

## Excerpt, Declaration of Independence (Last two paragraphs)

### Historical Background

At the time of the Declaration of Independence, many people saw the king not just as a political leader but as a father figure who should protect and guide his people. Turning against the king was like turning against a parent, something shocking and dangerous. However, the colonists believed that King George III had failed in his duty to protect their rights. They argued that the American colonies were “free and independent states,” completely breaking away from British rule and no longer accepting the king’s authority. The colonists were taking power into their own hands, shifting rule from King George III to the American people.

In creating this new country, Americans were required to practice certain civic virtues—commitment to the common good, courage, moral responsibility, integrity, and sacrifice—putting the good of the whole community above personal gain or self-interest. In the final paragraph, when the signers of the Declaration “mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor,” they are not just being dramatic; they are demonstrating these core civic virtues in action. This final sentence is their solemn promise to the American people and the world that they are willing to risk everything—their lives in the face of treason, their wealth and property, and their reputations—to establish a new, independent nation. This was an act of immense courage and self-sacrifice, proving that their commitment to liberty and the common good was far more important to them than their own personal safety and well-being.

**Consider these questions** as you read the final two paragraphs of the Declaration:

1. The closing paragraph moves from “I” to “we.” Why do you think the Declaration ends with a shared pledge rather than simply announcing independence? How does this conclusion show that freedom requires cooperation and trust among citizens—not just individual bravery? How might this final promise have helped unite people from very different colonies and backgrounds?
2. The phrase “we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor” expresses deep commitment. What civic virtues do you see in this pledge — courage, unity, honor, loyalty, or sacrifice? Do the founders’ pledge of lives, fortunes, and honor deepen your respect for their actions?

3. If you were writing a Declaration of Independence today, what kind of promise would you make to your fellow citizens?

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only 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 free people. Nor have We been wanting in attentions to our Brittish brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which, would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.

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 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 to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.