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350 Palabras – 250 Years of Independence

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This year, the United States celebrates the 250th anniversary of its declaration of independence from England. It was during the Second Continental Congress held in Philadelphia, on July 4, 1776, that the delegates of the 13 British colonies in America approved the Declaration of Independence.

While the delegates examined the draft prepared by Thomas Jefferson, the youngest delegate in Congress, the colonies were simultaneously in armed conflict with the most powerful empire in the world. Years earlier, England, under the reign of Elizabeth I, had defeated the Spanish Armada of Felipe II of Spain. Challenging the powerful mother country at the outset of the revolution of the 13 colonies seemed both a military and political folly.

Nevertheless, the talent of the Founding Fathers and the remarkable leadership of George Washington, Commander in Chief of the Continental Army, would ultimately achieve success that resonated across the world. The Declaration of Independence prepared by Jefferson drew its conceptual foundation from the ideas of John Locke, the English philosopher who provided the ideological framework for independence.

The notion that men, in their natural state, are equal and independent, or that no one ought to inflict harm upon another in his life, health, or possessions, are ideas originally articulated by Locke and later incorporated into the Declaration. However, Jefferson omitted the term health and replaced possessions with the right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

The Declaration of Independence would later play a crucial role in the libertarian and emancipatory struggles of several Latin American nations. Indeed, the United States’ Declaration of Independence directly influenced various political movements throughout the rest of the Americas.

One example, recently highlighted by Texas historian Brandon Seale, illustrates this influence: years before Mexico's independence, a group of Texan political leaders drafted the Act of Independence of the Province of Texas (1813). This Texan declaration, several years before Mexico gained independence from Spain and before Texas itself declared independence from Mexico, asserted the right of Texans to establish their own government and reaffirmed that legitimate authority derives from the people. Notably, the opening words of the Texan declaration of 1813 mirror those of the Philadelphia Declaration now commemorated in the United States "We the People... We, the People of the Province of Texas."