

Declaration 1776: The Big Bang of Modern Democracy

Traveling Exhibition Guide

Developed by

THE GILDER LEHRMAN
INSTITUTE *of* AMERICAN HISTORY

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GENERAL INFORMATION

This exhibition was developed by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History.

- Scholarly Advisor: Dr. James Basker
- Curator: Sandra Trenholm, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History
- Curatorial Intern: Summer Matthes, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History

Format

The exhibition is composed of seven retractable vinyl banners. Each panel measures 81 inches in height and 33 inches in width. It requires a total of 21 running feet and can be displayed separately or together. Detailed setup instructions are provided to the venue's coordinator upon shipment. Setup instructions can also be found on the [GLI Traveling Exhibitions website](#).

Rental Security

Exhibitions may be displayed in any open areas, but preferably not in a hallway. No exhibition is to be displayed outdoors or in a tent or other temporary structure. It is preferable that a staff member be in the room with the exhibition when it is open to students or guests.

If a borrower is determined to be at fault for damage or loss of any part of the exhibition, then the institution will be responsible for paying the replacement or restoration costs. The value of the *Declaration 1776: The Big Bang of Modern Democracy* exhibition is \$1,950. Some institutions choose to add a rider to their insurance policy.

Shipping

The exhibition is shipped in a wheeled plastic case measuring 38 inches x 18 inches x 14 inches and weighing approximately 75 pounds. GLI will be responsible for arranging shipping via FedEx. A week before the end of your loan period, we will send a return label and instructions.

Reporting

Each site is required to complete a condition report upon receipt of the exhibition and again after the exhibition has been packed for return. Condition reports will be sent to the venue coordinator via email.

Questions

If you have questions, please contact

Traveling Exhibitions Program

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EXHIBITION CONTENT

Panel One: Declaration 1776: The Big Bang of Modern Democracy

Introductory Text

When the Declaration of Independence was issued, the idea that “all men are created equal” was revolutionary. However, in the early years of the American republic, women, property-less White men, enslaved African Americans, Native Americans, and people under twenty-one were not included as equal citizens. In the decades since, the ideals of the Declaration have led to the inclusion of all these categories of citizens in the body politic. With this seminal document, the Founding Fathers unleashed an open-ended driving force that would shape modern history. Around the world, other countries have declared independence using the US Declaration of 1776 as a model. This exhibition gathers primary sources that illustrate how Americans and people across the world have been inspired by the Declaration in their pursuit of equality and self-determination.

Citations

1.1 John Trumbull, *The Declaration of Independence*, July 4, 1776, painted circa 1818.

(Yale University Art Gallery, Trumbull Collection)

1.2 The Declaration of Independence, printed by John Dunlap in Philadelphia on July 4,

1776. (Library of Congress Rare Book and Special Collections Division)

1.3 John Hancock to the Boston Town Clerk, announcing the Declaration of

Independence, July 6, 1776. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC00595)

The Declaration of Independence, printed by Peter Timothy in Charleston, South Carolina on

August 2, 1776. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC00959)

1.4 “First Reading of the Declaration of Independence in New York,” illustration by A. R. Waud

printed in *Harper's Weekly*, July 9, 1870. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC01733.12)

1.5 British printing of the Declaration of Independence in *Gentleman's Magazine*, August 1776. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC08863)

French translation of the Declaration of Independence printed in *Recueil des loix constitutives des colonies angloises*, published in Philadelphia and sold in Paris, 1778. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC01720)

Panel Two: The Declaration and the Origins of the Civil Rights Movement

Introduction

Independence did not mean equality and freedom for everyone. In 1776 and the years that followed, Black Americans were inspired by the Declaration to claim equal rights for themselves. Enslaved men and women cited the Declaration in freedom petitions. Black and White abolitionists invoked the promise of “unalienable rights” in speeches and anti-slavery writings. Some even challenged Thomas Jefferson directly. In the nineteenth century, Black printers emblazoned the promise of equality on the mastheads of their newspapers. Each helped push for the realization of the Declaration’s ideals.

Citations

2.1 Engraving of the Rev. Lemuel Haynes, n.d. (Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library)

Engraving of “Brother Prince Hall,” 1924. (Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Photographs and Prints Division, The New York Public Library)

Miniature watercolor on ivory portrait of Elizabeth Freeman (“Mumbet”) by Susan Anne Livingston Ridley Sedgwick, 1811. (Massachusetts Historical Society)

2.2 Engraved portrait of Benjamin Banneker from the title page of *Benjamin Bann[e]ker's Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia Almanac, for the Year of Our Lord 1795*

(Philadelphia: Jacob Johnson & Co., [1794]). (Courtesy of the Maryland Center for History and Culture, [Rare MAY 42 .B21 1795F]) Banneker's almanacs featured scientific information, including weather patterns to assist farmers, as well as poems and social commentary.

"This, Sir, was a time when you clearly saw into the injustice of a State of Slavery . . . [and] you publicly held forth this true and invaluable doctrine . . . 'We hold these truths to be Self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happyness.'" – Benjamin Banneker, 1791

2.3 David Walker, Walker's Appeal, 1829. (Internet Archive)

"Hear your language, proclaimed to the world, July 4th, 1776—'We hold these truths to be self evident—that ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL!' . . . Compare your own language above, extracted from your Declaration of Independence, with your cruelties and murders inflicted by your cruel and unmerciful fathers and yourselves on our fathers and on us." – David Walker, 1829

2.4 "Being taught by . . . the Declaration of Independence, that all men are born free and equal, and consequently are endowed with unalienable rights, among which are the enjoyments of life, liberty, and the pursuits of happiness . . . our forlorn and deplorable situation earnestly and loudly demands of us to devise and pursue all legal means for the speedy elevation of ourselves and brethren to the scale and standing of men." –The Reverend Richard Allen, 1830

"The National Colored Convention in Session at Washington, D.C.," illustration by Theodore R. Davis printed in *Harper's Weekly*, February 6, 1869. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC01733.11)

2.5 Masthead of *Palladium of Liberty*, Columbus, Ohio, February 14, 1844. (Columbus

Black Heritage Collection, Columbus Metropolitan Library)

2.6 “What, to the American slave, is your Fourth of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim.” –Frederick Douglass, 1852

Portrait of Frederick Douglass from his second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 1855. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC05820)

Panel Three: The Idea of Independence Spreads Internationally

Introduction

The American Revolution’s success set off a wave of independence movements abroad. Following the French Revolution of 1789, the Haitian Revolution of 1791 marked the first colonial uprising against French rule and led, in 1804, to the establishment of the first Black republic in the Western Hemisphere. Beginning in 1810, colonies across Latin America rose up against Spanish rule. Throughout the nineteenth century, the American Declaration inspired all who were striving for self-governance and equality.

Citations

3.1 Haitian Declaration of Independence, January 1, 1804. (The National Archives UK)

“We must, with one last act of national authority, forever assure the empire of liberty in the country of our birth; we must take any hope of re-enslaving us away from the inhuman government that for so long kept us in the most humiliating torpor. In the end we must live independent or die.”

Twentieth-century painting of Général Jean-Jacques Dessalines, 1957. (Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Photographs and Prints Division, The New York Public Library)

3.2 Painting depicting the signing of the Venezuelan Declaration of Independence on July 5, 1811,
by Juan Lovera, 1838. (Colección Museo de Caracas)

The Venezuelan Declaration of Independence and Constitution, printed in London by
Longman and Co., 1812. (Rice University, Fondren Library, Woodson Research Center)

“We, therefore, in the name and by the will and authority which we hold from the
virtuous People of Venezuela, do declare solemnly to the world, that its united
Provinces are, and ought to be, from this day, by act and right, Free, Sovereign, and
Independent States.” – The Venezuelan Declaration of Independence, 1811

3.3 Signing the Cartagena Declaration of Independence, 1811. (Ron Giling/Alamy)

“We, the representatives of the good people of Cartagena de Indias . . . solemnly
declare before the face of the whole world that the Province of Cartagena de Indias
is from today in fact and by right a free, sovereign, and Independent State.”

3.4 “Independence Day, July 26th” printed by Hutchinson & Co. in London in 1908. (Schomburg
Center for Research in Black Culture, Jean Blackwell Hutson Research and Reference
Division, New York Public Library)

Half-length portrait of Liberia’s first president Joseph Jenkins Roberts, photograph taken by
Rufus Anson in January 1854. (Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division)

The Declaration of Independence of Liberia, printed by William F. Geddes in Philadelphia,
1848. (Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare
Books Division, The New York Public Library)

Panel Four: A New Birth of Freedom

Introduction

During the Civil War, especially after the Emancipation Proclamation, leaders like Abraham Lincoln and Charles Sumner began to see winning the war as an opportunity to revitalize the ideals of freedom and equality expressed in the Declaration. In 1865, the Union victory and the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment ended slavery in the United States. The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments (1868 and 1870) further guaranteed the rights of citizenship to Black men. The 1870s would see a new level of involvement by Black Americans in political and civic life, though the end of Reconstruction in 1877 would reverse many of those gains and dampen hopes for equality until the revival of civil rights movements in the twentieth century.

Citations

4.1 An early printing of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address of November 19, 1863. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC06811)

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

4.2 "The Fifteenth Amendment. Celebrated May 19th 1870," print by James Carter Beard, in Baltimore, 1870. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC10030)

Iowa joint resolution ratifying the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, signed on March 30, 1866. (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC02631)

4.3 Photograph of John M. Langston, circa 1880. (Library of Congress)

"It should excite no surprise that the slave power has sought to bespatter, mystify, and traduce the immortal principles of the Declaration of Independence."

The National Equal Rights League Convention of Colored Men, 1867

“The glory of [the] principles [of the Declaration of Independence] lies in their ‘generality’—in their impartial application to all men by virtue of their manhood. . . . The burden of our request today is that you apply those same immortal principles in essentially the same way to your colored fellow-citizens. . . . Concede that we are men, born with those inalienable rights.”

4.4 An engraving by William Wellstood of five Black men elected to Congress during Reconstruction. Printed in James G. Blaine, *Twenty Years of Congress: From Lincoln to Garfield*, Norwich, 1886. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC09746)

Panel Five: Women’s Rights

Introduction

Women also admired the ideals of the Declaration and began to ask for equal rights. From the 1840s through the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, women from diverse backgrounds invoked the Declaration’s promises to demand voting rights and equality for themselves. Their voices echoed Abigail Adams’s 1776 plea to “Remember the Ladies.”

Citations

5.1 Abigail Adams to John Adams, March 31–April 5, 1776.

“I long to hear that you have declared an independency. . . . I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could. If perticular care and attention is not paid to the Laidies we are determined to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation.”

Portrait of Abigail Adams by Benjamin Blyth, ca. 1766. (Massachusetts Historical Society)

5.2 The Declaration of Sentiments, 1848

“We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

Elizabeth Cady Stanton with her sons, Daniel and Henry, 1848. (Library of Congress)

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, et al. “Declaration of Sentiments,” printed in the Report of the Woman’s Rights Convention, Held at Seneca Falls, N.Y., July 19th and 20th, 1848. (Library of Congress)

5.3 Zitkála-Šá at the meeting of the National Women’s Party in Washington, DC, February 1921. (Getty Images)

“America entered upon her career of freedom and prosperity with the declaration that ‘all men are born free and equal.’ The claims of brotherhood, of the love that is due a neighbor-race, and of tardy justice have not been wholly lost on your hearts and consciences.” – Zitkála-Šá, March 16, 1896

Painting of Adella Hunt Logan by William Edouard Scott, 1918. (Courtesy of Adele Logan Alexander)

“If white American women with all their natural and acquired advantages, need the ballot . . . how much more do black Americans, male and female, need the strong defense of a vote to help secure their right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness?” – Adella Hunt Logan, September 1905

5.4 “The Declaration of Independence was the direct result of taxation without representation,”

postcard published in Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1910. (University of Northern Iowa)

“Another Declaration of Independence,” printed in Harper’s Weekly, May 14, 1910. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC10222)

Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, passed by Congress in 1919, and ratified by the states in 1920. (National Archives)

Panel Six: The Fall of Empires and Proliferation of Independent Nations

Introduction

In the twentieth century, growing numbers of nationalist movements pushed for independence. From Asia to Africa to Eastern Europe, newly emerging countries turned to the American Declaration as a model for announcing their liberation from empires and their birth as independent nations. By the end of the twentieth century, these various campaigns for independence had forever changed the global landscape.

Citations

6.1 Mahatma Gandhi, ca. 1940. (UHM Library Digital Image Collections)

“We believe that it is the inalienable right of the Indian people, as of any other people, to have freedom and to enjoy the fruits of their toil and have the necessities of life, so that they may have full opportunities of growth.” – The Purna Swaraj, January 26, 1929

6.2 Sultan of Morocco Sidi Mohammed “Sidi Mohamed [ie Mohammed],” December 28, 1927. (National Library of France, Prints and Photography Department)

Independence memorial, Fez, Morocco, May 11, 2010. (Alamy)

Translation: “Whereas the regime [France] has attempted—through all possible means—to break the unity of the Moroccan people, to prevent Moroccans from effectively participating in the governance of their country, and to deprive them of every individual civil liberty. . . .” —Proclamation of Independence, 1944

6.3 Facsimile of the Proclamation of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam by Hồ Chí Minh, 1945. (Vietnam National History Museum)

“All men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. This immortal statement was made in the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America in 1776. In a broader sense, this means: All the peoples on earth are equal from birth, all the peoples have a right to live, to be happy and free.”
—Proclamation of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, 1945

6.4 Mau Mau leader of Kenya African National Union (KANU) Jomo Kenyatta holding the official document of Kenyan Independence, on December 13, 1963, in Nairobi. On the left is Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. (AFP/Getty Images)

“Whereas every person in Kenya is entitled to the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual, that is to say, the right, whatever his race, tribe, place of origin or residence or other local connexion, political opinions, colour, creed or sex. . . .”
—Constitution of Kenya, 1963

6.5 The Act of the Re-Establishment of the State of Lithuania, 1990. (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas)

“The Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania, expressing the will of the nation, decrees and solemnly proclaims that the execution of the sovereign powers of the State of Lithuania abolished by foreign forces in 1940, is re-established, and henceforth Lithuania is again an independent state.”

Lithuanians gather in the center of Vilnius, waving national flags, during a demonstration in support of independence, January 10, 1990. (Getty Images)

6.6 The Act of Declaration of Independence of Ukraine, August 24, 1991. (State Archival Service of Ukraine)

“In view of the mortal danger surrounding Ukraine in connection with the state coup in the USSR on August 19, 1991 . . . the Verkhovna Rada [the Supreme Council] of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic solemnly declares the Independence of Ukraine and the creation of an independent Ukrainian state.

Ukrainians wave flags and celebrate independence in Kyiv, August 25, 1991. (Getty Images)

Panel Seven: Twentieth-Century Legacies

Introduction

Twentieth-century presidents as various as Calvin Coolidge, Harry Truman, and John F. Kennedy all turned to the Declaration of Independence to inform their leadership. Grassroots political movements in support of civil rights also turned to the Declaration for inspiration. The ideals of the Declaration—that all human beings are created equal and have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—continue to be central to the identity of our country.

Citations

7.1 “Three very definite propositions were set out in its preamble...that all men are created equal, that they are endowed with certain inalienable rights, and that therefore the source of the just powers of government must be derived from the consent of the governed.” - Calvin

Coolidge, July 5, 1926

“The Voice of the Liberty Bell 1776–1926,” souvenir poster created by Dan Smith and printed by Elliott Brewer for the Sesquicentennial Celebration in Philadelphia, 1926. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09657)

7.2 “Bills of rights restrain governments from abridging individual civil liberties, while government itself by sound legislative policies protects citizens against the aggressions of others seeking to push their freedoms too far. Thus in the words of the Declaration of Independence: ‘Man is endowed by his Creator with certain inalienable rights. Among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. To secure these rights, governments are instituted among men.’ ” — The President’s Commission on Civil Rights, 1947

To Secure These Rights: The Report of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, Washington D.C., 1947. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09621)

7.4 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., 1964. (Library of Congress)

Martin Luther King Jr., January 14, 1959. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC07706)

“The challenge to you is to be maladjusted . . . as maladjusted as Jefferson, who . . . could cry out in words lifted to cosmic proportions, ‘All men are created equal, and are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights.’ ”

Demonstrators holding signs during the March on Washington, photograph by Marion S. Trikosko,

August 28, 1963. (Library of Congress)

Martin Luther King Jr., “I Have A Dream” speech, August 28, 1963

“When the architects of our Republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men — yes, black men as well as white men — would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

7.4 Declaration of Indian Purpose: The Voice of the American Indian by the American Indian Chicago Conference, 1961. (ERIC Institute of Education Sciences)

“We BELIEVE in the future of a greater America, an America which we were first to love, where life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness will be a reality.”

President John F. Kennedy at the White House with delegates from the 1962 American Indian Chicago Conference to discuss the needs and conditions of Native Americans, photograph by Cecil Stoughton, August 15, 1962. (John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum)

7.5 Harvey Milk being sworn in as the first gay San Francisco supervisor by California Chief Justice Rose Bird, by Robert Clay, January 9, 1978. (Alamy)

Cover of *The Ladder*, the first nationally distributed lesbian magazine in the US, featuring the Declaration of Independence, Volume 2, Issue 10, July 1958. (Internet Archive)

7.6 “We sometimes take it for granted today that independent judges will hear our cases and controversies. But it wasn’t always so. Before the Revolution, colonial judges depended on the crown for their tenure and salary and often enough their decisions followed their interests. The problem was so serious that the founders cited it in their Declaration of Independence. Once free, the framers went to great lengths to guarantee a degree of judicial independence for future generations that they themselves had not experienced.” – Justice

Neil Gorsuch, 2018

“The Supreme Court as of June 30, 2022,” photograph by Fred Schilling, October 7, 2022.
(Collection of the Supreme Court of the United States)