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The Draftsman of the Declaration of Independence



Dear United States of America,

Nearly 250 years have passed since signatures were inscribed upon parchment in Philadelphia, and yet the echo of its words still stirs the human conscience. In celebrating the anniversary of the United States Declaration of Independence, I find myself drawn not only to the document, but to the draftsman himself, the quiet mastermind whose intellect and conviction brought it to life.

Born as a son of Virginia in 1743, Thomas Jefferson was one of eight children from a prominent and respected family. It became evident early on that he was a formidable scholar, mastering natural sciences, law and moral philosophy, while also becoming a devoted architect. This latter passion took shape in his beloved *Monticello* estate in Charlottesville. These varied pursuits prepared him to be the statesman he hence became, later serving as both the nation's first **Secretary of State**, second **Vice-President** and eventually third **President**. He remained devoted to Virginia throughout, ultimately culminating in the foundation of the renowned **University of Virginia** in 1819.

When the Second Continental Congress appointed its Committee of Five in 1776, it was the young, reserved yet formidable Jefferson who was entrusted with drafting the case for independence. Working with remarkable speed and clarity, he transformed grievance into principle and rebellion into a universal argument. In a matter of days, he produced a text that proclaimed equality as self-evident and government as grounded in consent, a radical assertion that altered the trajectory of political thought forever.

Jefferson's intellectual formation was profoundly transatlantic. Appointed by Congress as an American **Minister Plenipotentiary**, he represented the young republic in Paris. There he engaged with ideas of natural rights, popular sovereignty, and reason as the foundation of legitimate government. These principles had already found their clearest and most enduring political expression in the Declaration. In time, they would also inspire the French Revolution, binding the destinies of two republics in a shared devotion to liberty. Although he remained in Paris during the Constitutional Convention in 1787, he was a strong supporter of the cause and corresponded frequently with those back home. Upon his return to the US in 1789, he continued to fiercely advocate for another matter close to his heart: the **Bill of Rights**.

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The Bill of Rights was the fulfillment of a years-long promise by the Federalists to add fundamental protections to the guarantees of the US Constitution. While the French **Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen** was adopted just ahead of the Bill of Rights, it was the American framework that became the first to successfully uphold those guarantees on a permanent constitutional level. Even though James Madison penned the amendments, Jefferson's relentless transatlantic correspondence was the driving force behind their addition, ensuring that individual liberties were forever codified.

Thomas Jefferson's legacy is overwhelming to grasp, and inherently paradoxical at the same time. He was the architect of American republican ideals, yet his legacy remains deeply complex and fiercely debated, inseparably tied to his reality as a slaveholder who denied the very equality he immortalized in ink, at least from today's perspective. Deliberately aware of how he wished history to judge him, he chose to be remembered as a thinker rather than a holder of power. His self-selected epitaph remains engraved on his tombstone to this day: "*Author of the Declaration of American Independence, of the Statute of Virginia for religious freedom, and Father of the University of Virginia.*" It is an expressive inscription, notable as much for what it claims as for what it omits. Jefferson's legacy cannot be neatly carved into marble. It is forever bound to the agonizing paradox of a Founding Father who envisioned a sanctuary of liberty while presiding over an enslaved workforce. But perhaps this is the true nature of his contribution: he provided an imperfect republic with a perfect compass. The self-evident truths he articulated established a standard of justice so high that even he could not reach it.

At 250 years, the Declaration of Independence is far more than a historical artifact. It is an active, demanding blueprint. It was an act of faith in humanity that still reads like a promise whispered to the future. Today, we honor not just the nation it announced, but the ongoing struggle to realize the ideals of the brilliant, albeit flawed mind that dared to write them into being.

Yours, with great admiration and transatlantic devotion,

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