



AMC 2026

Closing Plenary

**We Hold These Truths: The
Declaration at 250
A Conversation with Wisconsin
Supreme Court Justices**

Moderated By:

Dean Joseph Kearney
Marquette University Law School, Milwaukee

Dean Daniel Tokaji
University of Wisconsin Law School, Madison

Panelists:

Chief Justice Jill J. Karofsky
Wisconsin Supreme Court, Madison

Hon. Susan M. Crawford
Wisconsin Supreme Court, Madison

Hon. Rebecca Frank Dallet
Wisconsin Supreme Court, Madison

Hon. Brian Hagedorn
Wisconsin Supreme Court, Madison

Hon. Janet C. Protasiewicz
Wisconsin Supreme Court, Madison

About the Presenters...

Justice Susan M. Crawford was elected to the Wisconsin Supreme Court in 2025. Justice Crawford previously served as a circuit court judge in Dane County, first elected in 2018 and reelected in 2024. Before becoming a judge, Justice Crawford was a civil litigator in private practice for several years. She served as chief legal counsel for the Office of Governor Jim Doyle and in appointed positions in several state agencies. She began her career as an assistant attorney general, first at the Iowa Attorney General's Office and then at the Wisconsin Department of Justice, where she served as the director of the criminal appeals unit. Justice Crawford grew up in Chippewa Falls. She earned her undergraduate degree from Lawrence University with honors, Phi Beta Kappa, and later obtained a master's degree in English from Indiana University. She graduated from the University of Iowa College of Law with high honors in 1994. Justice Crawford is active in the community, serving as a board member and chair of a large food pantry in Dane County. She has participated in several professional organizations and statewide court committees, including serving on the Wisconsin Judicial Education Committee, the Wisconsin Judicial Conference Executive Committee, and the Wisconsin Supreme Court "Making the Record" Committee. She is a member of the Wisconsin Bar Association, the Dane County Bar Association, and the Milwaukee County Bar Association. Justice Crawford previously served as president of the James E. Doyle Chapter of the American Inn of Court, as chair of the Dane County Behavioral Health Subcommittee, as a commissioner on the Dane County Equal Opportunity Commission, and as vice president of the Wisconsin Chapter of the American Constitution Society. Justice Crawford and her husband live in Madison and have two adult children.

Justice Rebecca Frank Dallet was elected to the Wisconsin Supreme Court on April 3, 2018. Before joining the Supreme Court, she served as a judge of the Milwaukee County Circuit Court, elected in 2008 and re-elected in 2014. Prior to her elected judicial service, Justice Dallet served as the first female presiding court commissioner for Milwaukee County and as a Milwaukee County Assistant District Attorney and a Special Assistant United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Wisconsin. Immediately after graduating from law school, she clerked for Magistrate Judge Aaron Goodstein of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Wisconsin. Justice Dallet received her B.A. summa cum laude with honors from The Ohio State University in 1991, her J.D. summa cum laude from Case Western Reserve University School of Law in 1994, where she was an editor of law review, and her LL.M. in Judicial Studies from Duke University School of Law in 2025. Justice Dallet is passionate about the areas of equal access to justice and empowering women as leaders. She chairs a statewide committee on race, equity, inclusion and access and is the Supreme Court liaison to the Access to Justice Commission. Justice Dallet was named a Wisconsin Business Journal Woman of Influence, a Woman in the Law Honoree and a Whitehouse Leadership Project Women Rule! Honoree. She was elected a member of the American Law Institute, serves on the editorial advisory board of *Judicature*, is a former associate dean of the Wisconsin Judicial College, and a former adjunct professor at Marquette University Law School. Her recent publications include *State Shadow Dockets*, 2022 WIS. L. REV. 1063, and *Reining in State Judicial Conduct Commissions* 109 MARQ. L. REV. ____ (forthcoming 2026).

A native of the Milwaukee area, **Justice Brian Hagedorn** was elected to the Wisconsin Supreme Court in April 2019. Prior to that, he was a judge on the Court of Appeals, having been appointed in 2015 and elected in 2017. Prior to his judicial service, Justice Hagedorn served for almost five years as Chief Legal Counsel to Governor Scott Walker, as an Assistant Attorney General at the Wisconsin Department of Justice, as a law clerk for Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice Michael Gableman, and as an attorney in private practice at one of Milwaukee's largest law firms. Prior to law school, Justice Hagedorn worked in business for three years. Justice Hagedorn is a graduate of Northwestern University School of Law, where he was the President of the Federalist Society. He received his B.A. in philosophy from Trinity International University in Deerfield, Illinois, graduating summa cum laude, with honors. In 2014, he was named Trinity College Alumnus of the Year. Justice Hagedorn is a regular speaker to school, civic, and legal groups on the rule of law, legal writing, and

judicial philosophy, among other topics. When not on the bench, Justice Hagedorn enjoys reading, serving at his church and his children's school, and rooting for the Green Bay Packers and Milwaukee Brewers.

Chief Justice Jill J. Karofsky was elected to the Wisconsin Supreme Court on April 7, 2020 and took office August 1, 2020. Before her election to the Supreme Court, Justice Karofsky served as a judge on the Dane County Circuit Court to which she was elected in 2017. Prior to becoming a judge, Karofsky was the executive director of the Office of Crime Victim Services for the state Department of Justice. She previously served as an assistant state attorney general and Wisconsin's first Violence against Women Resource Prosecutor, an adjunct professor at the UW Law School, the general counsel and director of education and human resources for the National Conference of Bar Examiners, and as an assistant district attorney and deputy district attorney for Dane County. Chief Justice Karofsky has served on a number of boards and committees, including the Governor's Council on Domestic Abuse, the Wisconsin Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board, the Wisconsin Crime Victims Council, and the Dane County Big Brothers/Big Sisters Board of Directors. She previously co-chaired the Attorney General's Sexual Assault Response Team. She also has served on the Wisconsin Judicial Education Committee and chairs the Violence Against Women STOP Grant committee. Karofsky earned her bachelors degree from Duke University, her masters degree from UW-Madison, and her law degree from UW Law School. While at Duke, Chief Justice Karofsky competed on the school's NCAA Division I cross-country and track teams. Karofsky has received the "Outstanding Victim Advocacy by a Professional" award from the Wisconsin Victim/Witness Professional Association, the "Voices of Courage" award from the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault, and the "Significant Impact Award" from the Dane County Coordinated Response to Domestic Violence. Chief Justice Karofsky is an ultra-marathoner and has completed multiple marathons, ultra-marathons and Ironman competitions. She is the single-mom of two children.

Appointed in 2003, **Joseph D. Kearney** is one of the longest-serving law school deans in the country and only the ninth person to hold the position at Marquette University since 1908. Dean Kearney has been a member of the Marquette faculty since 1997. Before coming to Marquette Law School, Dean Kearney practiced for six years at Sidley & Austin in Chicago. He also served as a law clerk to the Honorable Antonin Scalia, Justice of the United States Supreme Court, and to the Honorable Diarmuid F. O'Scannlain of the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. Dean Kearney is an accomplished teacher, scholar, administrator, and lawyer. He teaches each semester, including upper-level courses in Advanced Civil Procedure and Federal Courts and a Supreme Court Seminar. His areas of research include regulation of industry (particularly telecommunications) and civil litigation. His collaborations with Professor Thomas W. Merrill (Columbia University) include their book, *Lakefront: Public Trust and Private Rights in Chicago* (Cornell University Press 2021). Dean Kearney's background as a practitioner is in appellate and telecommunications litigation. He has argued cases before the Wisconsin and Illinois Supreme Courts and the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit and has been the primary draftsman of winning briefs on the merits in the United States Supreme Court. Dean Kearney is an honors graduate of Yale College and Harvard Law School.

Justice Janet C. Protasiewicz was elected to the Wisconsin Supreme Court on April 4, 2023 and took office on August 1, 2023. Prior to her election to the Supreme Court, Justice Protasiewicz served as a Circuit Court Judge in Milwaukee County. She was first elected in 2014 and re-elected in 2020. While in Circuit Court, Justice Protasiewicz handled a wide variety of cases including homicides, sexual assaults, drug-related offenses and domestic violence cases. Her latest rotation was in the Family Division where she handled divorce matters and issues related to child custody and placement disputes. Justice Protasiewicz proudly served in the Milwaukee County District Attorney's Office for 25 years where she worked to keep our communities safe. She prosecuted violent crimes, handled termination of parental rights cases and worked to protect children who were in need of protection and services. Justice Protasiewicz taught Trial Advocacy at

the National Advocacy Center in Columbia, South Carolina where she taught prosecutors to be the best advocates they could be in the courtroom. She also taught Trial Advocacy at Marquette University Law School and worked as a volunteer grading the Wisconsin Bar exam. She has received numerous awards including the Community Involvement Award from the Association of Women Lawyers and the Women of Influence Award from the Wisconsin Law Journal. She continues to serve the community by working as a volunteer with the Wisconsin Chapter of the American Red Cross, The Polish Heritage Alliance and Marquette University Law School. Justice Protasiewicz is a magna cum laude graduate of UW-Milwaukee and a graduate of Marquette University Law School.

Dan Tokaji is the Fred W. & Vi Miller Dean and Professor of Law at the University of Wisconsin Law School. As Dean, he serves as the chief academic and executive officer of the school, with responsibility for faculty and staff development, personnel oversight, strategic planning and institutional vision, fundraising, budget planning and management, curriculum, and student academic affairs. Dean Tokaji became Dean of the University of Wisconsin Law School in 2020. From 2003 to 2020, he was on the faculty at Ohio State University, where he served as Associate Dean for Faculty and Charles W. Ebersold & Florence Whitcomb Ebersold Professor of Constitutional Law. He has taught a wide variety of courses, including Civil Procedure, Civil Rights Lawyering, Comparative Constitutional Law, Election Law and Voting Rights, Federal Courts, First Amendment, Legal Analysis and Writing, Legislation and Regulation, and the U.S. Legal System. He has also taught at Harvard Law School, Hong Kong University, and Oxford University. A leading authority in the field of Election Law, Dean Tokaji's scholarship addresses questions of voting rights, free speech, and democratic inclusion. He has published over 50 law review articles, book chapters, and other scholarly papers on a wide range of topics. His recent work includes "Election Law, Democracy, and Legal Education" in *Beyond Imagination? The January 6 Insurrection* (2022), "Voter Registration in a Pandemic," *University of Chicago Law Review Online* (2020), "Denying Systemic Equality: The Last Words of the Kennedy Court," *Harvard Law & Policy Review* (2019), and "Gerrymandering and Association," *William & Mary Law Review* (2018). He is the author of *Election Law in a Nutshell* (2d ed. 2016), and co-author of *Election Law: Cases and Materials* (7th ed. 2022). His recent scholarship addresses the challenges facing democracies around the globe, including the free speech issues surrounding digital disinformation, the need for trustworthy electoral institutions, and the role of law schools in strengthening democratic governance. Media have frequently relied on Dean Tokaji's expertise on election law, voting rights, and free speech issues. He has been quoted or interviewed by the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, and National Public Radio, and many other outlets. Dean Tokaji graduated *summa cum laude* from Harvard College, with an A.B. degree in English and American Literature and Language and Philosophy, then earned a J.D. from Yale Law School. Dean Tokaji clerked for the Honorable Stephen Reinhardt of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. A former civil rights lawyer, he has brought many free speech, racial justice, and voting rights cases over his career.

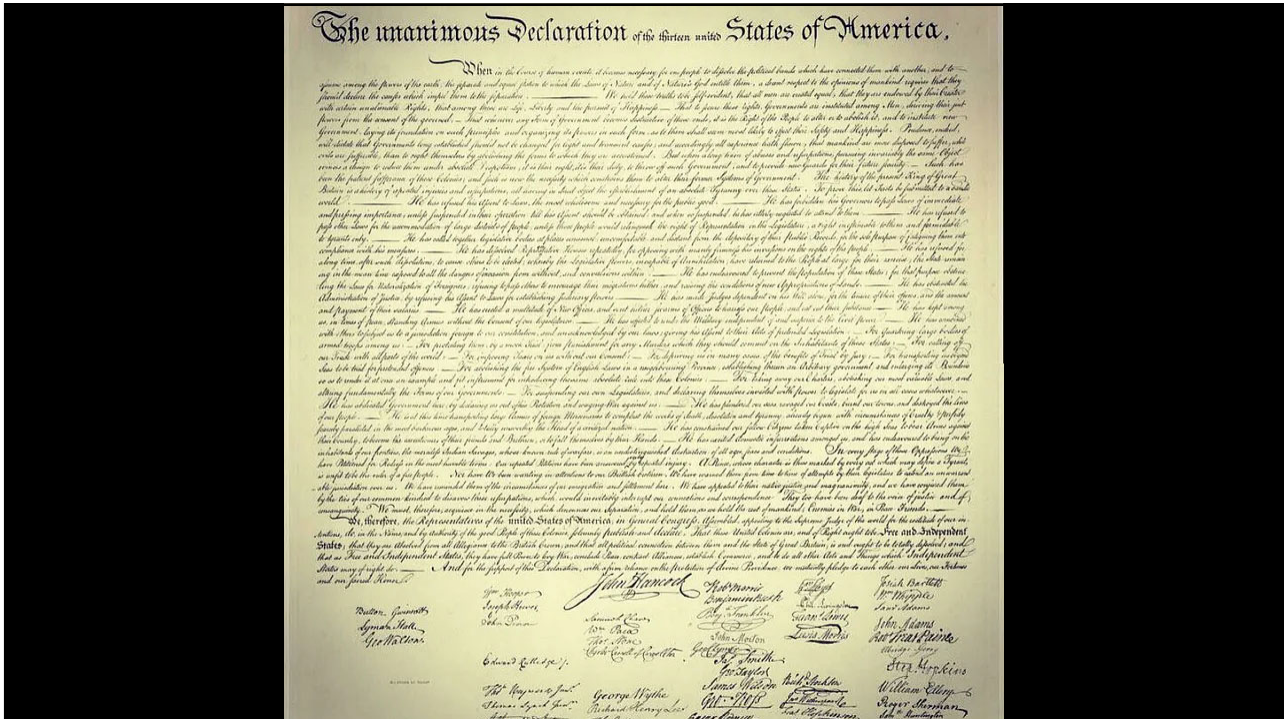


WE HOLD THESE TRUTHS: THE DECLARATION AT 250

State Bar of Wisconsin Annual Meeting

June 12, 2026

1



2

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.

3

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 Happiness**.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from **the consent of the governed**, --**That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it**, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

4

He has **refused his Assent to Laws**, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.

He has **forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance**, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has **refused to pass other Laws** for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only.

5

He has **obstructed the Administration of Justice**, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers.

He has **made Judges dependent on his Will alone**, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation:...

For protecting [armed troops], by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States.

For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury ...

6

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, **That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States.**

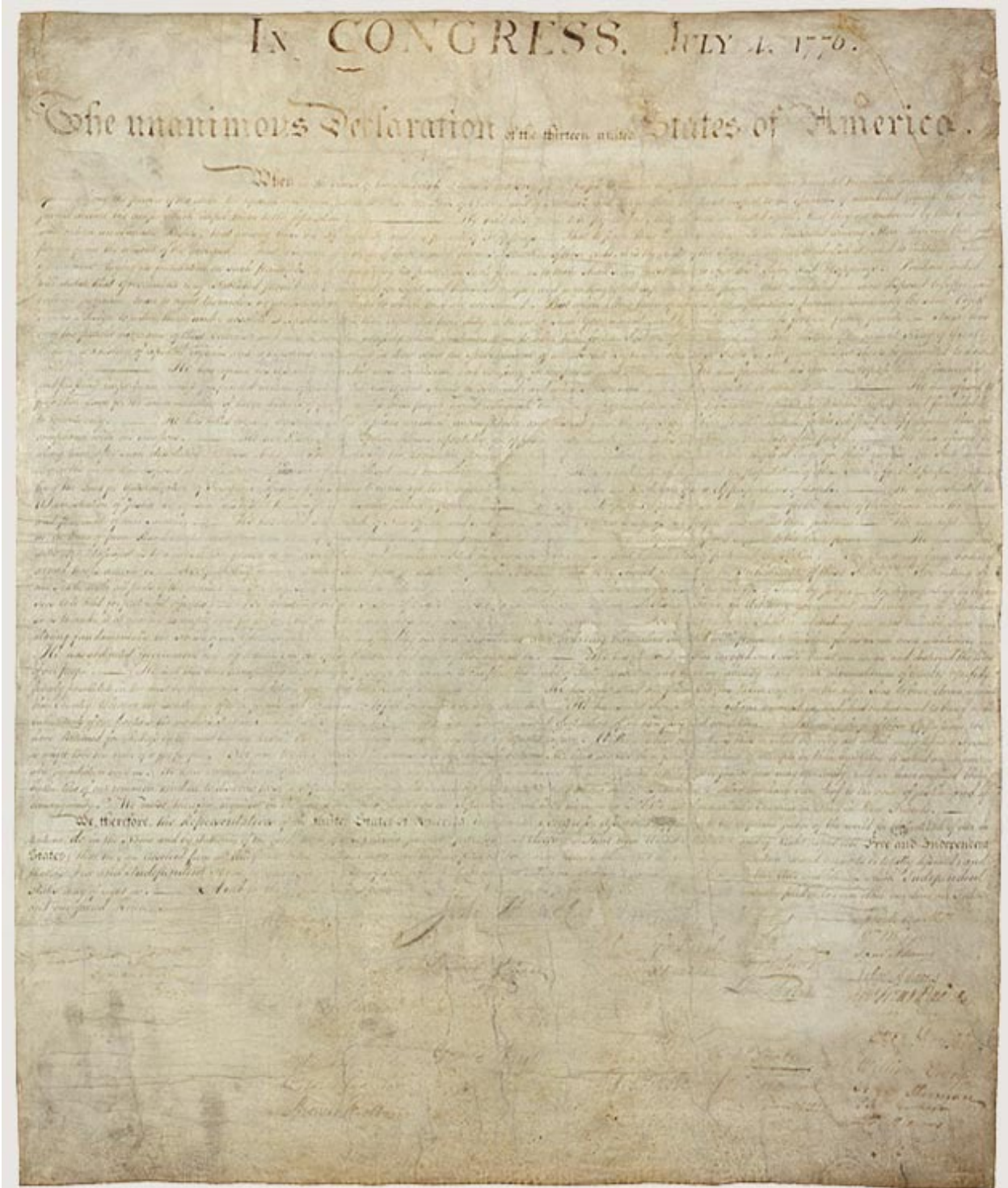
7

And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, **we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.**

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STATE BAR OF WISCONSIN ANNUAL MEETING AND CONFERENCE
CLOSING PLENARY: "WE HOLD THESE TRUTHS: THE DECLARATION AT 250"

JUNE 12, 2026



The Declaration of Independence

In Congress, July 4, 1776

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America,

[1] *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.*

[2] *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 Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.* Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.--Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.

[3] *He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.*

He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only.

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.

He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.

[4] He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers.

He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harrass our people, and eat out their substance.

He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.

He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power.

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation:

For Quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:

For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:

For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:

For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:

For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury:

For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences:

For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies:

For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:

For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation.

He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.

He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

Nor have We been wanting in attentions to our Brittish brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which, would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.

[5] *We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, 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; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do.* [6] *And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.*

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1. **WHAT?** What type of document is the Declaration of Independence? What did it purport to do?
2. **FOR WHOM?** Whose “independence” is being “declared”?
3. **TO WHOM?** Who is the intended audience of the Declaration?
4. **HOW** does the Declaration make its case? What facts and arguments are marshalled?
 - a. Self-governance & Liberty
 - b. Rights and Their Sources
 - c. Grievances
5. **WHY** is the Declaration **RELEVANT** today?
 - a. Lawmaking & Judicial Decision making
 - b. The Right to Abolish Government
 - c. “We mutually pledge”