

The Declaration of *Independence*

Thomas Jefferson

BACKGROUND In September 1774, 56 delegates met in Philadelphia at the First Continental Congress to draw up a declaration of colonial rights. They agreed to reconvene in May 1775 if their demands weren't met. At this Second Continental Congress, Thomas Jefferson joined Benjamin Franklin and John Adams on the committee to draft the Declaration of Independence. The task of writing it fell to Jefferson. Although Congress made many changes to the list of grievances, Jefferson's declaration of rights remained untouched—an abiding testament to “self-evident” truths for the nation and the world.

ANALYZE VISUALS

This is an original copy of the Declaration. What might be some of the advantages of having the whole document appear on one large sheet of paper?

In Congress, July 4, 1776

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. **A**

impel (ĩm-pěł') v. to drive forward; force

A ARGUMENT

What **claim** does Jefferson present in the preamble of the Declaration and what **support** does he say he will provide?

unalienable
(ũn-āl'yə-nə-bəl) *adj.*
not to be taken away
(Today the usual form is *inalienable*.)

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. That, to secure these
10 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 a 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. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and, accordingly,