

Overview, from “Principles of Liberty, Session 1”

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Talk among the American Colonists about the possibility and even the need to break ties with England had been occurring for some time, but not all the Colonists agreed that ties with the mother country should be severed, or that the time for a formal departure actually had arrived. It was against this backdrop that Richard Henry Lee of Virginia offered a clear and decisive resolution on Friday, June 7, 1776, during the Second Continental Congress. The motion readily was seconded by John Adams. It contained three clauses, the first and most significant of which read,

Resolved, 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.

The resolution was tabled until the next day, then discussed over a period of several days. On June 10, the delegates decided they would postpone the vote until July 1. The next day, on June 11, they appointed a “Committee of Five” delegates to draft a declaration and to

bring it back before the body. Thomas Jefferson became the principal author of the Declaration. On July 2, the delegates adopted the Richard Henry Lee’s resolution. They then “spent the latter part of July 2, all of July 3, and a portion of July 4 pouring over Jefferson’s draft.”¹The members of the Second Continental Congress made various changes to the draft, even as the Committee of Five had done so earlier. Yet, even with the changes, the document’s primary thrust and themes were not altered. On July 4 the delegates adopted the Declaration itself, but it was not until August 2 that most of them signed it.

According to an [article](#) at conservapedia.com,

The Declaration of Independence drew upon Christianity and the Enlightenment English philosopher John Locke. In his famous work “Two Treatises of Government” (1690), Locke declared that all men have the natural (inalienable) rights of “life, liberty and estate (property).” Notably the Declaration of Independence does not emphasize a right to pursue property, however, speaking instead in favor of pursuit of “happiness”.

Hyperlinks have been deleted from this excerpt.