



HAT: The Rough Draft of the Declaration

The Declaration of Independence went through some changes as it was being debated. Below is Thomas Jefferson's first submitted draft. As you read it underline any words or phrases that are different from the final version and think about why they may have been changed.

¹A Declaration by 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 ⁵the equal & independent station to which 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; that all men are created equal & independent, that from that equal creation they derive rights inherent & inalienable, among which are the ¹⁰preservation 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 & organizing it's powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to ¹⁵affect their safety & happiness. Prudence indeed will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light & 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 & usurpations, begun at a distinguished period, & pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a ²⁰design to reduce them to arbitrary power 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 ²⁵uniform 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.

1. Why do you think the title was changed?
2. The phrase “advance from that subordination in which they have hithero remained” in line 3 basically means to move forward from a place of being controlled. In the final draft this line instead reads “dissolve the political bands which have connected them” which basically means to leave a previous agreement. Why might this have been changed?
3. The word “independent” in line 8 was removed in the final draft. Why do you think saying all men were created to be independent was a problem for some of the signers?
4. Explain the difference between the phrase “preservation of life” in line 10 and the word “life” as it is used in the final version.
5. In line 23 the king is referred to as “majesty.” What is he called in the final version? Why was this changed?
6. Considering all the changes which version do you think was better? Explain.