

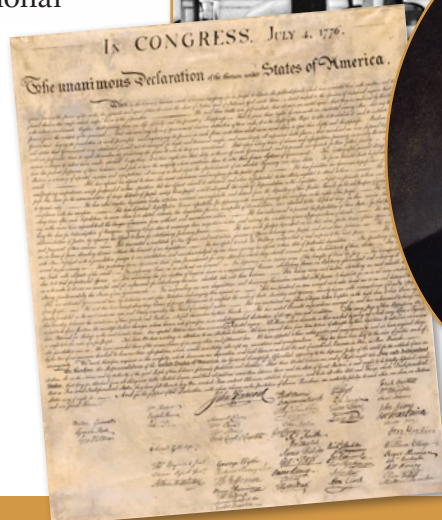
★ MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION ★

# The Declaration's Journey

A GROUNDBREAKING SPECIAL EXHIBITION  
OPENING OCTOBER 2025

To mark the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, and the founding of our country, the Museum of the American Revolution will present a major exhibition tracing the history of the Declaration of Independence over the 250 years since its adoption in 1776. Originating as a wartime statement of new nationhood meant to galvanize support for the Revolution and win allies for the new nation, the Declaration has since inspired a wide array of political and social movements that have used its language to support various, often contradictory causes: abolition and pro-slavery, universalism and nationalism, socialism and capitalism.

More than 200 nations have integrated the Declaration's ideals into their own independence movements. Through an object-rich exhibition, *The Declaration's Journey* will explore the often surprising and diverse meanings, adaptations, and interpretations of the Declaration by national independence and individual rights movements worldwide, highlighting how these international movements helped to shape Americans' own evolving views of their Declaration of Independence. The entwined histories and legacies of the Declaration in the U.S. and abroad will be presented as no other exhibition has done.





## First Travels 1776-1783

The exhibition begins with the story of Jonas Phillips, a Jewish merchant in Philadelphia who sent a letter, written in Judeo-German to keep its contents secret, and a Dunlap broadside of the Declaration of Independence to Amsterdam in July 1776. That copy never arrived, as the ship carrying it was captured by a British warship. The letter and Dunlap broadside will be on view along with Phillips' notes referencing the Declaration's promise of freedom of conscience — an early example of the emerging meanings credited to the Declaration.

Other objects and documents in this introductory section convey how a July 1776 reading of the Declaration led the Mi'kmac and Maliseet communities of New Brunswick and Maine to enter into the first treaty to recognize the U.S. as an independent nation; how the French celebrated the Declaration and helped to announce the U.S. as a nation of the world, available for diplomacy and alliance; and how a small minority, all abolitionists, pioneered the use of the Declaration as an egalitarian document.

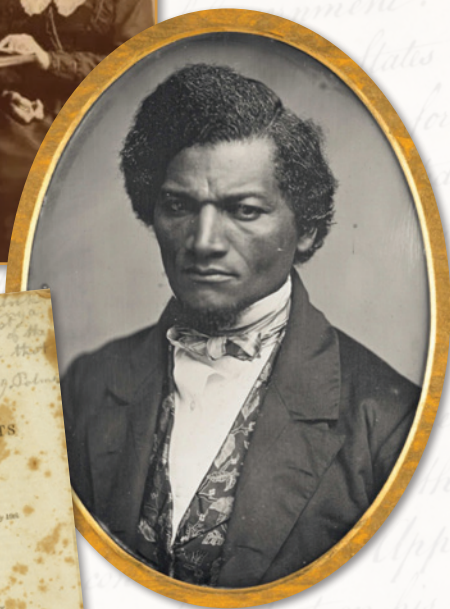


## A Worldwide Journey 1780-1830

The story moves abroad to examine how international interpretations of the Declaration of Independence pressured Americans to clarify their own understanding of the founding document, especially its language about equality. The Marquis de Lafayette borrowed language of the Declaration in his "Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen" (1789) but clarified language about equality. The Haitian Declaration of 1804, as well as the declarations adopted in Mexico and Chile, pushed and pressured Americans into conversation and conflict over the tensions within their own Declaration's promise.







## A Divided Declaration 1831-1898

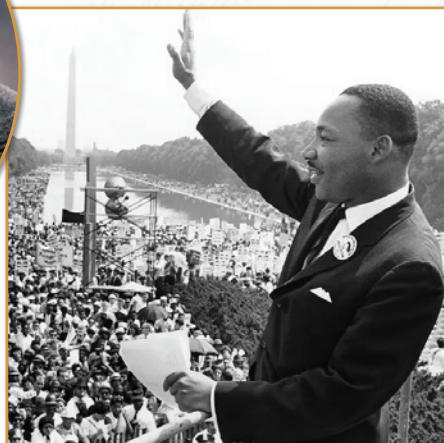
The narrative returns to the United States, exploring the Declaration's appropriation by abolitionists, suffragists, and Confederate secessionists. Items may include Frederick Douglass's typescript oration from 1852, best known for the line "What to the American Slave, is your Fourth of July?" and a pamphlet printing of the Seneca Falls Convention's Declaration of Sentiments, which launched the modern women's suffrage movement with the addition of the phrase "and women" to the Declaration's statement that "all men" are created equal.

Examples of Native American Declarations of Sovereignty and Independence, including Mashpee and Cherokee, show ways that the Declaration's language was re-fashioned in the 1800s by people described in the original document as "savage."

## The Declaration's Journey 1898-PRESENT

In this final section, visitors will see more and more people claim the legacy of the Declaration. At the end of WWI, Czechoslovakia, Korea and six other nations adopted their versions of a declaration of independence and by the mid-1900s, the Declaration was increasingly understood as a fundamental statement of human rights and equality. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1963 "I Have a Dream," speech is perhaps the best-known example of this understanding of the Declaration as a far-reaching promise.

Visitors will leave the exhibition with an understanding of our Declaration as part of an ongoing revolution, a continuing effort to secure fair government and individual rights for people in the United States and around the world.





## THE DECLARATION'S JOURNEY INITIATIVE

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The exhibition will be supplemented by a broader institution-wide initiative. Digital programming will help audiences discover how these new perspectives of the Declaration emerged and consider what the Declaration means today. An accompanying publication as well as a television and radio series based on the exhibition's stories and themes, to be produced by Philadelphia's PBS affiliate, WHYY, will also extend the influence and reach of the exhibition, which is expected to draw a national and international audience.

Robust student programs will be developed to include new thematic workshops and deep object and document explorations, new historical simulations to help students envision themselves in moments of important decision making and a full curriculum with customizable modular activities complete with teacher support materials. Professional development workshops and institutes will further support teachers in introducing new stories with nuance and depth.

*This exhibition will bring together in a single presentation the most important American and international documents and objects that demonstrate the lasting international significance of the American Declaration of Independence.*

## JOIN US

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*The Declaration's Journey* builds on an increasing scholarly consensus that the Declaration's evolution from a statement of independence to this more recently widespread understanding of it as a human rights document was not inevitable and asks how did these shifts in the document's memory, reputation, and meaning happen? What does that story tell us about who can claim the Declaration as their own? What does it tell us about the ideals

on which the United States was founded, whether they are the same as the ones that have guided the nation through its history, or that continue to guide us today? What have citizens of the United States learned about their own Declaration of Independence from people in other parts of the world? What should we learn from the world now, and how should we understand our Declaration today?



The Museum's special exhibitions have drawn hundreds of thousands of visitors since our opening in 2017. Each exhibit generates new scholarship and historical insights, directly fulfilling our mission to uncover and share compelling stories about the diverse people and complex events that sparked America's ongoing experiment in liberty, equality, and self-government. To make this important work possible, we are seeking gifts of all sizes in support of *The Declaration's Journey* and related initiatives leading up to the 250th anniversary of the nation's founding in 2026.

Please contact Danielle Smereczynski, Chief Philanthropy Officer,  
at 267-579-3449 or [dsmerczyński@amrevmuseum.org](mailto:dsmerczyński@amrevmuseum.org) to learn more.

**IMAGE CREDITS** Declaration of Independence, 1776, Library of Congress; Thomas Jefferson by Charles Willson Peale, Independence National Historical Park; Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., 1963, AP; Jonas Phillips by Charles Willson Peale, ca. 1803, Collection of the American Jewish Historical Society; Thomas Jefferson's Writing Chair, 1775-6, Collection of the American Philosophical Society; Declaration of Independence printed by John Dunlap, 1776, Collection of the UK National Archives; Portrait of Lafayette, Lafayette's Manuscript Draft of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, and Lafayette's Writing Set, Fondation Chambrun; Photo of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; Photo of Frederick Douglass, Heritage Images/Hulton Archive/Getty Images; Declaration of Sentiments, Library of Congress; Traveling Trunk used by Philip Jaisohn, Collection of the Jaisohn Memorial House; Photo of Philip Jaisohn, Philip Jaisohn Memorial Foundation; Photo of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Courtesy J. Paul Getty Trust and Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture