

Jefferson's "original Rough draught" of the Declaration of Independence

EDITORIAL NOTE (2004)

This text of the Declaration of Independence is from *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Volume 1: 1760-1776* (Princeton University Press, 1950), 423-8. Although at some point Jefferson labeled this manuscript as the "original Rough draught," it was not his first drafting of language for the Declaration. Portions of what Julian P. Boyd, the founding editor of the *Papers* and a student of the writing of the Declaration, called Jefferson's "composition draft" have survived. What Jefferson came to call his "original Rough draught" was, Boyd surmised, a fair copy made from the earlier drafts. It has considerable significance, however, as the earliest complete version of the Declaration in Jefferson's hand. It did take on some characteristics of a draft, Jefferson making several emendations to it (including alterations he ascribed to John Adams and Benjamin Franklin, who along with Jefferson, Roger Sherman, and Robert R. Livingston made up the committee charged by the Continental Congress with the drafting of a declaration). In editing the "Rough draught" for publication, Boyd endeavored to recover the text of Jefferson's fair copy—that is, Jefferson's original full text before any collaborative revision. To that end, this rendition of the text does not take account of alterations to the manuscript that represented, in Boyd's estimation, changes to the fair copy. In Volume 1 of the *Papers*, the "original Rough draught" is the third of a set of documents related to the Declaration. The other documents in the group are: two parts of the composition draft (pp. 417-23, referred to in the annotation below as Document I and Document II); a version showing changes made by the committee and by Congress (called Document IV, noted on p. 429 of the volume and incorporated in a set of Jefferson's notes on pp. 315-19); and the Declaration as adopted by Congress (Document V, pp. 429-33). Boyd's Editorial Note on the drafting of the Declaration is on pp. 413-17. There, and in the annotation to the "Rough draught" below, he cited John H. Hazelton, *The Declaration of Independence: Its History* (New York, 1906) and Carl Becker, *The Declaration of Independence. A Study in the History of Political Ideas* (New York, 1922 and 1942). He also cited his own work, Julian P. Boyd, *The Declaration of Independence: The Evolution of the Text* (Princeton, 1945), which illustrated the "original Rough draught" along with other manuscript versions of the Declaration and is available in a revised edition edited by Gerard W. Gawalt (Hanover, N.H., 1999).

A Declaration of¹ the Representatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in
General Congress assembled.

When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for a people to
advance from that subordination in which they have hitherto remained, & to
assume among the powers of the earth the equal & independant station to which

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the laws of nature & 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 change.

We hold these truths to be sacred & undeniable;² that all men are created equal & independant, that from that equal creation they derive rights³ inherent & inalienable, among which are the preservation of life, & liberty, & the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these ends, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government shall become destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, & to institute new government, laying it’s foundation on such principles & organising it’s powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety & happiness. prudence indeed will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light & transient causes: and accordingly all experience hath shewn 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 & usurpations, begun at a distinguished period, & pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to subject⁴ them to arbitrary power⁵ it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government & to provide new guards for their future security. such has been the patient sufferance of these colonies; & such is now the necessity which constrains them to expunge their former systems of government. the history of his present majesty, is a history of unremitting injuries and usurpations, among which no one fact stands single or solitary to contradict the uniform tenor of the rest, all of which have in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states. to prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world, for the truth of which we pledge a faith yet unsullied by falsehood.

he has refused his assent to laws the most wholesome and necessary for the public good:

he has forbidden his governors to pass laws of immediate & pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has neglected utterly to attend to them.

he has refused to pass other laws for the accomodation of large districts of people unless those people would relinquish the right of representation,⁶ a right inestimable to them, & formidable to tyrants alone:⁷

he has dissolved Representative houses repeatedly & continually, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people:

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he has refused⁸ for a long space of time⁹ 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 mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, & convulsions within:

he has endeavored to prevent the population of these states; for that purpose obstructing the laws for naturalization of foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither; & raising the conditions of new appropriations of lands:

he has suffered the administration of justice totally to cease in some of these colonies, refusing his assent to laws for establishing judiciary powers:

he has made our judges dependant on his will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and amount of their salaries:

he has erected a multitude of new offices by a self-assumed power, & sent hither swarms of officers to harrass our people & eat out their substance:

he has kept among us in times of peace standing armies & ships of war:

he has affected to render the military, independant of & superior to the civil power:

he has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitutions and unacknoleged by our laws; giving his assent to their pretended acts of legislation, for quartering large bodies of armed troops among us;

for protecting them by a mock-trial from punishment for any murders they should commit on the inhabitants of these states;

for cutting off our trade with all parts of the world;

for imposing taxes on us without our consent;

for depriving us of the benefits of trial by jury;

for transporting us beyond seas to be tried for pretended offences:

for taking away our charters, & altering fundamentally the forms of our governments;

for suspending our own legislatures & declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever:

he has abdicated government here, withdrawing his governors, & declaring us out of his allegiance & protection:

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he has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns & destroyed the lives of our people:

he is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation & tyranny, already begun with circumstances of cruelty & perfidy unworthy the head of a civilized nation:

he 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, & conditions of existence:

he has incited treasonable insurrections in our fellow-subjects,¹⁰ with the allurements of forfeiture & confiscation of our property:

he has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating it's most sacred rights of life & liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. this piratical warfare, the opprobrium of *infidel* powers, is the warfare of the CHRISTIAN king of Great Britain. determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought & sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce:¹¹ and that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished die, he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which *he* has deprived them, by murdering the people upon whom *he* also obtruded them; thus paying off former crimes committed against the *liberties* of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the *lives* of another.

in every stage of these oppressions we have petitioned for redress in the most humble terms; our repeated petitions have been answered 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 people who mean to be free. future ages will scarce believe that the hardiness of one man, adventured within the short compass of 12¹² years only, on so many acts of tyranny without a mask, over a people fostered & fixed in principles of liberty.

Nor have we been wanting in attentions to our British brethren. we have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend a jurisdiction over these our states. we have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration & settlement here, no one of which could warrant so strange a pretension: that these were effected at the expence of our own blood & treasure,

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unassisted by the wealth or the strength of Great Britain: that in constituting indeed our several forms of government, we had adopted one common king, thereby laying a foundation for perpetual league & amity with them: but that submission to their parliament was no part of our constitution, nor ever in idea, if history may be credited: and we appealed to their native justice & magnanimity, as well as to the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations which were likely to interrupt our correspondence & connection. they too have been deaf to the voice of justice & of consanguinity, & when occasions have been given them, by the regular course of their laws, of removing from their councils the disturbers of our harmony, they have by their free election re-established them in power. at this very time too they are permitting their chief magistrate to send over not only soldiers of our common blood, but Scotch & foreign mercenaries to invade & deluge us in blood. these facts have given the last stab to agonizing affection, and manly spirit bids us to renounce for ever these unfeeling brethren. we must endeavor to forget our former love for them, and to hold them as we hold the rest of mankind, enemies in war, in peace friends. we might have been a free & a great people together; but a communication of grandeur & of freedom it seems is below their dignity. be it so, since they will have it: the road to glory & happiness¹³ is open to us too; we will climb it in a separate state,¹⁴ and acquiesce in the necessity which pronounces¹⁵ our everlasting Adieu!¹⁶

We therefore the representatives of the United States of America in General Congress assembled do, in the name & by authority of the good people of these states, reject and renounce all allegiance & subjection to the kings of Great Britain & all others who may hereafter claim by, through, or under them; we utterly dissolve & break off all political connection which may have heretofore subsisted between us & the people or parliament of Great Britain; and finally we do assert and declare these colonies to be free and independant states, and that as free & independant states they shall hereafter have power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, & to do all other acts and things which independant states may of right do. And for the support of this declaration we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, & our sacred honour.

Dft (DLC). Endorsed by TJ, late in life, “Independance. Declaration of original Rough draught.”

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The text here presented approximates its state at the time TJ transcribed it from the manuscript of which the Fragment was a part (Document II; Boyd, *Declaration of Independence*, 1945, p. 18-22) and before John Adams took off the copy in his own handwriting (MS in Adams Manuscript Trust, Boston; facsimile in Boyd, pl. IV). The “Rough draught” includes changes made in the text in the various stages of its evolution—changes made by TJ himself, by Adams and Franklin, who were consulted separately, by the Committee or by Congress. The separation of the alterations made in these various stages has been traced in Hazelton, p. 306-42; Becker, ch. IV; and Boyd, p. 28-38. TJ’s indication of the changes made during the progress of the text at its various stages may be seen in Document IV in the present sequence of texts (printed above with TJ’s Notes of Proceedings in the Continental Congress, 7 June to 1 Aug. 1776). The alterations made in the text as here presented, with the possible exception of that indicated in note 9, were probably made by TJ in the course of making the “Rough draught”; this was certainly true of those indicated in notes 13-16.

¹ TJ first wrote “of” and then changed it to “by.”

² The phrase “sacred & undeniable” was changed to “self-evident” before Adams made his copy. This change has been attributed to Franklin, but the opinion rests on no conclusive evidence, and there seems to be even stronger evidence that the change was made by TJ or at least that it is in his handwriting (Boyd, *Declaration of Independence*, 1945, p. 22-3).

³ The word “in” was deleted before “rights”; TJ may have started to write “inherent.”

⁴ The word “subject” was changed to “reduce”; this, however, was not an interlineation but was a correction made on the same line, a clear evidence that the alteration was made at the time TJ wrote out the “Rough draught.”

⁵ The phrase “to arbitrary power” was changed, in a sequence of two alterations, to “under absolute Despotism,” the first alteration being made by TJ so that, when Adams made his copy, the phrase read “under absolute power.” Franklin made the second change, substituting “Despotism” for “power.”

⁶ The phrase “in the legislature” was interlined after the word “representation”; this change was probably made in the course of copying the “Rough draught,” for “in the legislature” occurs at the same point in Document I.

⁷ The word “alone” was changed to read “only.” This change, like that indicated in notes 1, 10, and 12, was made by expunging or erasing one word while the ink was still wet and overwriting the substituted word; thus all three of these changes were probably made by TJ in the course of copying the “Rough draught.”

⁸ The phrase “he has dissolved” was struck out at the beginning of this line; it is obvious that TJ had started to repeat the preceding sentence—a clear evidence that he was copying from an earlier draft (Boyd, *Declaration of Independence*, 1945, p. 26).

⁹ Here an alteration was made by John Adams. After Adams had interlined, with a caret, the words “after such Dissolutions” and had transcribed the document as it stood with these alterations, TJ then crossed out the words “space of time” and prefixed “time” to Adams’ interlineation.

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¹⁰ TJ originally wrote “fellow-subjects,” copying the term from the corresponding passage in the first page of the First Draft of the Virginia Constitution; then, while the ink was still wet on the “Rough draught” he expunged or erased “subjects” and wrote “citizens” over it. The fact that he made the same change in Document I is evidence that he was using that document as the composition text for this part of the Declaration.

¹¹ The words “determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought & sold” were bracketed in the “Rough draught” and then interlined at the point indicated; Adams copied the clause at the same point. TJ subsequently deleted the brackets, crossed out the interlined repetition of the words after “commerce,” and thus restored the original reading. While, therefore, the text at this point does not reflect its state at the time the Adams copy was written, it does give the text in the order in which TJ first copied it in the “Rough draught.” Congress, of course, struck out the entire passage.

¹² TJ first wrote the figure “12” and then, as in the changes indicated in notes 1, 7, and 10, wrote the word “twelve” over it, the correction being made in the course of copying.

¹³ TJ deleted “glory &” before, and interlined “& to glory” after “happiness”; this alteration was made in the course of copying, since the same change was made in Document II.

¹⁴ TJ changed “in a separate state” to “separately” in the “Rough draught”; then altered both that and the passage in Document II to read “apart from them”; this was the form which Adams copied. Thus we are able to follow TJ here in turning to two alternative readings in the “Rough draught” before going back to the text of Document II to record the one that finally satisfied him.

¹⁵ This word was changed to “denounces” in both the “Rough draught” and in Document II; the Adams copy reads “denounces.”

¹⁶ TJ struck out “everlasting Adieu” in both the “Rough draught” and the text of Document II, and substituted “eternal separation,” which is the reading of the Adams copy.