

THE INFLUENCE OF PRINCIPLES

American history has often been guided by the force of those self-evident truths.

In theory the 1787 Constitution rests upon the foundation of government in the 1776 Declaration, but the principles were not always followed; the clearest violation from the beginning was slavery (abolished in 1865 by the 13th amendment)

In his 1863 Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln looked back “four score and seven years ago” (1776) to the declaration of “a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” He reminded the living of their great task remaining: a “new birth of freedom” for the nation.

“... I have never had a feeling politically, that did not spring from the sentiments embodied in the Declaration of Independence . . . That which gave promise . . . that all should have an equal chance. This is the sentiment embodied in the Declaration of Independence.”

Abraham Lincoln, February 22, 1861
(Speech at Independence Hall)

In his 1963 speech at the Lincoln Memorial, Martin Luther King said, “I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.’”

IS THE DECLARATION OBSOLETE?

The earliest celebrations of the Fourth of July included public readings from the Declaration; since the progressive era, the celebrations are mostly fireworks and flag-waving; the Declaration is rarely discussed or even read aloud. Some find the principles now obsolete for an industrial age that has abolished slavery.

Unless proven false, self-evident truths do not become obsolete; it is more common for those who break the rules to also argue against them, as slave-owners once claimed that “all men are created equal” applied only to white males.

To honestly celebrate the Declaration, we should better follow its principles.

Like in previous arguments over slavery, Americans should ask themselves:

**Is the Declaration being violated today?
In what ways?**

Many today will deny the short answer: Yes! The national government is UNLIMITED.

Based upon their Equal Liberty, all people have a right to act freely, to live as they choose unless harming others. This is inherently transgressed when government becomes excessive (too big.)

This also breaks the 1787 Constitution with expressly limited government powers established upon the principles in the 1776 Declaration.

WHAT EVERY AMERICAN SHOULD KNOW ABOUT:

THE 1776 DECLARATION

To answer this fundamental question:
Why are we celebrating July the Fourth?

It should be called “Declaration Day”
(And NOT “Independence Day”)

Independence Day happened two days before when the Continental Congress approved the resolution on independence. John Adams wrote “the second day of July” would be celebrated “by succeeding generations . . . with pomp and parade.”

So what happened July 4, 1776?

Congress approved the “Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen States”, respecting “the Opinions of Mankind” by listing the causes for Separation.

More than independence, we are actually celebrating the day when America declared its beliefs. These self-evident truths restrict the just powers of all governments and define what America means. It has guided the nation (and the world) thereafter.



WE HOLD THESE (SELF-EVIDENT) TRUTHS

The Declaration is short: 1351 words in three sections with 56 signers appended. Its main purpose was revolutionary: to justify American independence from the British Empire. The middle section is longest; it lists 26 submitted facts (667 words of tyrannical acts) now mostly forgotten.

What has endured ever since is the one-sentence second paragraph that begins, “We hold these truths” (111 words); Thomas Jefferson intended this to be “an expression of the American mind.” (Letter to Henry Lee, 1825 May 8)

It is **The American Creed**:

“All men are created equal”, meaning all people have (“unalienable”, natural, God-given) **Equal Rights**, such as “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

Governments are “instituted” (principally) “to secure” Equal Rights, “deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed” (Democracy, **Majority Rule**)

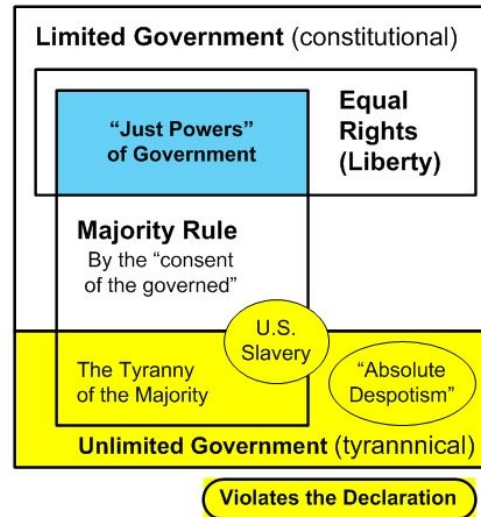
If “Government becomes destructive”, violating Equal Rights or pursuing powers of “absolute Despotism”, the People have a right “to alter or to abolish it . . .”

In brief: Government powers are Limited to follow Majority Rule and never violate the Equal Rights and Liberty of all. Unlimited (Tyrannical) Government is just cause for Revolution.

THE DECLARATION IN ONE DIAGRAM

This diagram illustrates the three main beliefs in the 1776 Declaration:

- Limited/Unlimited Government,
- Equal Rights (Liberty), and
- Majority Rule



Key Insights (from the diagram)

Just Government requires **BOTH** Equal Rights and Majority Rule.

Equal Rights (for all) **EXCLUDES** Unlimited Government. NO government may violate anyone's equal freedom.

Majority Rule (Democracy) is then **LESS** important than Equal Rights (Limited Government); majorities can be tyrannical, such as with slavery in America.

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We hold these (self-evident) truths
The Declaration in one diagram
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Is the Declaration obsolete?

More Thought-Provoking Questions

What is Equality? What is Liberty?
Is there a conflict between liberty and equality? Does taxation violate liberty?
Were women excluded?
Why not include a right to property?
What is “the consent of the governed?”
Which is more important: the Declaration or the Constitution? Natural or Civil Rights?
Negative or Positive Freedom?

For additional information:

“American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence”, by: Pauline Maier (1997)
“The Declaration of Independence: a Study in the History of Political Ideas”, by: Carl L. Becker (1922)
Seneca Falls Declaration (1848)
Frederick Douglass Speech: “What is the Fourth of July to the slave?” (1852)
Calvin Coolidge Speech on the Declaration (July 5, 1926)
The CULP website includes longer essays answering the above questions and more.

By Lloyd Sloan; St. Louis, MO (June, 2025)
For the 250th anniversary of the American Declaration of Independence (in 2026)
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<http://upperleftcenter.org/>