

# Thomas Jefferson

## The Autobiography of the Declaration of Independence

### COMMENTARY

Though the years leading up to this day were charged with popular colonial dissent— as Mr Jefferson reports from the Virginia House of Burgesses in the spring of 1773 the struggle against the hand of the British Parliament is at a stalemate. A clever and temperate Prime Minister, Lord North has, through diplomacy & by staying the tempers of an aggressive Parliament, defused what was to become a popular uprising in the colonies.



Committee preparing the Declaration

Nothing of particular excitement occurring for a considerable time our countrymen seemed to fall into a state of insensibility to our situation. The duty on tea not yet repealed & the Declaratory act of a right in the British parliament to bind us by their laws in all cases whatsoever, still suspended over us. But a court of inquiry held in R. Island in 1772 [\*see note in commentary following], with a power to send persons to England to be tried for offences committed here was considered at our session of the spring of 1773 as demanding attention. Not thinking our old & leading members up to the point of forwardness & zeal which the times required, Mr. Henry, R. H. Lee, Francis L. Lee, Mr. Carr & myself agreed to meet in the evening in a private room [the Apollo room, pictured below] of the Raleigh to consult on the state of things.

### COMMENTARY

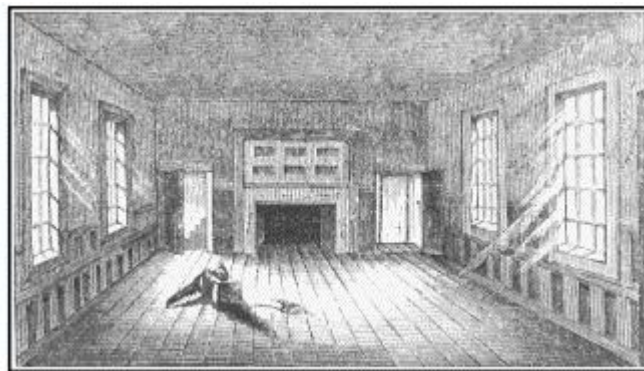
\*The date 1762 was given here in three different renditions of Jefferson's Autobiography. I have edited it to 1772 for the following reasons: The date is inconsistent with "...was considered at our session of the spring of 1773 as demanding attention." Any incident over ten years in the past would have been of little interest, even to the House of Burgesses.

Though the vice-admiralty courts were established throughout the colonies shortly after the French and Indian War, I was unable to locate any specific incident concerning a *court of inquiry* in Rhode Island in 1762. The Gaspee affair, in 1772, did result in a special court of inquiry, charged with the authority that Jefferson describes here.

The *Committees of Correspondence* were formed throughout the colonies as a means of coordinating action against Gr. Britain. Many were formed by the legislatures of the respective colonies, others by extra-governmental associations such as the Sons of Liberty in the various colonies. In any case, the members of these organizations represented the leading men of each colony. It took some time, and finally an act as dramatic as the Boston Port Bill, to coordinate the colonies in action against Gr. Britain.

*Circular Letters* were a common method of communications between the colonies. They were written by committees of correspondence, by the various legislatures, by town councils, and the Sons of Liberty organizations. These letters circulated in many copies from colony to colony and were often printed in the colonial papers or posted in public.

There may have been a member or two more whom I do not recollect. We were all sensible that the most urgent of all measures was that of coming to an understanding with all the other colonies to consider the British claims as a common cause to all, & to produce an unity of action: and for this purpose that a committee of correspondence in each colony would be the best instrument for intercommunication: and that their first measure would probably be to propose a meeting of deputies from every colony at some central place, who should be charged with the direction of the measures which should be taken by all.



The Apollo Room of the Raleigh Tavern, circa 1750

We therefore drew up the resolutions which may be seen in Wirt pa 87. The consulting members proposed to me to move them, but I urged that it should be done by Mr. Carr, my friend & brother in law, then a new member to whom I wished an opportunity should be given of making known to the house his great worth & talents. It was so agreed; he moved them, they were agreed to nem. con. and a committee of correspondence appointed of whom Peyton Randolph, the Speaker, was chairman.

The Govr. (then Ld. Dunmore) dissolved us, but the committee met the next day, prepared a circular letter to the Speakers of the other colonies, inclosing to each a copy of the resolutions and left it in charge with their chairman to forward them by expresses.

#### COMMENTARY

When news of the resolutions reached the executive, Lord Dunmore appeared on the floor of the house with the following announcement: "*Mr Speaker and gentlemen of the House of Burgesses: I have in my hand a paper published by order of your House, conceived in such terms as reflect highly upon His Majesty and the parliament of Great Britain, which makes it necessary to dissolve you, and your are dissolved accordingly.*"

The house disbanded & moved to the private accommodation at the Raleigh. This marked the transition of Virginia from a regal government to an independent one. Though Dunmore would convene the house once more, about a year from that

day, in order to consider a plan of reconciliation offered by Lord North. The Association was to be the only popularly recognized government in Virginia until the onset of war.

Rhode Island was the first to respond to the Virginia Association of May by adopting similar measures. The Massachusetts House of Representatives followed in kind on May 28th. These acts and others like them, laid the groundwork for the union of the colonies in a General Congress.

The next event which excited our sympathies for Massachusetts was the Boston port bill, by which that port was to be shut up on the 1st of June, 1774. This arrived while we were in session in the spring of that year. The lead in the house on these subjects being no longer left to the old members, Mr. Henry, R. H. Lee, Fr. L. Lee, 3 or 4 other members, whom I do not recollect, and myself, agreeing that we must boldly take an unequivocal stand in the line with Massachusetts, determined to meet and consult on the proper measures in the council chamber, for the benefit of the library in that room. We were under conviction of the necessity of arousing our people from the lethargy into which they had fallen as to passing events; and thought that the appointment of a day of general fasting & prayer would be most likely to call up & alarm their attention. No example of such a solemnity had existed since the days of our distresses in the war of '55, since which a new generation had grown up. With the help therefore of Rushworth, [a popular book, *John Rushworth's Historical Collections*] whom we rummaged over for the revolutionary precedents & forms of the Puritans of that day, preserved by him, we cooked up a resolution, somewhat modernizing their phrases, for appointing the 1st day of June, on which the Port bill was to commence, for a day of fasting, humiliation & prayer, to implore heaven to avert from us the evils of civil war, to inspire us with firmness in support of our rights, and to turn the hearts of the King & parliament to moderation & justice. To give greater emphasis to our proposition, we agreed to wait the next morning on Mr. Nicholas, whose grave & religious character was more in unison with the tone of our resolution and to solicit him to move it. We accordingly went to him in the morning. He moved it the same day; the 1st of June was proposed and it passed without opposition. The Governor dissolved us as usual.

We retired to the Apollo as before, agreed to **an association**, [see comments above] and instructed the committee of correspondence to propose to the corresponding committees of the other colonies to appoint deputies to meet in Congress at such place, annually, as should be convenient to direct, from time to time, the measures required by the general interest: and we declared that an attack on any one colony should be considered as an attack on the whole. This was in May. We further recommended to the several counties to elect deputies to meet at Williamsburg the 1st of August ensuing, to consider the state of the colony, & particularly to appoint delegates to a general Congress, should that measure be acceded to by the committees of correspondence generally. It was acceded to, Philadelphia was appointed for the place, and the 5th of September for the time of meeting. We returned home, and in our several counties invited the clergy to meet assemblies of the people on the 1st of June, to perform the ceremonies of the day, & to address to them discourses suited to the occasion.



View of Boston from Dorchester Heights

## COMMENTARY

This paper, titled *Instructions to the Delegates* by Jefferson, soon came to be re-printed widely as *A Summary View of the Rights of British America*. It was (and is) a remarkable document, for it offered the first rational argument for what, until this time, had been a little known dirty secret of the revolutionary movement. While the public outcry was all about **taxation without representation**, the unspoken goal was to refute ANY right of royal sovereignty over the colonies. Jefferson protests here that he could never get anyone except his teacher George Wythe to agree with this idea, but in fact nearly all of the members of the congress recognized it immediately. Not all, however, were resolved that the time for asserting this argument had come. Some of the most respected members, Pendleton, R. H. Lee, Dickinson, Jay, and Nicholas, had invested their public integrity in the argument opposing *internal taxes*, but conceding the rights of Parliament concerning *external taxes*. To change the nature of their protest at this point would subject them to charges of hypocrisy.

The idea offered by *A Summary View* was so popular with the members of the Congress that, though they could not adopt it, they did have it printed and then forwarded to England. Nowhere in the article was the author identified, yet Jefferson's authorship was well known at the time.

Jefferson was misinformed regarding the English edition. The ministry did modify & distribute the work, however Edmund Burke had it reprinted in the popular press with only slight modifications to format.

The people met generally, with anxiety & alarm in their countenances, and the effect of the day thro' the whole colony was like a shock of electricity, arousing every man & placing him erect & solidly on his centre. They chose universally delegates for the convention.

Being elected one for my own county I prepared a **draught of instructions** [see comments above] to be given to the delegates whom we should send to the Congress, and which I meant to propose at our meeting. In this I took the ground which, from the beginning I had thought the only one orthodox or tenable, which was that the relation between Gr. Br. and these colonies was exactly the same as that of England & Scotland after the accession of James & until the Union, and the same as her present relations with Hanover, having the same Executive chief but no other necessary political connection; and that our emigration from England to this country gave her no more rights over us, than the emigrations of the Danes and Saxons gave to the present authorities of the mother country over England. In this doctrine however I had never been able to get any one to agree with me but Mr. Wythe. He concurred in it from the first dawn of the question What was the political relation between us & England? Our other patriots Randolph, the Lees [F.L. Lee, R.H. Lee], Nicholas, Pendleton stopped at the half-way house of John Dickinson who admitted that England had a right to regulate our commerce, and to lay duties on it for the purposes of regulation, but not of raising revenue. But for this ground there was no foundation in compact, in any acknowledged principles of colonization, nor in reason: expatriation being a natural right, and acted on as such, by all nations, in all ages. I set out for Williamsburg some days before that appointed for our meeting, but was taken ill of a dysentery on the road, & unable to proceed. I sent on therefore to Williamsburg two copies of my draught, the one under cover to Peyton Randolph, who I knew would be in the chair of the convention, the other to Patrick Henry. Whether Mr. Henry disapproved the ground taken, or was too lazy to read it (for he was the laziest man in reading I ever knew) I never learned: but he communicated it to nobody. Peyton Randolph informed the convention he had received such a paper from a member prevented by sickness from offering it in his place, and he laid it on the table for perusal. It was read generally by the members, approved by many, but thought too bold for the present state of things; but they printed it in pamphlet form under the title of "A Summary view of the rights of British America." It found its way to England, was taken up by the opposition, interpolated a little by Mr. Burke so as to make it answer opposition purposes, and in that form ran rapidly thro' several editions. This information I had from Parson Hurt, who happened at the time to be in London, whether he had gone to receive clerical orders. And I was informed afterwards by Peyton Randolph that it had procured me the honor of having my name inserted in a long list of proscriptions enrolled in a bill of attainder commenced in one of the houses of parliament, but suppressed in embryo by the hasty step of events which warned them to be a little cautious. Montague, agent of the House of Burgesses in England made extracts from the bill, copied the names, and sent them to Peyton Randolph. The names I think were about 20 which he repeated to me, but I recollect those only of Hancock, the two Adamses [John, Samuel], Peyton Randolph himself, Patrick Henry, & myself.<sup>1</sup>

The convention met on the 1st of August, renewed their association, appointed delegates to the Congress, gave them instructions very temperately & properly expressed, both as to style & matter; and they repaired to Philadelphia at the time appointed.

The splendid proceedings of that Congress at their 1st session belong to general history, are known to every one, and need not therefore be noted here. They terminated their session on the 26th of October, to meet again on the 10th May ensuing. The convention at their ensuing session of Mar, '75, approved of the proceedings of Congress, thanked their delegates and reappointed the same persons to represent the colony at the meeting to be held in May: and foreseeing the probability that Peyton Randolph their president and Speaker also of the House of Burgesses might be called off, they added me, in that event to the delegation.

#### COMMENTARY

Lord North's proposal was essentially an effort to get one or more of the colonies to abandon the others & thus crush the whole revolutionary effort. The proposal was sent separately to each of the royal governors, to be presented to each assembly individually. It offered that any colony that wished to *contribute* its share of the "common defense" to parliament, subject to approval of its own royal government, would be exempted from further taxes except for regulation of trade. And that those taxes on trade would be reserved for the administration of that colony. Virginia took the lead in answering this proposal, just as Peyton Randolph had hoped. The answer drafted by Jefferson & passed by the last official quorum of the Virginia House of Burgesses, became the answer of the Continental Congress to Lord North, the Resolutions of Congress on Ld. North's Conciliatory Proposals.

Mr. Randolph was according to expectation obliged to leave the chair of Congress to attend the Gen. Assembly summoned by Ld. Dunmore to meet on the 1st day of June 1775. **Ld. North's conciliatory propositions**, [see commentary above] as they were called, had been received by the Governor and furnished the subject for which this assembly was convened. Mr. Randolph accordingly attended, and the tenor of these propositions being generally known, as having been addressed to all the governors, he was anxious that the answer of our assembly, likely to be the first, should harmonize with what he knew to be the sentiments and wishes of the body he had recently left. He feared that Mr. Nicholas, whose mind was not yet up to the mark of the times, would undertake the answer, & therefore pressed me to prepare an answer. I did so, and with his aid carried it through the house with long and doubtful scruples from Mr. Nicholas and James Mercer, and a dash of cold water on it here & there, enfeebling it somewhat, but finally with unanimity or a vote approaching it. This being passed, I repaired immediately to Philadelphia, and conveyed to Congress the first notice they had of it. It was entirely approved there. I took my seat with them on the 21st of June.



Carpenters' Hall, Philadelphia



On the 24th, a committee which had been appointed to prepare a declaration of the causes of taking up arms, brought in their report (drawn I believe by J. Rutledge) which not being liked they recommitted it on the 26th, and added Mr. Dickinson and myself to the committee. On the rising of the house, the committee having not yet met, I happened to find myself near Govr W. Livingston, and proposed to him to draw the paper. He excused himself and proposed that I should draw it. On my pressing him with urgency, "we are as yet but new acquaintances, sir, said he, why are you so earnest for my doing it?" "Because, said I, I have been informed that you drew the Address to the people of Gr. Britain, a production certainly of the finest pen in America." "On that, says he, perhaps sir you may not have been correctly informed. "I had received the information in Virginia from Colo Harrison on his return from that Congress. Lee, Livingston & Jay had been the committee for that draught. The first, prepared by Lee, had been disapproved & recommitted. The second was drawn by Jay, but being presented by Govr Livingston, had led Colo Harrison into the error. The next morning, walking in the hall of Congress, many members being assembled but the house not yet formed, I observed Mr. Jay, speaking to R. H. Lee, and leading him by the button of his coat, to me. "I understand, sir, said he to me, that this gentleman informed you that Govr Livingston drew the Address to the people of Gr Britain." I assured him at once that I had not received that information from Mr. Lee & that not a word had ever passed on the subject between Mr. Lee & myself; and after some explanations the subject was dropt. These gentlemen had had some sparrings in debate before, and continued ever very hostile to each other.

I prepared a draught of the Declaration committed to us. It was too strong for Mr. Dickinson. He still retained the hope of reconciliation with the mother country, and was unwilling it should be lessened by offensive statements. He was so honest a man, & so able a one that he was greatly indulged even by those who could not feel his scruples. We therefore requested him to take the paper, and put it into a form he could approve. He did so, preparing an entire new statement, and preserving of the former only the last four paragraphs & half of the preceding one. We approved & reported it to Congress, who accepted it. Congress gave a signal proof of their indulgence to Mr. Dickinson, and of their great desire not to go too fast for any respectable part of our body, in permitting him to draw their second petition to the King according to his own ideas, and passing it with scarcely any amendment. The disgust against this humility was general; and Mr. Dickinson's delight at its passage was the only circumstance which reconciled them to it. The vote being passed, altho' further observation on it was out of order, he could not refrain from rising and expressing his satisfaction and concluded by saying "there is but one word, Mr. President, in the paper which I disapprove, & that is the word **Congress**," on which Ben Harrison rose and said "there is but on word in the paper, Mr. President, of which I approve, and that is the word **Congress**."

On the 22d of July Dr. Franklin, Mr. Adams, R. H. Lee, & myself, were appointed a committee to consider and report on Lrd. North's conciliatory resolution. The answer of the Virginia assembly on that subject having been approved I was requested by the committee to prepare this report, which will account for the similarity of feature in the two instruments.

**On the 15th of May, 1776**, the convention of Virginia instructed their delegates in Congress to propose to that body to declare the colonies independent of G. Britain, and appointed a committee to prepare a declaration of rights and plan of government.

In Congress, **Friday June 7, 1776**. The delegates from Virginia moved in obedience to instructions from their constituents that the Congress should declare that these United colonies are & of right ought to be free & independent states, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British crown, and that all political connection between them & the state of Great Britain is & ought to be, totally dissolved; that measures should be immediately taken for procuring the assistance of foreign powers, and a Confederation be formed to bind the colonies more closely together.

The house being obliged to attend at that time to some other business, the proposition was referred to the next day, when the members were ordered to attend punctually at ten o'clock.

Saturday June 8. They proceeded to take it into consideration and referred it to a committee of the whole, into which they immediately resolved themselves, and passed that day & Monday the 10th in debating on the subject.

It was argued by Wilson, Robert R. Livingston, E. Rutledge, Dickinson and others

That tho' they were friends to the measures themselves, and saw the impossibility that we should ever again be united with Gr. Britain, yet they were against adopting them at this time:

That the conduct we had formerly observed was wise & proper now, of deferring to take any capital step till the voice of the people drove us into it:

That they were our power, & without them our declarations could not be carried into effect;

That the people of the middle colonies (Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, the Jerseys & N. York) were not yet ripe for bidding adieu to British connection, but that they were fast ripening & in a short time would join in the general voice of America:

#### COMMENTARY

The narrative now skips ahead to 1776, when the congress, just seated, observes that things are coming to crisis. The "middle colonies" have not, however, reached a consensus. In some cases all that is needed is a formal vote in a provisional legislature. In other cases, the delegates have not yet received new instructions, though they are aware that such instructions are to be delivered. Several delegates from New York & Pennsylvania will refuse, despite instructions from their constituents, to vote for separation. Some of those will be replaced by newly elected members before the vote in early July.

Virginia again took the initiative in advancing toward the separation from Great Britain. Richard Henry Lee presented a *Resolution for Independence*. It was argued for two days, & then set aside because it could not yet pass. It was scheduled to be debated again on July 1st, when it was hoped that more affirmative votes would be available.

That the resolution entered into by this house on the 15th of May for suppressing the exercise of all powers derived from the crown, had shown, by the ferment into which it had thrown these middle colonies, that they had not yet accommodated their minds to a separation from the mother country:

That some of them had expressly forbidden their delegates to consent to such a declaration, and others had given no instructions, & consequently no powers to give such consent:

That if the delegates of any particular colony had no power to declare such colony independent, certain they were the others could not declare it for them; the colonies being as yet perfectly independent of each other:

That the assembly of Pennsylvania was now sitting above stairs, their convention would sit within a few days, the convention of New York was now sitting, & those of the Jerseys & Delaware counties would meet on the Monday following, & it was probable these bodies would take up the question of Independence & would declare to their delegates the voice of their state:

That if such a declaration should now be agreed to, these delegates must retire & possibly their colonies might secede from the Union:

That such a secession would weaken us more than could be compensated by any foreign alliance:

That in the event of such a division, foreign powers would either refuse to join themselves to our fortunes, or, having us so much in their power as that desperate declaration would place us, they would insist on terms proportionably more hard and prejudicial:

That we had little reason to expect an alliance with those to whom alone as yet we had cast our eyes:

That France & Spain had reason to be jealous of that rising power which would one day certainly strip them of all their American possessions:

That it was more likely they should form a connection with the British court, who, if they should find themselves unable otherwise to extricate themselves from their difficulties, would agree to a partition of our territories, restoring Canada to France, & the Floridas to Spain, to accomplish for themselves a recovery of these colonies:

That it would not be long before we should receive certain information of the disposition of the French court, from the agent whom we had sent to Paris for that purpose:

That if this disposition should be favorable, by waiting the event of the present campaign, which we all hoped would be successful, we should have reason to expect an alliance on better terms:

That this would in fact work no delay of any effectual aid from such ally, as, from the advance of the season & distance of our situation, it was impossible we could receive any assistance during this campaign:

That it was prudent to fix among ourselves the terms on which we should form alliance, before we declared we would form one at all events:

And that if these were agreed on, & our Declaration of Independence ready by the time our Ambassador should be prepared to sail, it would be as well as to go into that Declaration at this day.

On the other side it was urged by J. Adams, Lee, Wythe, and others

That no gentleman had argued against the policy or the right of separation from Britain, nor had supposed it possible we should ever renew our connection; that they had only opposed its being now declared:

That the question was not whether, by a declaration of independence, we should make ourselves what we are not; but whether we should declare a fact which already exists:

#### COMMENTARY

On the 15th of May, Congress instructed the colonies to establish their own legislatures, independent of any royal charter. This caused quite an uproar in New York, Pennsylvania, & New Jersey, despite the fact that the royal legislatures had long since been dissolved by the Governors. In fact, in nearly every colony the Royal Governors were no longer in power: they had been replaced by committees of safety—and they showed their persons in public only at risk to life & limb. Provisional legislatures had already been established. One of those, the Pennsylvania Assembly, sat directly upstairs from the Continental Congress.

That as to the people or parliament of England, we had always been independent of them, their restraints on our trade deriving efficacy from our acquiescence only, & not from any rights they possessed of imposing them, & that so far our connection had been federal only & was now dissolved by the commencement of hostilities:

That as to the King, we had been bound to him by allegiance, but that this bond was now dissolved by his assent to the late act of parliament, by which he declares us out of his protection, and by his levying war on us, a fact which had long ago proved us out of his protection; it being a certain position in law that allegiance & protection are reciprocal, the one ceasing when the other is withdrawn:

That James the II<sup>d</sup>. never declared the people of England out of his protection yet his actions proved it & the parliament declared it:

No delegates then can be denied, or ever want, a power of declaring an existing truth:



That the delegates from the Delaware counties having declared their constituents ready to join, there are only two colonies Pennsylvania & Maryland whose delegates are absolutely tied up, and that these had by their instructions only reserved a right of confirming or rejecting the measure:



House of Parliament

That the instructions from Pennsylvania might be accounted for from the times in which they were drawn, near a twelvemonth ago, since which the face of affairs has totally changed:

That within that time it had become apparent that Britain was determined to accept nothing less than a carte-blanche, and that the King's answer to the Lord Mayor Aldermen & common council of London, which had come to hand four days ago, must have satisfied every one of this point:

That the people wait for us to lead the way:

That they are in favour of the measure, tho' the instructions given by some of their representatives are not:

That the voice of the representatives is not always consonant with the voice of the people, and that this is remarkably the case in these middle colonies:

That the effect of the resolution of the 15th of May has proved this, which, raising the murmurs of some in the colonies of Pennsylvania & Maryland, called forth the opposing voice of the freer part of the people, & proved them to be the majority, even in these colonies:

That the backwardness of these two colonies might be ascribed partly to the influence of proprietary power & connections, & partly to their having not yet been attacked by the enemy:

That these causes were not likely to be soon removed, as there seemed no probability that the enemy would make either of these the seat of this summer's war:

That it would be vain to wait either weeks or months for perfect unanimity, since it was impossible that all men should ever become of one sentiment on any question:

That the conduct of some colonies from the beginning of this contest, had given reason to suspect it was their settled policy to keep in the rear of the confederacy, that their particular prospect might be better, even in the worst event:

That therefore it was necessary for those colonies who had thrown themselves forward & hazarded all from the beginning, to come forward now also, and put all again to their own hazard:

That the history of the Dutch revolution, of whom three states only confederated at first proved that a secession of some colonies would not be so dangerous as some apprehended:

That a declaration of Independence alone could render it consistent with European delicacy for European powers to treat with us, or even to receive an Ambassador from us:

That till this they would not receive our vessels into their ports, nor acknowledge the adjudications of our courts of admiralty to be legitimate, in cases of capture of British vessels:

That though France & Spain may be jealous of our rising power, they must think it will be much more formidable with the addition of Great Britain; and will therefore see it their interest to prevent a coalition; but should they refuse, we shall be but where we are; whereas without trying we shall never know whether they will aid us or not:

That the present campaign may be unsuccessful, & therefore we had better propose an alliance while our affairs wear a hopeful aspect:

That to await the event of this campaign will certainly work delay, because during this summer France may assist us effectually by cutting off those supplies of provisions from England & Ireland on which the enemy's armies here are to depend; or by setting in motion the great power they have collected in the West Indies, & calling our enemy to the defence of the possessions they have there:

That it would be idle to lose time in settling the terms of alliance, till we had first determined we would enter into alliance:

That it is necessary to lose no time in opening a trade for our people, who will want clothes, and will want money too for the payment of taxes:

And that the only misfortune is that we did not enter into alliance with France six months sooner, as besides opening their ports for the vent of our last year's produce, they might have marched an army into Germany and prevented the petty princes there from selling their unhappy subjects to subdue us.

**Jefferson wrote:**

It appearing in the course of these debates that the colonies of N. York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and South Carolina were not yet matured for falling from the parent stem, but that they were fast advancing to that state, it was thought most prudent to wait a while for them, and to postpone the final decision to July 1, but that this might occasion as little delay as possible a committee was appointed to prepare a declaration of independence. The committee were J. Adams, Dr. Franklin, Roger Sherman, Robert R. Livingston & myself. Committees were also appointed at the same time to prepare a plan of confederation for the colonies, and to state the terms proper to be proposed for foreign alliance.

The committee for drawing the declaration of Independence desired me to do it. It was accordingly done, and being approved by them, I reported it to the house on Friday the 28th of June when it was read and ordered to lie on the table.

On Monday, the 1st of July the house resolved itself into a committee of the whole & resumed the consideration of the original motion made by the delegates of Virginia, which being again debated through the day, was carried in the affirmative by the votes of N. Hampshire, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, N. Jersey, Maryland, Virginia, N. Carolina, & Georgia. S. Carolina and Pennsylvania voted against it. Delaware having but two members present, they were divided. The delegates for New York declared they were for it themselves & were assured their constituents were for it, but that their instructions having been drawn near a twelvemonth before, when reconciliation was still the general object, they were enjoined by them to do nothing which should impede that object. They therefore thought themselves not justifiable in voting on either side, and asked leave to withdraw from the question, which was given them. The committee rose & reported their resolution to the house. Mr. Edward Rutledge of S. Carolina then requested the determination might be put off to the next day, as he believed his colleagues, tho' they disapproved of the resolution, would then join in it for the sake of unanimity. The ultimate question whether the house would agree to the resolution of the committee was accordingly postponed to the next day, when it was again moved and S. Carolina concurred in voting for it. In the meantime a third member had come post from the Delaware counties and turned the vote of that colony in favour of the resolution. Members of a different sentiment attending that morning from Pennsylvania also, their vote was changed, so that the whole 12 colonies who were authorized to vote at all, gave their voices for it; and within a few days, the convention of N. York approved of it and thus supplied the void occasioned by the withdrawing of her delegates from the vote.

Congress proceeded the same day to consider the declaration of Independence which had been reported & lain on the table the Friday preceding, and on Monday referred to a committee of the whole. The pusillanimous idea that we had friends in England worth keeping terms with, still haunted the minds of many. For this reason those passages which conveyed censures on the people of England were struck out, lest they should give them offence. The clause too, reprobating the enslaving the inhabitants of Africa, was struck out in complaisance to South Carolina and Georgia, who had never attempted to restrain the importation of slaves, and who on the contrary still wished to continue it. Our northern brethren also I believe felt a little tender under those censures; for tho' their people have very few slaves themselves yet they had been pretty considerable carriers of them to others. The debates having taken up the greater parts of the 2d 3d & 4th days of July were, in the evening of the last, closed the declaration was reported by the committee, agreed to by the house and signed by every member present except Mr. Dickinson. As the sentiments of men are known not only by what they receive, but what they reject also, I will state the form of the declaration as originally reported.

