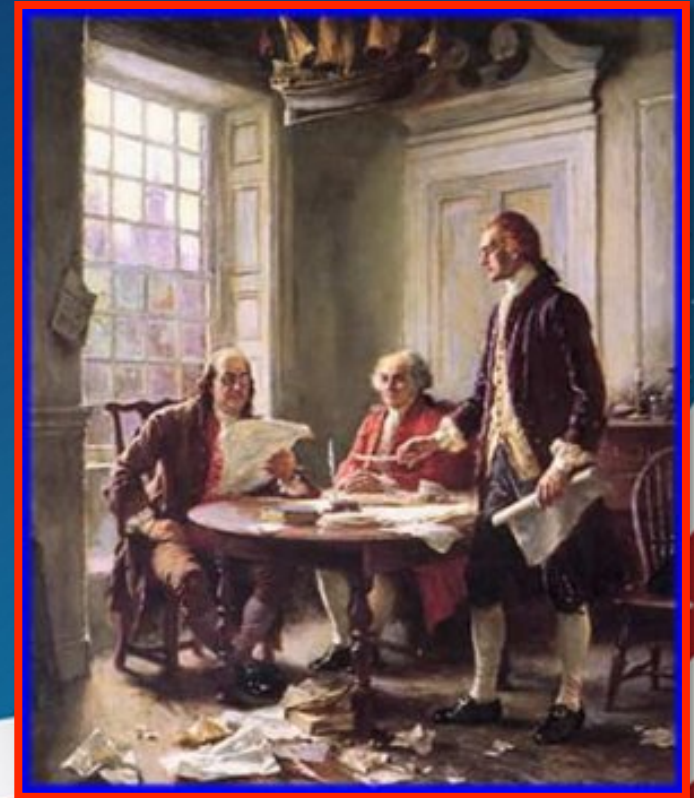
Background



- The 13 colonies had been at war with Britain for a year before writing the Declaration.
- June 11, 1776 the Continental Congress appointed 5 leaders to write a document
 - Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Robert Livingston, Roger Sherman, and Thomas Jefferson
 - Thomas Jefferson was responsible for writing the first draft
 - To explain to Britain the reasons behind the decision for breaking away



- It took Jefferson 17 days to write the Declaration of Independence
 - Continental Congress spent two days making some changes
 - Presented to congress on June 28, 1776
 - Congress officially accepted the final version on the 4th
 - 56 members signed it (8 were originally born in Great Britain)
 - Copies were sent to all the colonies, published in newspapers, and sent to Parliament



What are the Dunlap Broad­sides?

- The Dunlap broadsides were the first printed copies of the Declaration. The term refers to a sheet of paper much like a newspaper or a poster today. The average size is about 20in high by 16 inches wide.
- Early on July 5, about 200 broadsides of the text were printed at John Dunlap's shop. They were rushed to the 13 colonies and the army to be read aloud.
- The official one that was signed by all the delegates was put on parchment paper (looks different)
- 21 copies belong to universities or museums; other 4 to private owners

Main Parts

1. Preamble:

- Introduction/Reasons behind writing the declaration

2. Natural Rights:

- List of the rights of citizens

3. List of Grievances:

- Complaints against the British (King George III singled out)

4. Resolution of Independence:

- Declared the colonies free and independent states
- State their power to make war, alliances, and ability to trade with other countries

Colonists Reactions

- When the news reach New York City, a riot broke out.
 - George Washington read a copy in front of of city hall– the crowd cheered at the inspiring words
 - Later that day a group tore down a statue of King George III
 - They melted the statue down into more than 42,000 musket balls

Great Britain's Reaction

- The British saw the Declaration as a great annoyance
 - Saw it as a sign of ingratitude
 - The delegates knew that signing the Declaration would be considered an act of treason and punishable by hanging— thus it was important they all agreed on its contents and maintained a united front
- The fate of the signers:
 - 5 of the signers were captured by the British as traitors and tortured before they died
 - 12 had their homes ransacked and burned
 - 2 lost their sons serving in the Revolutionary war
 - 2 had their sons captured
 - 9 of the 56 signers died fighting in the war
 - 2 signers later became presidents: Thomas Jefferson and John Adams

Significance

- Purpose: Explained **WHY** the colonies desired freedom
 - Listed all the bad things that the king had done (grievances)
 - It stated basic rights and liberties for Americans
 - Basically a birth certificate of the USA
 - It is the foundation for later precious documents: Constitution/Bill of Rights, Emancipation Proclamation
- One of the most famous statements in the history of the U.S.A.
 - “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.”
 - These words grew in importance as time went on: used to free the slaves and in matters of civil/equal rights
 - These words used by Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr. in later years



Today

You can see the
Declaration of
Independence at the
National Archives in
Washington D.C.



<http://www.monticello.org/site/multimedia/breaking-great-britain>