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Changes and Edits in the Declaration of Independence: From Draft to Final Copy

The Declaration of Independence, one of the most iconic documents in American history, underwent several revisions and edits before its final version was adopted on July 4, 1776. In this passage, we will explore the notable changes and edits made to the original draft of the Declaration of Independence, shedding light on the collaborative process that shaped this historic document.

Initial Drafting

The process of creating the Declaration of Independence began with a committee of five individuals appointed by the Continental Congress. Thomas Jefferson, the primary author, drafted an initial version that outlined the colonists' grievances against King George III and asserted their intention to declare independence.

Committee Revisions

After Jefferson presented his draft to the committee, it underwent a series of revisions and edits. Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Roger Sherman, and Robert Livingston reviewed and discussed the document, making changes to improve its clarity and impact.

Congressional Debates

The edited draft was then presented to the Continental Congress for further discussion and debate. Congress debated various sections of the document, making additional changes and edits based on input from delegates representing the thirteen colonies.

Removal of Anti-Slavery Language

One notable change involved the removal of a passage in Jefferson's original draft that condemned the transatlantic slave trade and slavery itself. Southern delegates, particularly from South Carolina and Georgia, objected to these sections, and they were omitted to ensure the support of all thirteen colonies.

Final Adoption

On July 4, 1776, after days of debate and revisions, the Continental Congress approved the final version of the Declaration of Independence. John Hancock, the President of the Continental Congress, and other delegates signed the document, making it an official proclamation of American independence.

