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Attention editors
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QuickPoint! • The Last Living Signer's “Best Earthly Inheritance”

By Cascade Policy Institute

On the 50th anniversary of America's Independence, the Declaration's last living signer, Charles Carroll, left a final message every generation still needs to hear.

Two hundred fifty years ago this July 4, the world received a gift as one of the most consequential political documents ever written. **When Thomas Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence, he boldly declared an idea that would shape human history**—that rights come from the Creator, not the government; that a government derives—not imposes—its power; and that its power exists to secure and defend the rights of its people and by consent of its people.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable 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.”

Jefferson staked a claim for independence from Britain, writing that “a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.” By doing so, the Second Continental Congress did not set forth completely new ideas about human freedom but rather **made a precise statement of what American colonists expected that a government must do—and must never do—relative to securing a citizen's rights and property.**

The Declaration became the primary expression of the American idea: that all men are created equal, that rights are inherent—not granted, that government's power is limited by consent, and that a free people can seek justice when those rights are violated.

Exactly 200 years ago, in 1826, the last surviving signer of the Declaration wrote his last testament on a parchment copy of the Declaration. **Charles Carroll of Carrollton (1737-1832) expressed gratitude for living to see the 50th year of American Independence** and chose to reaffirm—in his own hand—his “approbation of the Declaration of Independence adopted by Congress.”

Carroll's testament urged future generations to cherish the Declaration's principles, writing: “I do hereby recommend to the present and future generations the principles of that important document as **the best earthly inheritance their**



ancestors could bequeath to them, and pray that the civil and religious liberties they have secured to my country may be perpetuated to the remotest posterity and extended to the whole family of man.”

As we mark this 250th year and other historic anniversaries of the story of American freedom, may we remember and treasure the great legacy the Founders bequeathed us. In gratitude for the enduring principles on which this nation was built, we encourage you to explore these resources and add your own to them as you celebrate America’s 250th Independence Day.

Happy Independence Day 250 from Cascade Policy Institute!

RESOURCES FOR AMERICA’S FOUNDATIONAL TEXTS

From the National Archives

America's Founding Documents

[America's Founding Documents | National Archives](#)

Declaration of Independence

[Declaration of Independence: A Transcription | National Archives](#)

[The Declaration of Independence | National Archives](#)

The Constitution

[The Constitution of the United States: A Transcription | National Archives](#)

[The Constitution of the United States | National Archives](#)

The Bill of Rights

[The Bill of Rights: A Transcription | National Archives](#)

The Magna Carta

[Magna Carta | National Archives](#)

Patriotic Programming

Independence Day Celebration from the U.S. Capitol

(broadcast on public television)

[A Capitol Fourth | 250th Weekend Celebration](#)

July 4th at the National Archives

[July 4th at the National Archives | National Archives](#)

Colonial Williamsburg's "America Made in Virginia: 250 Years Together"

[America Made in Virginia: 250 Years Together - Colonial Williamsburg](#)

PBS stations [America at 250 | PBS](#)

*“I do hereby recommend to the present and future generations the principles of that important document as **the best earthly inheritance their ancestors could bequeath to them**, and pray that the civil and religious liberties they have secured to my country may be perpetuated to the remotest posterity and extended to the whole family of man.”*

**Charles Carroll
of Carrollton
(1737-1832)**

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