

CONCLUDING INDEPENDENCE

by Dr. Lindsay Chervinsky

The final paragraphs of the Declaration of Independence close one of the most important chapters in American history—and open a brand new one. In this essay, historian Lindsay M. Chervinsky, executive director of the George Washington Presidential Library, explores the deep ties colonists once felt to Britain, the shock and sadness when those bonds broke, and the bold claims the new United States made about its powers and identity.

Use the questions below to guide your reading.

Before the Break & Emotional Fallout

1. How did the colonists view their relationship with Great Britain before the Declaration of Independence?
2. What emotions are reflected in the Declaration's penultimate paragraph, and what events or actions caused those feelings?

A New Relationship & New Powers

1. How do the Declaration's final paragraphs signal a complete shift in the relationship between the colonists and Britain?
2. From where is political power derived according to the Declaration, and what rights do sovereign nations hold?



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Defining the New Nation

1. What unanswered questions about the nation's structure and identity existed in 1776?
2. How did the Constitution help define the political identity of the United States?

Reflect and Discuss

Chervinsky states, "Since 1776, moments of American progress—the Reconstruction Amendments, women's suffrage, and the expansion of civil rights - were inspired by the promises contained in the Declaration ...

While the United States has not yet fully lived up to the principles proclaimed in the Declaration, the principles have stood the test of time."

1. What are the promises and principles found in the Declaration that you consider important?
2. How could these principles be applied today to support continued American progress?