



*Center for*  
**CONSTITUTIONAL  
STUDIES**

UTAH VALLEY UNIVERSITY

## Declaration of Independence Readings



## Resource #1: Which Version is This, and Why Does it Matter?

### Which Version is This, and Why Does it Matter

There is no singular authoritative version of the Declaration of Independence. Most Americans and many historians consider "the" Declaration of Independence to be the engrossed and signed parchment, on display at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. The image that comes to mind when most people think of the Declaration of Independence is actually the William J. Stone engraving of the engrossed and signed parchment. Every few years, when the story of a newly discovered copy of the Declaration of Independence surfaces, the copy is often a Stone engraving, or even a reprint of the Stone engraving by Peter Force. There are also rare newspaper editions where the text is condensed to the front page or spread out over multiple columns, manuscripts of typically unknown origins, and broadsides representing a small fraction of the number that were printed and proclaimed in the summer of 1776. So, when you see a copy of the Declaration of Independence, how do you know which version it is? And, why does that matter?...

To read more, we recommend teachers visit the Declaration Resources Project at Harvard University. It contains a highly readable "physical history" of the document, which may be of interest to students and teachers as background before delving in to the deeper meaning (and different interpretations) of the text.

Source: <https://declaration.fas.harvard.edu/resources/which-version-and-why>

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**Text:** Letter from John Adams to Abigail Adams, 3 July 1776, "Had a Declaration..."

### Philadelphia July 3d. 1776

Had a Declaration of Independency been made seven Months ago, it would have been attended with many great and glorious Effects . . . . We might before this Hour, have formed Alliances with foreign States. -- We should have mastered Quebec and been in Possession of Canada .... You will perhaps wonder, how such a Declaration would have influenced our Affairs, in Canada, but if I could write with Freedom I could easily convince you, that it would, and explain to you the manner how. -- Many Gentlemen in high Stations and of great Influence have been duped, by the ministerial Bubble of Commissioners to treat .... And in real, sincere Expectation of this ~~effort~~ Event, which they so fondly wished, they have been slow and languid, in promoting Measures for the Reduction of that Province. Others there are in the Colonies who really wished that our Enterprise in Canada would be defeated, that the Colonies might be brought into Danger and Distress between two Fires, and be thus induced to submit. Others really wished to defeat the Expedition to Canada, lest the Conquest of it, should elevate the Minds of the People too much to hearken to those Terms of Reconciliation which they believed would be offered Us. These jarring Views, Wishes and Designs, occasioned an opposition to many salutary Measures, which were proposed for the Support of that Expedition, and caused Obstructions, Embarrassments and studied Delays, which have finally, lost Us the Province.

All these Causes however in Conjunction would not have disappointed Us, if it had not been for a Misfortune, which could not be foreseen, and perhaps could not have been prevented, I mean the Prevalence of the small Pox among our Troops .... This fatal Pestilence completed our Destruction. -- It is a Frown of Providence upon Us, which We ought to lay to heart.

But on the other Hand, the Delay of this Declaration to this Time, has many great Advantages attending it. -- The Hopes of Reconciliation, which were fondly entertained by Multitudes of honest and well meaning tho weak and mistaken People, have been gradually and at last totally extinguished. -- Time has been given for the whole People, maturely to consider the great Question of Independence and to ripen their judgments, dissipate their Fears, and allure their Hopes, by discussing it in News Papers and Pamphletts, by debating it, in Assemblies, Conventions, Committees of Safety and Inspection, in Town and County Meetings, as well as in private Conversations, so that the whole People in every Colony of the 13, have now adopted it, as their own Act. -- This will cement the Union, and avoid those Heats and perhaps Convulsions which might have been occasioned, by such a Declaration Six Months ago.

But the Day is past. The Second Day of July 1776, will be the most memorable Epocha, in the History of America.

I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated, by succeeding Generations, as the great anniversary Festival. It ought to be commemorated, as the Day of Deliverance by solemn Acts of Devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with Pomp and Parade, with Shews, Games, Sports, Guns, Bells, Bonfires and Illuminations from one End of this Continent to the other from this Time forward forever more.

You will think me transported with Enthusiasm but I am not. -- I am well aware of the Toil and Blood and Treasure, that it will cost Us to maintain this Declaration, and support and defend these States. -- Yet through all the Gloom I can see the Rays of ravishing Light and Glory. I can see that the End is more than worth all the Means. And that Posterity will triumph in that Days Transaction, even altho We should rue it, which I trust in God We shall not.

Source: <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive/doc?id=L17760703jasecond>

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**Text: Thomas Jefferson, "Minutes from a meeting of the Board of Visitors of the University of Virginia, March 4, 1825"**

### **Meeting Minutes of University of Virginia Board of Visitors, 4-5 Mar. 1825, 4 March 1825**

At a special meeting of the Board of Visitors of the University, called by George Loyall, Chapman Johnson and Joseph C. Cabell while attending the late session of the legislature, and held at the University Mar. 4. 1825.

Present Thomas Jefferson Rector, James Madison, George Loyall John H. Cocke, and Joseph C. Cabell.

Resolved that in consideration of the delay which attended the opening of the University beyond the day on which it had been announced, the uncertainty which this might occasion in the minds of many at what time it might be opened, and the temporary engagements which in consequence thereof they might enter into elsewhere, Notice shall be given that, for the present year, students will be recieved at the University at any time of the year when they may become disengaged, on payment of so much only of the Usual charges as shall be proportioned to the time unexpired at the date of their reception.

A blank having been left in one of the regulations of the 4<sup>th</sup> of October last respecting the price of board in boarding houses not within the precincts of the University, resolved that it be filled with the sum of 120. Dollars.

On a revision of the rule of Oct. 4. last respecting testimony required from Students it was proposed to amend the same by striking out the words 'if unwilling to give it, let the moral obligation be explained and urged, under which every one is bound to bear witness where wrong has been done, but finally let it' and to insert instead thereof the words 'and the obligation to give it shall' which being agreed to, the rule as amended now stands in these words, 'When testimony is required from a Student, it shall be voluntary, and not on oath, and the obligation to give it shall be left to his own sense of right.'

A Resolution was moved and agreed to in the following words.

Whereas it is the duty of this board to the government under which it lives, and especially to that of which this University is the immediate creation, to pay especial attention to the principles of government which shall be inculcated therein, and to provide that none shall be inculcated which are incompatible with those on which the Constitutions of this state, and of the US. were genuinely based, in the common opinion: and for this purpose it may be necessary to point out specifically where these principles are to be found legitimately developed:

Resolved that it is the opinion of this board that as to the general principles of liberty and the rights of man in nature and in society, the doctrines of Locke, in his 'Essay concerning the true original extent and end of civil government,' and of Sidney in his 'Discourses on government,' may be considered as those generally approved by our fellow-citizens of this, and of the US., and that on the distinctive principles of the government of our own state, and of that of the US. the best guides are to be found in 1. the Declaration of Independence, as the fundamental act of union of these states. 2. the book known by the title of 'the Federalist,' being an authority to which appeal is habitually made by all, and rarely declined or denied by any as evidence of the general opinion of those who framed, and of those who accepted the Constitution of the US. on questions as to its genuine meaning. 3. the Resolutions of the General assembly of Virginia in 1799. on the subject of the Alien and Sedition laws, which appeared to accord with the predominant sense of the people of the US. 4. the Valedictory address of President Washington, as conveying political lessons of peculiar value. and that in the branch of the school of Law, which is to treat on the subject of Civil polity, these shall be used as the text and documents of the school.

...Resolved that John H. Cocke, and Jos. C. Cabell be appointed a Committee to settle the accounts of the Proctor and the Bursar of the University.

And then the Board adjourned without day.

Th: Jefferson  
Mar. 5. 1825.

Source: <https://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/default.xqy?keys=FOEA-print-04-02-02-5019>

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Text: Thomas Jefferson to Henry Lee, 8 May 1825

**From Thomas Jefferson to Henry Lee, 8 May 1825**

Monticello May 8. 25.

Dear Sir

Your favor of Apr. 29 has been duly recieved, and the offer of mineralogical specimens from mr Myer has been communicated to D<sup>r</sup> Emmet our Professor of Natural history. the last donation of the legislature to the University was appropriated specifically to a library and apparatus of every kind. but we apply it first to the more important articles of a library, of an astronomical, physical, & chemical apparatus. and we think it safest to see what these will cost, before we venture on collections of mineral & other subjects. the last we must proportion to what sum we shall have left only. the Professor possesses already what he thinks will be sufficient for mineralogical and geological explanations to his school. I do not know how far he might be tempted to enlarge his possession by a catalogue of the articles and prices, if both should be satisfactory. if mr Myer chuses to send such a catalogue, it shall be returned to you immediately, if the purchase be not approved.

That George Mason was author of the bill of rights, and of the constitution founded on it, the evidence of the day established fully in my mind. of the paper you mention, purporting to be instructions to the Virginia delegation in Congress, I have no recollection. if it were any thing more than a projét of some private hand, that is to say, had any such instructions been ever given by the Convention, they would appear in the Journals, which we possess entire. 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 therefore 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 Independance. 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; [. . .] terms so plain and firm, as to command their assent, and to justify ourselves in the independant stand we [. . .] 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 it's authority rests then on the harmonising sentiments of the day, whether expressed, in conversns in letters, printed essays or in the elementary books of public right, as Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, Sidney E'c. the historical documents which you mention as in your possession, ought all to be found, and I am persuaded you will find, to be corroborative of the facts and principles advanced in that Declaration. be pleased to accept assurances of my great respect and esteem.

Th: Jefferson

Source: [https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/98-01-02-5212#print\\_view](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/98-01-02-5212#print_view)

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Text: Thomas Jefferson to Roger Weightman, 24 June 1826

[*This is an abridged version of the document.*]

*Monticello*

RESPECTED SIR, — The kind invitation I receive from you, on the part of the citizens of the city of Washington, to be present with them at their celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of American Independence, as one of the surviving signers of an instrument pregnant with our own, and the fate of the world, is most flattering to myself, and heightened by the honorable accompaniment proposed for the comfort of such a journey. It adds sensibly to the sufferings of sickness, to be deprived by it of a personal participation in the rejoicings of that day. But acquiescence is a duty, under circumstances not placed among those we are permitted to control. I should, indeed, with peculiar delight, have met and exchanged there congratulations personally with the small band, the remnant of that host of worthies, who joined with us on that day, in the bold and doubtful election we were to make for our country, between submission or the sword; and to have enjoyed with them the consolatory fact, that our fellow citizens, after half a century of experience and prosperity, continue to approve the choice we made. May it be to the world, what I believe it will be, (to some parts sooner, to others later, but finally to all), the signal of arousing men to burst the chains under which monkish ignorance and superstition had persuaded them to bind themselves, and to assume the blessings and security of self-government. That form which we have substituted, restores the free right to the unbounded exercise of reason and freedom of opinion. All eyes are opened, or opening, to the rights of man. The general spread of the light of science has already laid open to every view the palpable truth, that the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, by the grace of God. These are grounds of hope for others. For ourselves, let the annual return of this day forever refresh our recollections of these rights, and an undiminished devotion to them. ...

Source: *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Library of America, 1984), 1516-1517.

Source: <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/letter-to-roger-c-weightman/>

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Text: The Gettysburg Address, 19 November 1863

## **The Gettysburg Address**

**Gettysburg, Pennsylvania**

**November 19, 1863**

On June 1, 1865, Senator Charles Sumner referred to the most famous speech ever given by President Abraham Lincoln. In his eulogy on the slain president, he called the Gettysburg Address a "monumental act." He said Lincoln was mistaken that "the world will little note, nor long remember what we say here." Rather, the Bostonian remarked, "The world noted at once what he said, and will never cease to remember it. The battle itself was less important than the speech."

There are five known copies of the speech in Lincoln's handwriting, each with a slightly different text, and named for the people who first received them: Nicolay, Hay, Everett, Bancroft and Bliss. Two copies apparently were written before delivering the speech, one of which probably was the

reading copy. The remaining ones were produced months later for soldier benefit events. Despite widely-circulated stories to the contrary, the president did not dash off a copy aboard a train to Gettysburg. Lincoln carefully prepared his major speeches in advance; his steady, even script in every manuscript is consistent with a firm writing surface, not the notoriously bumpy Civil War-era trains. Additional versions of the speech appeared in newspapers of the era, feeding modern-day confusion about the authoritative text.

source: <http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/gettysburg.htm>

\*note: the following is the Bliss copy, perhaps the most often quoted or reproduced version (<http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/gettysburg.htm>)

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate -- we can not consecrate -- we can not hallow -- this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Source: Bliss copy, obtained from <http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/gettysburg.htm>