



## DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

# WRITING THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

### TIME AND GRADE LEVEL

**One** 45 or 50 minute class period in a **Grade 9-12** US history, civics, or government course. This lesson can be extended to two or more days to cover issues suggested in the section titled “Summary Homework / Extended Activities.”

### PURPOSE AND CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT QUESTIONS

History is the chronicle of choices made by actors/agents/protagonists in specific contexts. This simulation places students at the Second Continental Congress in 1776 and asks them to consider Jefferson’s draft of the Declaration of Independence along with earlier declarations in favor of independence from provincial and local bodies. By contextualizing the writing of the Declaration, students will see that this historic document was, in Jefferson’s own words, “an expression of the American mind,” and that “all its authority” rested not on “originality of principle or sentiment” but rather on “harmonizing sentiments of the day.” By affirming that the document establishing our nation was itself rooted in the will of the people, this lesson underscores our foundational principle: popular sovereignty.

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

\*Students will expand their narratives of the nation’s independence to include the numerous declarations favoring independence passed by provincial and local bodies in the months preceding Congress’s declaration.

\*Students will be able to cite similarities between George Mason’s preamble to Virginia’s Declaration of Rights and Thomas Jefferson’s preamble to Congress’s Declaration of Independence.

\*Students will be able to explicate the differing implications of Mason’s “all men are born equally free and independent” and Jefferson’s “all men are created equal.”

\*Students will be able to evaluate some of the changes that Congress made to Jefferson’s draft.

\*Students will be able to explain what Jefferson meant by calling the Declaration of Independence “an expression of the American mind.”

### OVERVIEW OF THE LESSON

#### Prefatory homework:

**Handout A: “Maryland’s Declaration of Independence”** and **Handout B: “Continental Congress’s Declaration of Independence.”**

**In class:**

1. Homework review and discussion: 10-15 minutes
2. Presentation of George Mason's preamble to the Virginia Declaration of Rights and Thomas Jefferson's preamble to Congress's Declaration of Independence: 10 minutes
3. Student breakout groups compare and evaluate Mason's preamble and Jefferson's preamble: 10-15 minutes
4. Class discussion: The Declaration of Independence as "an expression of the American mind": 10-15 minutes

Summary Homework / Extended Activities

**MATERIALS**

*Background Handouts:*

- A. Maryland's Declaration of Independence
- B. Continental Congress's Declaration of Independence

*Classroom Handouts*

- C. George Mason's preamble to Virginia's Declaration of Rights and Thomas Jefferson's preamble to Congress's Declaration of Independence
- D. Jefferson's 1825 letter on writing the Declaration of Independence

Teacher Resources

- T-1: Homework results for comparison of Maryland Declaration of Independence and the Continental Congress's Declaration of Independence

**PREFATORY HOMEWORK**

Distribute **Handout A: Maryland's Declaration of Independence** and **Handout B: Continental Congress's Declaration of Independence**. Go over instructions on those sheets.

**CLASS ACTIVITIES: 45-50 MINUTES**

**1. HOMEWORK REVIEW AND DISCUSSION: 10-15 minutes**

Students share their homework results for comparing the grievances. (Compare with **Handout T-1: Homework results for comparison of Maryland Declaration of Independence and the Continental Congress's Declaration of Independence**.) Teacher asks: *Is it any wonder that both documents list key grievances?*

Class discusses the main points and the wording of the concluding paragraph for each document. In particular, compare how Maryland and Congress word the actual declaration of independence:

**Maryland:** *“We have therefore thought it just and necessary to empower our Deputies in Congress to join with a majority of the United Colonies in declaring them free and independent States.”*

**Congress:** *“We, therefore, the representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress assembled, . . . do, in the name and by the authority of the good people of these colonies solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES.”*

Note the main difference: Maryland, as one of 13 colonies, can only empower its “Deputies in Congress” to **vote** for independence, while Congress, which represents all the colonies, can actually **declare** independence.

Then ask students to explain and compare the following passages. They sound different, but are how are they similar?

**Maryland:** *“We have also thought proper to call a new Convention, for the purpose of establishing a Government of the Colony.”*

**Congress:** *“... and that, as free and independent states, they have full power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, and do all other acts and things which independent states may of right do.”*

RESPONSE: Once Maryland, a colony, becomes a state, it must embark on creating a new government. Similarly, Congress must undertake some governing powers; although it does not use the word “government,” it lists key functions that *“independent states may of right do.”*

## **2. Presentation of George Mason’s preamble to Virginia’s Declaration of Rights and Thomas Jefferson’s preamble to Congress’s Declaration of Independence: 10 minutes**

Teacher presents, or students read, **Handout C: George Mason’s preamble to Virginia’s Declaration of Rights and Thomas Jefferson’s preamble to Congress’s Declaration of Independence**. Go over the instructions on that sheet.

## **3. Student breakout groups compare and evaluate Mason’s preamble and Jefferson’s preamble: 10-15 minutes**

As delegates to the Continental Congress, students address the questions on Handout C. Additionally, teacher might invite them to prepare their own renditions.

## **4. Class discussion: The Declaration of Independence as “an expression of the American mind”: 10-15 minutes**

Distribute **Handout D: [Jefferson’s 1825 letter on writing the Declaration of Independence](#)**. Teacher can present the first three paragraphs, or students can read them. Students then read the letter, silently or aloud. Discuss what Jefferson meant by “an expression of the American mind.”

Then ask: *Why do you think Jefferson is so often portrayed as the sole genius behind the Declaration of Independence?* (See question #6 below.) This can stir a broader look into how we study history—as discrete acts of individuals or as broad social movements. Of course these are interrelated, with individuals affecting groups and vice versa. Students can explore this dialectic through a wide-ranging discussion.

## SUMMARY HOMEWORK / EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

1. [Jefferson's rough draft of the Declaration of Independence](#) included this grievance, which does not appear in the final document:

*"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, capturing & 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. 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 your own words, what is he saying here? Why do you think Congress decided to delete this? In particular, which delegates do you think opposed it?

2. [Julian Boyd, an editor of Jefferson's papers, has stated](#): "In all there were eighty-six alterations [or Jefferson's original draft], made at various stages by Jefferson, by Adams and Franklin, by the Committee of Five, and by Congress." Below are a few of the revisions. (To help you locate the passages, they are listed in order of appearance.) Which version of each word or passage do you prefer, and why? And why do you think each change was made? For context, here is [Jefferson's draft](#) and here is [Congress's final version](#).

**Jefferson**: "such is now the necessity which constrains them to **expunge** their former systems of government."

**Congress**: "such is now the necessity which constrains them to **alter** their former systems of government."

**Jefferson**: "He has **suffered the administration of justice totally to cease in some of these colonies**, refusing his assent to laws for establishing judiciary powers."

**Congress**: "He has **obstructed the administration of justice, by** refusing his assent to laws for establishing judiciary powers."

**Jefferson**: "He has abdicated government here, **withdrawing his governors**, & declaring us out of his **allegiance &** protection."

**Congress**: "He has abdicated government here, by declaring us out of his protection **and waging war against us**."

**Jefferson**: "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**."

**Congress**: "A prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a **free people**."

3. Delegates at more than twenty conventions or town meetings signed off by pledging to support independence with their “lives and fortunes,” foretelling Jefferson’s famous conclusion to the congressional declaration: “We mutually pledge our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.” Some of these added creative touches to this standard oath: Boston delegates pledged “their lives and the remnants of their fortunes,” while patriots from Malden, Massachusetts, concluded: “Your constituents will support and defend the measure to the last drop of their blood, and the last farthing of their treasure.” Why do you think Jefferson added “and our sacred honor”?

4. After consulting Mason’s draft preamble and Maryland’s declaration in favor of independence, would you prefer a different wording in Congress’s final Declaration of Independence?

5. In his 1825 letter, Jefferson referred to “books of public right, as Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, Sidney, etc.” Investigate what any of these figures, or any Enlightenment philosopher, wrote about the “public right.”

6. On June 17, 1776, the [Committee for the Lower District of Frederick County](#), Maryland, resolved: “That all just and legal Government was instituted for the ease and convenience of the People, and that the People have the indubitable right to reform or abolish a Government which may appear to them insufficient for the exigency of their affairs.” Compare this with the first two paragraphs of the [Constitution of New Jersey](#) (July 2, 1776) and the second paragraph of [Congress’s Declaration of Independence](#) (July 4, 1776). Each of these embraces the social contract theory of government. State this theory in your own words, and explain how it serves to justify the extreme act of revolution. In your statement, explain why rebellious colonists, who leaned on this theory, compiled long lists of grievances against the existing government.

7. Examine the tradition of elucidating rights by discussing any combination of these: the [Massachusetts Body of Liberties](#) (1641), the [Charter or Fundamental Laws of West New Jersey](#) (1676), the [English Declaration of Rights](#) (1689), the introductory Declaration of Rights within the [Constitution of Virginia](#) (1776), the preamble to the [American Declaration of Independence](#) (1776), the introductory Declaration of Rights within the [Constitution of Pennsylvania](#) (1776), the introductory Declaration of Rights within the [Constitution of Maryland](#) (1776), the introductory Declaration of Rights within the [Constitution of North Carolina](#) (1776), the introductory Declaration of Rights within the [Constitution of Massachusetts](#) (1780), or the [American Bill of Rights](#) (drafted in 1789 and ratified in 1791).

8. Historian Joseph Ellis notes that Jefferson was in a position to draw on the works of many others, including George Mason, who had just drafted a very similar document for Virginia’s Declaration of Rights. Ellis then lists other possible influences on Jefferson: the social contract theory of John Locke, the moral philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment, and contemporary books on rhetoric and the art of the spoken word. At this juncture, [he offers an apt observation](#):

“The central problem with all these explanations, however, is that they make Jefferson’s thinking an exclusive function of books. . . . There is a long-standing scholarly tradition—one might call it the scholarly version of poetic license—that

depends on the unspoken assumption that what one thinks is largely or entirely a product of what one reads.”

Certainly we are more than the sum of what we read. But if not from books, Ellis asks, where did Jefferson’s ideas come from? [“From deep inside Jefferson himself,” he posits.](#) The Declaration of Independence represented “the vision of a young man projecting his personal cravings” for a better world. This view of the creative process places individual imagination over and above external influences

Historian Pauline Maier, who uncovered the 90 provincial and local declarations, [disagrees:](#)

“A draftsman is not an author... The ‘declaration on independence,’ as Congress sometimes called it, was not a novel, or a poem, or even presented to the world as the work of a particular writer, but a public document, an authenticated representation of the American mind.”

Comment on these two views. If you agree with Ellis, do you think Congress meddled too much with his draft? (Consult the full drafts from question #3 to see the various revisions.) If you side with Maier and see Thomas Jefferson as one of many scribes, not the sole muse, of the independence movement, why do you think Americans have been willing to grant him, in the words of John Adams, “all the glory” of the Declaration of Independence?

## Handout A: Excerpts from Maryland's Declaration of Independence

Historian Pauline Maier has discovered ninety declarations of independence issued by colonies or local communities in the months immediately preceding the congressional declaration.<sup>1</sup> Most of these were instructions by towns, counties, or associations to their representatives in provincial conventions, telling them to instruct their representatives in the Continental Congress to vote for independence. Between April 12, 1776, and June 22, 1776, provincial conventions in North Carolina, Rhode Island, Virginia, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Delaware, and New Jersey did so. Taken together, these reveal a groundswell of support for independence.

On June 28 the Maryland Convention reversed its prior position and instructed its delegates to the Continental Congress to vote for independence. It also formed a committee to draft a declaration of independence for Maryland. Below are excerpts from that document, developed over the next few days and entered into the official journal on July 6. The Maryland Convention had no access to the draft of the Declaration of Independence that a five-member committee in Congress, headed by Thomas Jefferson, was preparing simultaneously, nor did Jefferson and his committee have access to Maryland's declaration. Both documents followed the example of the English Declaration of Rights and Liberties, passed by Parliament in 1689, which justified the "Glorious Revolution" by listing grievances against King James II. This time, both the Crown and Parliament were deemed culpable.

INSTRUCTIONS: Read through this portion of Maryland's Declaration of Independence. Numbers have been added to facilitate the comparison with Handout B, "Continental Congress's Declaration of Independence," which you will read next.

*The Parliament of Great Britain has of late claimed an uncontrollable right of binding these Colonies in all cases whatsoever. To enforce an unconditional submission to this claim, the Legislative and Executive powers of that state have invariably pursued for these ten years past a studied system of oppression,*

*[1] by passing many impolitick, severe, and cruel acts for raising a revenue from the Colonists;*

*[2] by depriving them in many cases of the trial by Jury;*

*[3] by altering the chartered Constitution of one Colony [Massachusetts Government Act], and the entire stoppage of the trade of its Capital [Boston Port Act];*

*[4] by cutting off all intercourse between the Colonies;*

*[5] by restraining them from fishing on their own coasts;*

*[6] by extending the limits of, and erecting an arbitrary Government in the Province of Quebeck;*

*[7] by confiscating the property of the Colonists taken on the seas, and compelling the crews of their vessels, under the pain of death, to act against their native country and dearest friends;*

*[8] by declaring all seizures, detention, or destruction, of the persons or property of the Colonists, to be legal and just.*

[9] *A war unjustly commenced hath been prosecuted against the United Colonies with cruelty, outrageous violence, and perfidy;*

[10] *slaves, savages, and foreign mercenaries, have been meanly hired to rob a people of their property, liberties, and lives. ...*

*Compelled by dire necessity either to surrender our properties, liberties, and lives, into the hands of a British King and Parliament, or to use such means as will most probably secure to us and our posterity those invaluable blessings, We, the Delegates of Maryland in Convention assembled, do declare, that the King of Great Britain has violated his compact with this people, and that they owe no allegiance to him; we have therefore thought it just and necessary to empower our Deputies in Congress to join with a majority of the United Colonies in declaring them free and independent States. ... We have also thought proper to call a new Convention, for the purpose of establishing a Government of the Colony. ... [W]e exhort and conjure every virtuous citizen to join cordially in defence of our common rights, and in maintenance of the freedom of this and her sister Colonies.*

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<sup>1</sup> A list of these documents appears in Maier, Pauline, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence* (New York: Vintage, 1998), 217-223.



## Handout B: Excerpts from Continental Congress's Declaration of Independence

INSTRUCTIONS: Some but not all of the grievances listed by the Continental Congress were also addressed by Maryland. Circle the grievances on Congress's declaration that also appear on Maryland's list, and write the number of Maryland's grievance in the left margin. The wording will not be identical, but the grievance might be essentially the same. For example, Congress's declaration states, "For imposing taxes on us without our consent," while number [1] in Maryland's declaration states, "by passing many impolitick, severe, and cruel acts for raising a revenue from the Colonists." Since taxation was the means of raising revenue, place the number [1] in the "taxes" margin on Congress's list.

When you are done with the lists of grievances, read carefully the concluding paragraph of each document. Be prepared to discuss in class: in what ways are final declarations similar? Are there any significant differences?

*The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world...*

*He has combined with others [Parliament] to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our Constitution and unacknowledged by our laws, giving his assent to their acts of pretended legislation:*

*For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us;*

*For protecting them, by a mock trial, from punishment for any murders which 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, in many cases, of the benefits of trial by jury;*

*For transporting us beyond seas, to be tried for pretended offenses;*

*For abolishing the free system of English laws in a neighboring province [Quebec], establishing therein an arbitrary government, and enlarging its boundaries, so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these colonies;*

*For taking away our charters, abolishing our most valuable laws, and altering fundamentally the forms of our governments;*

*For suspending our own legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.*

*He has abdicated government here, by declaring us out of his protection and waging war against us.*

*He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burned our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.*

*He is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation, and tyranny already begun with circumstances of cruelty and perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the head of a civilized nation.*

*He has constrained our fellow-citizens, taken captive on the high seas, to bear arms against their country, to become the executioners of their friends and brethren, or to fall themselves by their hands.*

*He has excited domestic insurrection among us, and 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, and conditions. . . .*

*We, therefore, the representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the name and by the authority of the good people of these colonies solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES; that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British crown and that all political connection between them and the state of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved; and that, as free and independent states, they have full power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, and do all other acts and things which independent states may of right do.*

## Handout C: George Mason's preamble to Virginia's Declaration of Rights and Thomas Jefferson's preamble to Congress's Declaration of Independence

Acting more swiftly than Congress, the Virginia Convention decided to declare independence on May 15, 1776. To form its own government, Virginia would need a constitution, and the Convention instructed George Mason to prepare a draft for a "Declaration of Rights" that would accompany those new rules. On June 12, Mason's draft for Virginia's Declaration of Rights was published in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*.

Meanwhile, on June 7, also following instructions from the Virginia Convention, Richard Henry Lee formally proposed to the Continental Congress that the thirteen colonies, collectively, declare their independence from Great Britain. Congress did not yet vote on this measure, but on June 11 it appointed a five-man committee (Thomas Jefferson, John Adams Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman, and Robert R. Livingston) to draft a document that would explain and justify Congress's dramatic move, should Lee's motion be approved.

Note the timing: the day after Jefferson is appointed to the committee, Mason's draft appears in the Philadelphia press. Jefferson was certainly following events back home in Virginia; in fact, [he had stated a few weeks earlier](#) that the preparation of a new constitution in Virginia was so important that "it might be agreeable to recall for a short time" Virginia's delegates to the Continental Congress so they could help write their state's new constitution. There can be no doubt that Jefferson read Mason's draft. Key excerpts from these two documents appear below.

### INSTRUCTIONS:

As you read, circle key words that appear in both documents. (NOTE: In those days, "happiness" signified well-being or contentment as well as joy or delight, and "public weal" meant the public good, what's best for everybody.)

Answer briefly the following three questions and prepare to discuss them more thoroughly class:

- Do you think Jefferson was specifically affected by Mason's draft, or were they both expressing ideas that were common at the time?
- Are there any significant differences in meaning?
- Which document do you think expresses these ideas more clearly?

Also, prepare to discuss these two questions in class:

d. Jefferson said, "all men are created equal," but what does "created equal" really mean? Are all men equally tall or short, heavy or slim? Years later, Stephen Douglas, when debating Abraham Lincoln, protested that Negroes were not the "equal" of whites, [leading Lincoln to retreat](#) by admitting they were "not my equal in many respects – certainly not in color, perhaps not in moral or intellectual endowment." Had Jefferson stayed with Mason's phraseology, could Lincoln have cited the Declaration of Independence with greater authority and less apology? Mason said, "all men are

born equally free and independent.” Does this establish that the nature of equality lies in people’s rights, not in their attributes, abilities, or achievements?

e. Jefferson is often considered a “genius” for writing the Declaration of Independence, particularly the preamble. Discuss the nature of his genius: is it his style or the originality of his ideas?

<a href="#"><u>George Mason’s draft of the Virginia Declaration of Rights</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Thomas Jefferson’s draft of the Declaration of Independence</u></a>
<p>That all men are born equally free and independent, and have certain inherent natural rights, ... among which are the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety.</p>	<p>We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with inherent and inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.</p>
<p>That all power is vested in, and consequently derived from the people. ... That government is, or ought to be, instituted for the common benefit, protection, and security of the people, nation, or community.</p>	<p>[T]hat to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.</p>
<p>3. Of all the various modes and forms of government, that is best, which is capable of producing the greatest degree of happiness and safety, ... and that, whenever any government shall be found inadequate or contrary to these purposes, a majority of the community hath an indubitable, unalienable and indefeasible right to reform, alter or abolish it, in such manner as shall be judged most conducive to the public weal.</p>	<p>3. [T]hat whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute 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.</p>

## Handout D: Jefferson's 1825 letter on writing the Declaration of Independence

Because the proceedings of the Continental Congress were kept secret, Americans at the time had no way of ascertaining who was on the committee to prepare the Declaration of Independence, who among the committee penned the first draft, or who edited the final version. This information, even if available, would have been deemed irrelevant. People didn't care to quibble about authorship or craft. What counted most was the document's conclusion: the United States was declaring its independence!

Although the Declaration of Independence was often read aloud during Fourth of July celebrations, its words were not incorporated into other founding documents. None of the eight states that drafted their own declarations of rights in the Founding Era used Congress's exact phrasing, nor was the Declaration of Independence cited often during the drafting of the U. S. Constitution in 1787 or in the subsequent debates over ratification. Madison's notes from the Constitutional Convention make only two references to the Declaration, while the 85 essays in *The Federalist* contain but one.<sup>1</sup>

Not until the mid-1790s, when Jefferson became the leader of one of the nation's two political parties, was the Declaration of Independence, and Jefferson's authorship, celebrated as it is today. The Declaration's newfound status rankled John Adams, a leader of the opposing political party. According to Adams, the hard-earned achievement of independence should be the object of celebration, not the simple act of writing about it, and he was the one who had successfully pushed the motion for independence through Congress. "The Declaration of Independence I always considered as a Theatrical Show. Jefferson ran away with all the stage effect of that, [he wrote](#)—and, he added grudgingly, "all the Glory of it" as well.

While Jefferson took pride in drafting the Declaration of Independence, he saw his role in perspective. In 1825, one year before his death, [he wrote to Henry Lee](#):

*"...but with respect to our rights, and the acts of the British government contravening those rights, there was but one opinion on this side of the water. All American whigs thought alike on these subjects. When forced therefor, to resort to arms for redress, an appeal to the tribunal of the world was deemed proper for our justification. This was the object of the Declaration of Independence. Not to find out new principles, or new arguments, never before thought of, not merely to say things which had never been said before; but to place before mankind the common sense of the subject, in terms so plain and firm as to command their assent, and to justify ourselves in the independent stand we [were] compelled to take. Neither aiming at originality of principle or sentiment, nor yet copied from any particular and previous writing, it was intended to be an expression of the American mind, and to give to that expression the proper tone and spirit called for by the occasion. All its authority rests on the harmonizing sentiments of the day, whether expressed in conversation, in letters, printed essays, or in the elementary books of public right, as Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, Sidney, &c."*

Later that year, while supporting the promotion of relics he had used to draft the Declaration, [Jefferson again insisted](#) that his words were to be seen as no more than "the genuine effusion of the soul of our country."

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<sup>1</sup> Philip F. Detweiler, "The Changing Reputation of the Declaration of Independence: The First Fifty Years," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 19 (1962): 559–561.

## Handout T-1: Homework results for the comparison of Maryland's Declaration of Independence and the Continental Congress's Declaration of Independence

INSTRUCTIONS: Some but not all of the grievances listed by the Continental Congress were also addressed by Maryland. Circle the grievances on Congress's declaration that also appear on Maryland's list, and write the number of Maryland's grievance in the left margin. The wording will not be identical, but the grievance might be essentially the same. For example, Congress's declaration states, "For imposing taxes on us without our consent," while number [1] in Maryland's declaration states, "by passing many impolitick, severe, and cruel acts for raising a revenue from the Colonists." Since taxation was the means of raising revenue, place the number [1] in the "taxes" margin on Congress's list.

*The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world...*

*He has combined with others [Parliament] to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our Constitution and unacknowledged by our laws, giving his assent to their acts of pretended legislation:*

*For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us;*

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

3 *For cutting off our trade with all parts of the world; [Boston Port Act]*

1 *For imposing taxes on us without our consent; [Raising Revenue]*

2 *For depriving us, in many cases, of the benefits of trial by jury;*

*For transporting us beyond seas, to be tried for pretended offenses;*

6 *For abolishing the free system of English laws in a neighboring province [Quebec], establishing therein an arbitrary government, and enlarging its boundaries, so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these colonies;*

3 *For taking away our charters, abolishing our most valuable laws, and altering fundamentally the forms of our governments; [Massachusetts Government Act]*

*For suspending our own legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.*

9 *He has abdicated government here, by declaring us out of his protection and waging war against us.*

9 *He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burned our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.*

10 *He is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation, and tyranny already begun with circumstances of cruelty and perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the head of a civilized nation.*

7 *He has constrained our fellow-citizens, taken captive on the high seas, to bear arms against their country, to become the executioners of their friends and brethren, or to fall themselves by their hands.*

10 *He has excited domestic insurrection among us, and 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, and conditions.*