

Contest held July 2013 in Missouri

"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." With these words, Thomas Jefferson, one of our nation's most prominent founding fathers, iterated an unchallengeable dogma which he believes to be intrinsically true: certain unalienable rights are shared by peoples of all nations, civilizations, and cultures. The Declaration of Independence was signed by our forefathers in 1776 - two hundred and thirty six years ago - and yet, the Declaration of Independence is clearly one of the most lasting and impacting documents on our modern society as a whole.

Before the signing of the Declaration, it had been over a year of constant, brutal fighting with the British. The Seven Years' War around fifteen years earlier had only further deteriorated and depreciated the relation amongst the thirteen colonies and the 'mother country'. Debt from wars beleaguered the British government, thus becoming the catalyst for the taxes imposed on the thirteen colonies. When one analyzes the taxes placed on the Americans by the British, one can't help but wonder why the colonists were so enraged by these taxes. Taxes such as the sugar act, tea act, molasses act, and stamp act really didn't raise the price of these goods a notable amount. No one was going hungry or something of the sort due to imposing of these taxes. So what was it that really infuriated the Americans? It was no representation. The Americans weren't represented for in the British Parliament; in other words, Americans had no diplomatic way to object to or fight against these new taxes. Money, though a meager amount, was getting taken out of their pockets and the Americans could not do anything about it. Eventually, when it became apparent to the Americans that protesting these taxes wouldn't be enough, the last resort option needed to be done: war with Britain; a war fought for their rights, rights believed to be unalienable, rights that (as the Declaration of Independence states) government is obligated to protect. It was a war for freedom.

The main event of 1776 wasn't to come on a battlefield or during a war; it was the signing of the Declaration of Independence that was a remarkable feat. However, the desire for independence wasn't the reason for the instigation of war against Britain, rather it was the book "Common Sense" by Thomas Paine. This book challenged the idea that settlement by words with Britain was not possible and instead iterated a strong belief in independence at all costs. With the help of the book, quickly the American mood shifted towards independence. Finally, on June 7, 1776 a gesture to affirm independence came before Congress. On July 4, 1776 the Declaration of Independence was approved by Congress. But what was the real, initial effect of this signing? That very day that the Declaration was signed, a handwritten copy was passed on to the printing shop of John Dunlap, who made around 200 copies that night. On July 8, after hearing the Declaration, crowds in many cities tore down and destroyed representations or signs of the royal power. George III was despised tenfold. A sense of American

nationalism pervaded throughout the people, with the main catalyst being the signing of the Declaration of Independence. In the future, a plethora of similar independence statements were modeled off of the American Declaration, with cogent examples including the Venezuelan Declaration, Vietnamese Declaration, and even the Declaration of Secession by the Confederate States of America - all modeled off of the American Declaration. The Declaration of Independence was the epitome of influential documents.

As we look back on history past the date of the signing, one could easily see how the Declaration shaped our country up to this modern era. The propinquity of the freeing of the slaves to the signing of the Declaration wasn't by chance; rather, Abraham Lincoln rightly interpreted the statement that "(all people) are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." to all peoples in America. The Bill of Rights, which is the name by which the first ten amendments to the United States Constitution are known, is in essence an expansion on the Declaration of Independence. While the Declaration of Independence made general statements about unalienable rights, the Bill of Rights offers specific rights and laws, from freedom of speech, press, and religion, to the right to keep and bear arms; the freedom to petition; prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment; and compelled self-incrimination. The Bill of Rights is essentially a further development on what Thomas Jefferson had written in the Declaration of Independence.

Every morning at my school one thing remains persistent throughout the year; the reiteration of the Pledge of Allegiance as a class. The ultimate words of the Pledge of Allegiance, "with liberty, and justice for all", always persist within my mind for a short time after I speak them along with my class. The words of liberty and justice for all are further exemplified with the statements first written in our Declaration of Independence. The Declaration of Independence was the paramount document that has shaped our world as we know it today. All around America, the eternal effects of the Declaration of Independence are exceedingly overt, and it all begun with a pen held by Thomas Jefferson, writing a sentence that began with "When in the course of human events..."