

# American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence

By Pauline Maier

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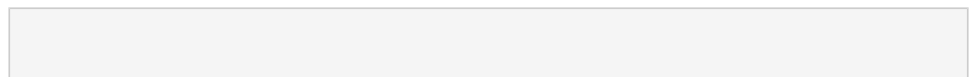
## American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence By Pauline Maier

Pauline Maier shows us the Declaration as both the defining statement of our national identity and the moral standard by which we live as a nation. It is truly "American Scripture," and Maier tells us how it came to be -- from the Declaration's birth in the hard and tortuous struggle by which Americans arrived at Independence to the ways in which, in the nineteenth century, the document itself became sanctified.

Maier describes the transformation of the Second Continental Congress into a national government, unlike anything that preceded or followed it, and with more authority than the colonists would ever have conceded to the British Parliament; the great difficulty in making the decision for Independence; the influence of Paine's *Common Sense*, which shifted the terms of debate; and the political maneuvers that allowed Congress to make the momentous decision.

In Maier's hands, the Declaration of Independence is brought close to us. She lets us hear the voice of the people as revealed in the other "declarations" of 1776: the local resolutions -- most of which have gone unnoticed over the past two centuries -- that explained, advocated, and justified Independence and undergirded Congress's work. Detective-like, she discloses the origins of key ideas and phrases in the Declaration and unravels the complex story of its drafting and of the group-editing job which angered Thomas Jefferson.

Maier also reveals what happened to the Declaration after the signing and celebration: how it was largely forgotten and then revived to buttress political arguments of the nineteenth century; and, most important, how Abraham Lincoln ensured its persistence as a living force in American society. Finally, she shows how by the very act of venerating the Declaration as we do -- by holding it as sacrosanct, akin to holy writ -- we may actually be betraying its purpose and its power.



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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

This is a well-written, well-researched, entertaining account of the creation of the United States' Declaration of Independence as well as an analysis of how the declaration has been enshrined as something of a sacred document (a place it did not always hold). Pauline Maier, a history professor at MIT, will no doubt surprise many readers with detective work demonstrating that Jefferson's Declaration of Independence was actually preceded by many local declarations, which have been generally overlooked by historians but which were published throughout the colonies and were well known in their day. *American Scripture* holds many surprises as it details Jefferson's drafting of the document, the editing process, and the varying regard with which the Declaration of Independence has been held in the past two centuries.

#### From Library Journal

Maier (American history, MIT; *From Resistance to Revolution*, LJ 7/72) sets the stage for her fascinating history of the Declaration of Independence with a concise and well-written introduction into the political background of the American Revolution. She provides the context for the document within the British tradition of declarations, addresses, and petitions and relates it to the many local and state declarations that aimed to mobilize support for independence. The thrust of her work is a careful examination of the drafting of the document by Jefferson and the Congressional committee; she then describes how Congress edited it into its final form. The latter third of the book is dedicated to the ways in which the Declaration has been redefined and used by different groups of Americans. Combining meticulous scholarship with clear prose, Maier tells a compelling story that will succeed in winning her a general audience. Highly recommended.

-?David B. Mattern, *Univ. of Virginia, Charlottesville*

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#### From [Booklist](#)

This analysis of the initial crafting of the Declaration of Independence and its subsequent metamorphosis into a sacred document is a worthy successor to Carl Becker's landmark 1922 publication *The Declaration of Independence*. Instead of assuming the Declaration and the political ideas it expounded were essentially European in origin, Maier places the document itself and the process by which it was conceived and executed firmly in the context of eighteenth-century American sensibilities. By evaluating the Declaration of Independence as a homegrown expression of colonial discontent, it becomes a natural extension of prior revolutionary activities and ideologies rather than a precursor to the rebellion. After the Declaration caused its initial sensation, it served merely as a footnote to the history of the Revolutionary War until well into the nineteenth century, when it was resurrected, revitalized, and ultimately transformed into sanctified dogma. A powerful and engrossing account of the document most responsible for defining the cultural ethos of the American citizenry. Sure to become a classic, this is recommended for most public library collections.

*Margaret Flanagan*

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**Thomas Palmer:**

Reading a guide tends to be new life style within this era globalization. With looking at you can get a lot of information that may give you benefit in your life. Using book everyone in this world can easily share their idea. Guides can also inspire a lot of people. Plenty of author can inspire all their reader with their story or maybe their experience. Not only the storyline that share in the publications. But also they write about the ability about something that you need case in point. How to get the good score toefl, or how to teach your sons or daughters, there are many kinds of book that exist now. The authors in this world always try to improve their proficiency in writing, they also doing some investigation before they write for their book. One of them is this American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence.

**Mindy Munson:**

American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence can be one of your basic books that are good idea. We all recommend that straight away because this reserve has good vocabulary which could increase your knowledge in terminology, easy to understand, bit entertaining but still delivering the information. The copy writer giving his/her effort that will put every word into pleasure arrangement in writing American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence however doesn't forget the main place, giving the reader the hottest in addition to based confirm resource data that maybe you can be one of it. This great information can easily drawn you into fresh stage of crucial contemplating.

**Royce Britton:**

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