

The Amazing Maturity of the Young Declaration Signers

When we think of Independence Day and the men who affixed their signatures to the Declaration of Independence, it's easy to lump them all together as wizened old men.

But while some – such as 70-year-old Benjamin Franklin – were certainly getting up in age, many others were remarkably young. Consider the following list of signers. In 1776, the year the Declaration was signed:

- George Walton (Georgia), John Penn (North Carolina), and Samuel Chase (Maryland) were 35.
- Arthur Middleton (South Carolina), James Wilson (Pennsylvania), and William Hooper (North Carolina) were 34.
- Thomas Jefferson (Virginia) and Thomas Stone (Maryland) were 33.
- Elbridge Gerry (Massachusetts) was 32.
- Benjamin Rush (Pennsylvania) was 31.
- Thomas Heyward Jr. (South Carolina) was 30.
- Thomas Lynch Jr. (South Carolina) was 27.
- And Edward Rutledge (South Carolina) was a mere 26 years old!

Perhaps even more remarkable than the young ages of these signers is the young age at which many of them began what we today consider “adult life.” A number of signers entered prestigious colleges such as Harvard between the ages of 13 and 16, including John Hancock, Samuel Adams, William Ellery, Robert Treat Pain, and Elbridge Gerry. Still others, such as George Ross, John Penn, Benjamin Rush, and William Whipple, were already beginning their careers as businessmen, lawyers, and doctors by the time many modern young people are just finishing their undergrad years.

Today's young people have become known for their inability to grow up. Marriage, childbirth, jobs, and education are [increasingly prolonged](#) and young adults are even having trouble leaving their childhood doctors until their [mid-thirties](#).

When compared to the depth of knowledge, the staggering responsibility, and the pain and difficulty the young Founders experienced, modern America's inability to grow up can seem a bit pathetic. Are we expecting too little of the next generation in education, morality, and personal responsibility?

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