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## From 'sacred and undeniable' to 'self-evident': a rhetorical analysis of Jefferson's original draft of the Declaration of Independence

Patrick A. McHugh  
*Eastern Washington University*

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FROM 'SACRED AND UNDENIABLE' TO 'SELF-EVIDENT':  
A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF JEFFERSON'S ORIGINAL DRAFT OF THE  
DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

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A Thesis  
Presented To  
Eastern Washington University  
Cheney, Washington

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree  
Master of Science in Communication

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By  
Patrick A. McHugh  
Spring 2018

## THESIS OF PATRICK MCHUGH APPROVED BY

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NAME OF CHAIR, GRADUATE STUDY COMMITTEE

DATE\_\_\_\_\_

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NAME OF MEMBER, GRADUATE STUDY COMMITTEE

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NAME OF MEMBER, GRADUATE STUDY COMMITTEE

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## ABSTRACT

FROM 'SACRED AND UNDENIABLE' TO 'SELF-EVIDENT':  
A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF JEFFERSON'S ORIGINAL DRAFT OF THE  
DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

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This research examines Thomas Jefferson's original draft of the Declaration of Independence. Ostensibly written for the simple purpose of justifying the American separation from Great Britain, the Declaration nevertheless utilizes persuasive techniques and narrative themes that are not necessary to the rhetorical goal of justification. Of particular interest is Jefferson's curious choice to base his argument for independence around the theme of enslavement. In order to uncover Jefferson's possible reasons for doing so, the original draft of the Declaration is examined using a combination of three methods of rhetorical criticism: analysis of the rhetorical situation, close textual analysis, and Dramatistic analysis. The use of these methods reveal that Jefferson's purpose in writing his draft was to turn George III into a scapegoat for all forms of tyranny within the colonies, including the institution of slavery, so that by expunging the King they would be absolved of their attachment to the slave trade and could reform their new American identity in opposition to British tyranny. The study then explores how the removal of his indictment of the slave trade weakened its ideological integrity and corrupted its popular impact.

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of research is the opportunity to uncover new and different ways of looking at the world around us. The 5th edition of *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2018) classifies qualitative research into five paradigms: positivism, post positivism, critical theories, constructivism, and participatory (Denzin & Lincoln, p. 112). Because research is capable of providing historical insights with an ethical obligation to reveal hidden assumptions, I am a critical theorist with constructivist leanings. That means I understand that the best research challenges our basic assumptions and makes us question how we think about who we are and what we believe. What we believe and how we relate to others in our society are as socially constructed as the Oscars and reality TV. Additionally, we operate in a world that is based on a struggle for power. But because we often don't acknowledge our shared social constructions or the power struggle at the heart of our constructions, and because we do not often question the underpinnings of our deeply held convictions, we never see the hurdles and pitfalls that we put up between ourselves and those with whom we share our existence. I came to the critical and constructivist paradigms over time, but there was a particular catalyst for how I approached this research in 2018.

In the autumn of 2016, amidst the turmoil of what was easily the most toxic and bitterly divided presidential election of a generation, I took a class in rhetorical theory and criticism at Eastern Washington University. In that class, I came across the following lines in Stephen Lucas's "The Stylistic Artistry of the Declaration of Independence,"

(1990) which to me encapsulated the news footage and talking heads that had dominated the airwaves for the past several months:

Defenders of the king had to clarify each charge and what specific acts or events it referred to, and then explain why the charge was not true. Thus it took John Lind, who composed the most sustained British response to the Declaration, 110 pages to answer the charges set forth by the Continental Congress in fewer than two dozen sentences. Although Lind deftly exposed many of the charges to be flimsy at best, his detailed and complex rebuttal did not stand a chance against the Declaration as a propaganda document... While the Declaration continues to command an international audience and has created an *indelible popular image* [emphasis mine] of George III as a tyrant, Lind's tract remains a piece of arcana, buried in the dustheap of history. (para. 58)

This quote immediately stood out to me as something important and relevant to the current events of the time. And so I bookmarked the page, underlined the phrase “indelible popular image,” and wrote two words in the margins next to it: “Crooked Hillary?” With three simple words, Lucas had provided me with a vocabulary to define everything that had frustrated me about politics for nearly a decade but had come to a head in the past few years. Donald Trump's oft-repeated nicknames, rumors, and conspiracy theories by which he created indelible caricatures of his opponents as weak, little, low-energy, sneaky, and crooked no longer felt like an anomaly within our political system, but rather, a manifestation of something much more integral to our political identity as Americans.



Despite my background and education in political science, like many Americans I didn't know much about the Declaration of Independence beyond the oft-quoted lines in the preamble about the equality of mankind and their natural rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. After reading Lucas's article, I was left to ponder two fundamental questions: why did Thomas Jefferson construct his arguments against the crown in such a curious way, and what impact did Jefferson's rhetorical constructions have on the developing American identity? From these general inquiries, three more specific research questions emerged that would guide me through the existing scholarship on this topic: first, what were Jefferson's primary rhetorical strategies throughout his public discourse? I wanted to know whether it was the occasion of writing the Declaration of Independence that called for such an audacious writing style, or whether he had called on those strategies elsewhere in his public life. Second, was he creating a new style of political communication with the Declaration of Independence, or simply following the historical and popular trends at the time? If political actors of the time commonly employed misleading and personal attacks against their opponents, then perhaps it would not be significant if Jefferson did the same. Finally, did Jefferson's rhetorical approach have any impact aside from the immediate and intended effects of the documents that he wrote? The Declaration of Independence has made an enduring mark on the American consciousness, mostly for its lofty and eloquent statement of ideals, but if the first act of the new American government was to sling mud against the character of a political opponent, then what might that have done to the way that Americans continue to think about and consume political media?

After the literature review, my focus shifted to Jefferson's original draft of the Declaration in order to better understand his own strategies and motives. The questions, although they shifted and evolved with the new artifact for study, became even more important. It was no longer sufficient to retread the same terrain as Lucas and others in dissecting the final draft.

Chapter 2, the Literature Review, analyzes the existing research relevant to these three questions in order to identify what questions have been left unanswered. This chapter is divided into three sections, each exploring one of my original research questions. The first section, Jefferson and his Rhetoric, addresses rhetorical or literary analyses of the rhetorical techniques and narrative themes that Jefferson used, not only in the Declaration of Independence but throughout his public life. The second section, Genre and Historical Context, explores articles that examine the genre of declarations of independence before Jefferson, in order to put his rhetoric into the proper historical context. Finally, the third section, Jefferson's Legacy, addresses scholarship regarding the immediate impact of the Declaration of Independence within the US political system.

Chapter 3, the Methodology, begins by synthesizing my findings from the literature review and explicating the new research questions that emerged from it. It then outlines the three methods of rhetorical criticism that I employ in order to answer them: Lloyd Bitzer's Rhetorical Situation, Close Textual Analysis, and Kenneth Burke's method of Dramatism. Using these three strategies allows me to not only analyze the themes and patterns contained within the text of the original draft, but also identify the author's reasons for using them.

The first part of Chapter 4, the Results, applies these methods to the text of Jefferson's original draft of the Declaration in order to analyze Jefferson's purpose and motives. First, Lloyd Bitzer's theory of the Rhetorical Situation is employed in order to illuminate the context in which the Declaration of Independence was written. Next, it utilizes the methodology of *close textual analysis* (CTA), which deconstructs the facets of the original draft of the Declaration, identifying themes and strategies in each component part, and then re-forges them into a more complete understanding of the text. Finally, having clarified both Jefferson's audience and his rhetorical strategies within the text, the study turns to Kenneth Burke's theory of Dramatism, using his Pentad to identify the act, the scene, the agent, the agency, and the purpose within the drama that Jefferson constructed. A dramatistic analysis seeks to locate which aspects the rhetor weighs more heavily than the others in order to identify his motive for creating that particular drama within his text.

In the Discussion section of Chapter 4, I summarize the findings from the Bitzerian, CTA, and Dramatistic analyses. I then synthesize these findings in order to answer the research questions outlined above and reveal their significance. After answering the question not only of *how* Jefferson constructed his draft, but also *why* he did so in this particular manner, the research concludes in Chapter 5 by examining the role that the Declaration has played in shaping the American popular consciousness and, more importantly, how changes made from the rough draft to the final document have allowed Americans to make distinctions between tyrannical threats to the majority and those that threaten minority groups within our own population.

Finally, in the Appendices at the end of the document, readers will find both the original and the final draft versions of the Declaration of Independence for their reference.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Research Questions:

Q1: What were Jefferson's primary rhetorical strategies throughout his public discourse?

Q2: Was Jefferson creating a new style of political communication with the Declaration of Independence, or simply following the historical and popular trends at the time?

Q3: Did Jefferson's rhetorical approach have any impact aside from the immediate and intended effects of the documents that he wrote?

In order to answer the research questions, this chapter is divided into three sections: (1) a review of Jefferson's rhetorical strategies; (2) genre and historical context; and (3) Jefferson's legacy.

### **Literature Review Section I: Jefferson and his Rhetoric**

In American popular culture, Thomas Jefferson is remembered as much as a philosopher and natural scientist as a political actor. As a result, in any critical examination of his writings, there is a temptation to take him at his word. When Jefferson explained his purpose in writing the Declaration of Independence as "to place before mankind the common sense of the subject, in terms so plain and firm as to command their assent, and to justify ourselves in the independent stand we [were] compelled to take" ("Thomas Jefferson," n.d.), we may feel some reluctance to pry further into his motivations because of his legacy as an honest and rational man. However, as scholars have noted, Jefferson was meticulous in his use of rhetoric, so that no part of his text can be altered without dramatically changing the impact and meaning of every other section.

If the facts irrefutably prove that the Americans are justified in declaring independence, as Jefferson argued, the construction of the argument should be of secondary importance; Jefferson himself claimed this to be the case when he described the language of the Declaration as “plain” (Jefferson, 1825). A more fruitful question, then, is why did Jefferson employ certain rhetorical strategies, and not others? Which rhetorical strategies did he repeatedly draw upon across his body of work? What goal was he trying to achieve with his use of specific rhetorical forms, and, broadly speaking, was he successful?

“The Declaration of Independence: A Study in the History of Political Ideas” by Carl Becker (1922) was one of the first major scholarly attempts to deconstruct the Declaration of Independence. Becker began with a brief overview of the major themes within each of the Declaration’s sections translated them into contemporary language and explained the purpose and some historical context for each. He explored the philosophical underpinnings of the Declaration in the natural rights philosophy of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and then moved to discuss how this clashed with the philosophy of the British Empire and set the stage for the American Revolution. Becker then analyzed the process of drafting the Declaration, starting with Jefferson’s original draft, taking note first of the edits proposed by his fellow committee members, and then those made by the Continental Congress, and explained the reasoning for each. Finally, he analyzed the views put forward within the Declaration of Independence and discussed the document’s legacy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Edwin Gittleman (1974) approached the Declaration of Independence as a literary text rather than a public one in order to analyze the narrative that Jefferson built within the document; as he argued, Jefferson was writing a story about slavery in the guise of a

state paper, and this narrative was, in large part, what set the document apart from similar declarations that came before it (pp. 242-243). As Gittleman observed, Jefferson was building a mythology within the text. Gittleman even rewrote the Declaration as a parable to show how its central drama of a free people being reduced to slavery by a tyrannical king functions on a narrative level (pp. 246-247). Jefferson created this mythology and then used it to reinforce his argument for independence; his claim to the necessity of independence drew its rhetorical power from the fictional plight of his colonist-slaves. Gittleman posited that:

The reality, of course... is that “George III was not the would-be tyrant of tradition but an earnest, if not very clever, politician, working hard at the job which the British constitution of the time assigned to him.” But in the Declaration, “HE” bears complete responsibility for deliberately contriving “Evils” under which the colonies believe they are suffering. “HE” is less the third George, King of Great Britain, than a personification of the political-social-economic circumstances... frustrating American ambitions in the New World. (p. 249)

In Gittleman’s analysis, there are several key themes that recur in later analyses. Jefferson’s knack for building his rhetorical superstructure upon a mythological base and his strategic use of hyperbole, as well as his understanding that image and perception are equally important to truth and accuracy, appear repeatedly throughout the literature.

Stephen Lucas (1990), in his close textual analysis of the Declaration of Independence, revealed how every element of the text, “from its eloquent introduction to its aphoristic maxims of government, to its relentless accumulation of charges against

George III, to its elegiac denunciation of the British people, to its heroic closing sentence” (para. 73), work together to persuade its audience of the need for independence. Line by line, he dissected the text of the document, positing for instance Jefferson’s use of the word “necessary” in the introduction, which in 18<sup>th</sup> century terms would convey a sense of inevitability or fatalism to the audience (para. 7). Later in his analysis, Lucas discussed how the language in the war grievances shifts compared to previous charges:

“Whereas the first twenty-two grievances describe the king’s acts with such temperate verbs as ‘refused,’ ‘called together,’ ‘dissolved,’ ‘endeavored,’ ‘made,’ ‘erected,’ ‘kept,’ and ‘affected,’ the war grievances use emotionally charged verbs such as ‘plundered,’ ‘ravaged,’ ‘burnt,’ and ‘destroyed.’” (para. 55)

As with Gittleman, Lucas theorized that the grievances are not randomly ordered (as they might appear at first glance), but instead, are grouped into four main categories that escalate in severity further into the document. Charges 1-12 deal with “abuses of the king’s executive power” (para. 44). Charges 13-22 address unconstitutional laws passed by the king and Parliament. Charges 23-27 accuse the king of “violence and cruelty in waging war against his American subjects” (para. 45). The final charge, no. 28, asserts that the king has not only ignored the colonists’ petitions, but that such requests have only led to further injury. The effect of this escalation, as Lucas explained, was cumulative:

Throughout this section of the Declaration, form and content reinforce one another to magnify the perfidy of the king. The steady, laborious piling up of “facts” without comment takes on the character of a legal indictment, while the



repetition of “He has” slows the movement of the text, draws attention to the accumulation of grievances, and accentuates George III’s role as the prime conspirator against American liberty. (para. 52)

Again, it is observed that Jefferson’s rhetoric in the grievances are designed to build upon one another to form a perception of George III as an unrepentant tyrant, rather than the more complex historical truth. Ultimately, as Lucas observed, the grievances stack up to create an “indelible popular image of George III as a tyrant” (para. 58), despite the vague and exaggerated character of many of the accusations.

Stephen Browne (2003) analyzed Jefferson’s earlier work, *A Summary View of the Rights of British America*, and uncovered a number of similarities to the Declaration of Independence, particularly in its rhetoric against George III and its conspiratorial tone when dealing with the excesses of Parliament. In stark contrast to the tone of earlier entreaties to the British crown, which took the deferential tone of subject to monarch, Jefferson adopted the tone of an intellectual and moral equal to the king, accusing the king personally and even lecturing him. As Browne claimed, Jefferson’s tone was a significant rhetorical strategy:

The complaints were by 1774 latent in colonial opposition in one form or another. The radical tendency of the case, however, is owing to the unabashed indictment of the king’s person and, specifically, the tone with which that person is addressed. It is the manner in which the grievances were posed that gives them their rhetorical force and distinction, not simply their enumeration. (p. 248)

Jefferson’s tone established his status as an equal and created an impression of the king that was undeniably compelling, even if not fully grounded in fact.

Browne also examined Jefferson's use of narrative as a rhetorical strategy in the *Summary View*. Again, Jefferson's rhetoric in the document tapped into conspiratorial narratives that were widespread in the colonies at the time of its writing. He also explicitly drew from Saxon and Puritan mythologies addressing natural rights and the state of nature in order to bolster his claims against the British Crown. Browne concluded that, "together, these narratives plot a sustained conflict between freedom and tyranny, the rhetorical function of which is to leave the colonies with no choice but to embrace the former by resisting the latter" (p. 236). By tying the plight of the colonies to these earlier stories, Jefferson is said to imbue the current struggle with a mythic quality, transforming the conflict into yet another battle between the forces of liberty and tyranny. This strategy of conferring universal values to the specific case of the American colonies is one that will later appear in the Declaration of Independence, as Lucas observed.

Expanding beyond the pre-Revolutionary period, Ron Chernow's (2004) biography of Alexander Hamilton examined Jefferson in his adversarial role to the book's subject. Chernow characterized Jefferson as "a crafty man intent upon presenting himself as the spokesman for the common people" (p. 311) despite his own aristocratic origins. Chernow's analysis shed light upon Jefferson's understanding of the importance of impressions; in one anecdote, Jefferson drafted a series of resolutions against Hamilton to be presented in Congress by an ally, accusing him of misconduct in his role as Treasurer; Republicans in the House of Representatives later assembled a committee charged with investigating the Treasury. As Chernow explained, although the resolutions were voted down in Congress, and Hamilton was exonerated of any wrongdoing, "Jefferson anticipated this defeat but knew that the unsubstantiated accusations would float

tantalizingly in the air. As he observed, the resolutions would enable people to ‘see from this the extent of their danger’” (p. 427). Chernow later claimed that Hamilton “had learned a lesson about propaganda in politics... If a charge was made often enough, people assumed in the end ‘that a person so often accused cannot be entirely innocent’” (p. 457).

In another section, Chernow discussed Jefferson’s “Anas,” a journal containing snippets of political gossip and recollections of his own discussions. Chernow described the effects of Jefferson’s campaign against Hamilton as both cumulative and lasting:

In these pages, Hamilton figures as the melodramatic villain of the Washington administration, appearing in no fewer than forty-five entries. These horror stories about Hamilton have been regurgitated for two centuries and are now engraved on the memories of historians and readers alike. Unfortunately, these vignettes often cruelly misrepresent Hamilton and have done no small damage to his reputation.

Jefferson understood very well the power of laying down a paper trail (p. 397). Just as he did with the grievances against George III in the Declaration, Jefferson’s “Anas” entries created a scapegoat in Hamilton for all of the fledgling nation’s ills, painting a portrait of Hamilton as a tyrant (or at least, a sympathizer for tyranny) that ultimately outlasts either man. The business of the resolutions against Hamilton show the same strategies put into practice in another manner; by launching repeated investigations into his conduct as treasurer, Jefferson and his allies strove to create, as Lucas (1990) described of George III, “an indelible public impression” of Hamilton, regardless of the facts of his conduct. As has been demonstrated, this style of rhetoric is not limited to the

particular exigency of the American Revolution; rather, it is a tactic Jefferson would habitually use throughout his political career.

Jeremy Engles (2006) took a different approach to Jefferson's rhetoric by performing a close textual analysis on a piece of Jefferson's personal correspondence, rather than any of his political statements. In his analysis of Jefferson's 1786 love letter to Maria Cosway, Engles claimed that "the key to understanding [Jefferson's] political psychology," was to recognize his consistent privileging of rationality over emotion (p. 430). Just as he believed his own heart led him to ill consequences (Jefferson broke his arm climbing a fountain in a vain attempt to impress Cosway), he was simultaneously sympathetic to Shay's Rebellion but feared the consequences of irrational rebellions. In particular, Jefferson feared that the emotional reaction to such a rebellion would lead the young country into despotism (p. 428). Just as he believed in love tempered by reason in his personal life, in his public life he argued that the revolutionary spirit of America must be balanced with enlightened principles and civic education in order to maintain stability and order within the state (pp. 428-429).

Similarly, Eleanor Berman and E. C. McClintock (1947), in *Thomas Jefferson and Rhetoric*, analyzed Jefferson's statements on the art of rhetoric throughout his life, particularly as an advocate for education. The authors concluded that "what Jefferson would like a speech to have is classical brevity, taste, condensation of manner; classical purity of style, logic, and pith. He wanted it to be rational, and chaste, unadorned, and clear, but at the same time elegant and moving" (pp. 7-8). Notably, Berman and McClintock also found that Jefferson, at least in his discourse about rhetoric, condemned

the use of “froth and fancy, hyperbole, vagueness, [and] elaborate philippic” (p. 7). They described Jefferson’s relative constraint:

It is obvious... from the language of the Declaration of Independence, that while he was responsive to the passionate qualities of language he yet strove to keep them under complete control. Though neither inclined nor fitted to be a demagogue in the “crowd” sense of the term, he was still an effective example of his own insistence upon perfection of style and loftiness of manner. (p. 8)

These authors again painted Jefferson as a champion of cool rationality and plain speaking, yet there is a disconnect between the way that Jefferson thought about political rhetoric in the abstract, and the rhetorical tools that he in fact relied on throughout his political career. This begs the question: if Jefferson was optimistic about human nature and believed in elevated, rational discourse, as it appears that he truly was and did, then why was so much of his rhetoric designed to appeal to the fears and base emotions of his audience?

*The Art of Power*, by Jon Meacham (2012), offers a potential answer to this question by examining formative moments in Jefferson’s life. In one such moment, Meacham depicted Jefferson as a student in his early 20s and watching as Patrick Henry argued on the floor of the House of Burgesses that just as Caesar had his Brutus, he “did not doubt but some good American would stand up in favor of his country” (p. 32). Although some members of the Assembly suggested such words to be treason, Jefferson was captivated, saying, “He appeared to me to speak as Homer wrote” (p. 32). The resolution that Henry was arguing in favor of stated that the Virginia General Assembly had the only right to pass taxes, but went on to say that “every attempt to vest such power

in any other person or persons whatsoever other than the General Assembly aforesaid has a manifest tendency to destroy British as well as AMERICAN FREEDOM” (p. 33).

Thanks to Henry’s efforts, the resolution narrowly passed by a margin of one vote, but as soon as he departed the capital, the vote was overturned. This exaggerated and audacious manner of argumentation obviously left a mark on Jefferson, who would later rely on similar tactics in his own political discourse, and as Meacham posits, so did the political lesson of Henry’s opponents: to jump on any opportunity to turn a situation to his own advantage (p. 34).

In *The Art of Power*, Meacham made an unflinching argument for the motive behind Jefferson’s rhetoric:

The closest thing to a constant in his life was his need for power and for control. He tended to mask these drives so effectively, however, that even the most astute of observers of his life and work had trouble detecting them... For him, sympathy and love among the members of his political circle were means to an end—and the end was command. If he had found that affection was insufficient to accumulate the power he wanted, he would have found other ways to govern. (pp. 500-501)

This is particularly striking for its appearance in a generally sympathetic portrayal of Jefferson by Meacham. If power was the common denominator in all of Jefferson’s deeds, then his adoption of rhetorical strategies that opposed his expressed values but rewarded him with prestige or political power makes much more sense. However, as a member of the slaveholding southern gentry, Jefferson’s indictment of George III for the perpetuation of the slave trade was, from the standpoint of the political climate of the

time, a rare misstep. After the review of this literature, the question that remains in clear focus is simple: why did Jefferson build his argument against the English king around the theme of slavery, even to the extent of attempting to lay sole blame for that very institution at his feet?

## **Literature Review Section II: Genre and Historical Context**

In the rhetoric of Thomas Jefferson, there are particular strategies that appeared throughout his career; of these, two main ones stand in bold relief. The first is how he emphasized the management of public opinion. In particular, Jefferson used vague and hyperbolic accusations to destroy the credibility and public image of his opponents. The second is how he contextualized his political goals within a larger narrative framework that his rhetorical audience could be drawn into. One question arises relative to these primary rhetorical strategies used by Jefferson as to whether they might have aligned to the broader social and rhetorical context of his time: Were these strategies commonly employed by the great speakers of the era, or was Jefferson inventing a new form of discourse?

Stephen Lucas (1998), nearly a decade after writing “The Stylistic Artistry of the Declaration of Independence,” provided insight into this question with “The Rhetorical Ancestry of the Declaration of Independence.” Lucas began by explaining how in Jefferson’s time the best writers were perceived as those who relied upon imitation, borrowing from other authors and repurposing their words or style to meet a new purpose. Beyond the obvious references within the Declaration, such as Jefferson’s

references to his earlier works like his *Summary View of the Rights of British America* or to the theories of John Locke (p. 146), Lucas traced the ideological lineage of the Declaration of Independence further back to discuss how it fit at that time within the preexisting genre of declarations as political discourse. At that time, virtually all political communication followed one of several forms which dictated its language and content:

In the eighteenth century, formal communications among the monarch, the Parliament, and the populace took place by means of conventional rhetorical forms. These forms included proclamations, petitions, memorials, remonstrances, messages, addresses, and declarations. Although some of these were at times used interchangeably, most had distinctive rhetorical traits. The decision to use one rather than another constrained the content, structure, and style of political communication and, as often as not, connoted the relative power and status possessed by both the sender and receiver of a discourse. (p. 147)

The genre of British political declarations included declarations of war between monarchs, as well as declarations from the Parliament to the monarch when other modes of communication had failed (p. 149). This latter scenario would seem to provide a fitting mode of discourse for a newly independent nation which felt it had exhausted all other means of petition.

However, Lucas also linked the Declaration, in particular the grievances against the king, to another mode of discourse, that of the British deposition apologia. This rhetorical form was used for centuries before the Revolution by British subjects to rationalize overthrowing a tyrannical king. Traditionally, it laid blame for the nation's ills with the king specifically (rather than Parliament or his council), accused the king of



deliberately subverting the constitution, and delineated the specific crimes that the king had committed (p. 152).

Lucas did not limit himself to strictly British sources, arguing that Jefferson was very likely influenced by a 1581 declaration entitled the *Plakkaat van Verlatinge*, also known as the Act of Abjuration. This document, issued by a union of Spanish colonies in the Netherlands, gave justification for seeking independence from Spain, but was also notable for being “the first statement of the rights of man as formulated by a representative national assembly against a tyrannical ruler” (pp. 162-163). Like the Declaration of Independence, the *Plakkaat* began by outlining the conditions under which revolution was justified, then demonstrated that the condition of the colonies met those conditions, and finally concluded the only solution to be independence.

Linda MacDonald-Lewis (2009) also explored the lineage of the Declaration of Independence, delving even further back than the *Plakkaat* to discuss how the Scottish Declaration of Arbroath, in 1320, created a framework for Jefferson’s later work. She argued that notions such as a “chosen king” who derives power from his or her subjects, and basic, universal rights for all, originated from the clan system of the Celtic and Pictish tribes (p. 12). The Declaration of Arbroath was a letter to the Pope declaring Scotland’s independence from England, with Robert the Bruce as their chosen king; this declaration of independence arose from perceived excesses on the part of King Edward I of England. In declaring their independence, MacDonald-Lewis argued, the Scots made a compelling case for a democratic government. Although they believed in monarchy, they insisted that the king is chosen by the people to rule, and could be dethroned if needed:

The assertion that this King Robert has come to the throne by the choice of the nation really brings in the idea of the sovereignty of the people... in other words, the people are the ruling body of the kingdom, or rather the nation. And the fact that this kingship will be stripped from him if he does wrong by or to the people makes him sound a lot like an elected official. That's a major shift from the old truth of 'kings being brought by God', whereby if you questioned the king, it was like doubting God. (p. 52)

This analysis contains echoes of the mythology that Jefferson built around the Saxons in his *Summary View* (Browne, 2003) such that this type of mythologizing becomes a necessary part of the genre which the Declaration of Independence, as well as Jefferson's similar works, inhabit.

Rahe (1995) postulated the probable influence of Niccolò Machiavelli on Jefferson's political thought. The author began by qualifying his analysis with the concession that Jefferson never himself cited Machiavelli as somebody worth reading. The only explicit reference found in Jefferson's public statements and correspondence is a criticism of a scheming colleague (pp. 449-450). However, as Rahe claims, one does not have to cite an author in order to have read them, or to have absorbed some of their political doctrine: "Jefferson's allusion to Machiavelli's reliance on appearances suggests that he had both read *The Prince* and assimilated the critique of virtue elaborated in chapters fifteen through eighteen. That he had not adopted as his own the advice proffered therein... is evident as well" (p. 450). Rahe's analysis focused not on the Machiavelli of *The Prince*, but the republican author of the *Discourses on Livy*, who was

second only to John Locke as a spiritual leader of eighteenth-century republicanism (pp.450-451).

Like Jefferson and Locke, Machiavelli concluded “that in a republic the people are safer and better guardians of liberty than the nobles, and that Roman liberty was rooted in a salutary political turbulence” (Rahe, p. 456). Machiavelli believed that general education and popular activism (including rebellion) were keys to staving off tyranny and oppression in a republic. He also believed in what Rahe terms “the politics of distrust” (p. 455), arguing that any successful republic must begin with the presupposition “that all men are wicked”, an assumption that “by Jefferson’s day... had become the common wisdom of the age” (p. 452). Rahe provided examples from Jefferson, including his statements on Shay’s Rebellion and his dream, unfulfilled in his lifetime, of a system of publicly funded primary education in Virginia, to further demonstrate how his beliefs adhered to those of “the Florentine.” Rahe concluded that Jefferson’s motives aligned with the preservation of liberty:

From the outset, Jefferson's goal was to prevent America's ‘grandi’ from becoming wolves who would treat their fellow citizens as if they were sheep. Because he was mindful of the Machiavellian dictum that a legislator must presume all men wicked, he was persuaded that the only way to accomplish this end was to see to it that the American people were never in any fashion sheep-like at all. This was for Jefferson, as it had been for Machiavelli, Locke, and their admirers before him, the central core of his understanding of the spirit that one must foster if one is to sustain republican liberty (Rahe, p. 481).

While Rahe does not address the “other” Machiavelli, the author of *The Prince*, aside from the disclaimer with which he opens his analysis, he does establish the Florentine’s prevalence in 18<sup>th</sup>-century political thought, including Jefferson’s awareness and sympathy toward Machiavelli’s republican views. His anecdote of Jefferson’s condemnation of his congressional peer as “Machiavellian” also proves that he was aware of Machiavelli’s more controversial work. Which brings this review back to Jefferson’s rhetoric: despite his critique of Machiavelli’s emphasis on appearances found in *The Prince*, the way that Jeffersonian rhetoric targeted the reputation of his opponents in order to turn popular opinion against them, and his habit after the Revolutionary War of operating through proxies in the newspapers and Congress to make his attacks, indicates that he was sensitive about his own reputation in a way that Machiavelli would no doubt approve.

Returning to the question of whether Jefferson was creating a new genre of political discourse throughout his career, the conclusion that seems to exist within the literature is “no.” As Lucas (1998) argued, Jefferson’s talent was not his originality of thought or argument, but rather his deftness at transforming existing ideas and modes of communication in order to make them suit his purpose. It makes sense that the same would hold true for his rhetorical decisions. In the Declaration of Independence, we can trace elements of multiple genres. From one perspective, Jefferson was an Enlightenment philosopher like Locke or Rousseau (Becker, 1922); from another, he became a political activist like Thomas Paine or the French Revolutionaries (Meacham, 2012). In yet a third perspective, Jefferson rose to the genre of a statesman like the authors of the *Plakkaat* and Declaration of Arbroath. As Lucas (1990) theorized, Jefferson even drew from the

English literary tradition: “Jefferson, draftsman of the Declaration, was a diligent student of rhythm, accent, timing, and cadence in discourse... Jefferson systematically analyzed the patterns of accentuation in a wide range of English writers, including Milton, Pope, Shakespeare, Addison, Gray, and Garth” (para. 14).

Jefferson’s rhetorical achievement is singular because of how he drew from such an eclectic mix of references and styles; and yet, as Lucas (1990) observed, he combined them to read with one voice:

The Declaration is a work of consummate artistry. From its elegant introduction to its aphoristic maxims of government, to its relentless accumulation of charges against George III, to its elegiac denunciation of the British people, to its heroic closing sentence, it sustains an almost perfect synthesis of style, form, and content. Its solemn and dignified tone, its graceful and unhurried cadence, its symmetry, energy, and confidence, its combination of logical structure and dramatic appeal, its adroit use of nuance and implication—all contribute to its rhetorical power. (para. 52)

If Jefferson didn’t invent a new mode of discourse, it can at least be said that he discovered a particularly effective manner of utilizing and synthesizing the resources at his disposal. While the Declaration of Independence bore many similarities to the tradition of parliamentary declarations that preceded it, Jefferson’s document was unique in its indictment not just of the king’s actions, but of his character. In order to render George III not only as a tyrant, but to strip away his humanity and leave his audience seeing only the monstrous “He,” Jefferson went far beyond the “emphatic, solemn, [and] legal terms” (Lucas, p. 150) of the declaration genre, using emotionally charged and

audacious language in order to turn public opinion against the Crown. Yet, questions remain unanswered: Why did Jefferson write the Declaration of Independence so persuasively, and who was his audience? The task at hand did not require anything more than a factual account of the reasons for independence. From another angle, if the purpose was to convince the American public that independence was the correct action to take, then a pamphlet like Payne's "Common Sense" or a letter to be published in newspapers, like the later Federalist Papers, would likely have been more effective than a formal declaration of the government. Keeping these remaining questions in mind, we now turn to the question of Jefferson's legacy.

### **Literature Review Section III: Jefferson's Legacy**

The last section on genre and historical context discovered that, at minimum, Jefferson had found an effective new way of synthesizing the rhetorical forms of his era. The questions that now remain concern the impact and legacy of Jefferson's rhetorical approach. Did Jefferson's rhetorical style have any impact beyond the immediate and intended effects of the documents he wrote? Did American political discourse change in any meaningful way after his ascendancy, and if so, was this due to Jefferson in particular or were there other factors at work? The scholarly waters are murkier on this series of questions, because scholarship on Jefferson's legacy tends to focus on his ideology, his values, and his accomplishments, rather than his rhetoric. However, some answers can be gleaned from the literature.

Renker (1989) analyzed the often-conflicting accounts of the "Declaration-Men," particularly Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, late in life as they began to feel the

historical impact of their deeds and turned their focus to legacy-building. She contrasted Jefferson's seeming humility on the subject, observing that "the passiveness, both grammatically and tonally, with which Jefferson records his moment of authorship... is almost self-effacing" with the dramatic act of including the full text of the Declaration in his autobiography, framing it within the context of his life and other deeds, and including authorship of the Declaration as one of just a handful of achievements on his headstone (pp. 123-124). Adams, she argued, was equally determined to deprive Jefferson of this legacy, highlighting multiple occasions in which Adams attempted to downplay its significance; on one occasion, he pointed to a declaration of rights that he wrote in 1774, implying that Jefferson's masterwork was in fact derivative of his own (p. 126), and at other times he suggested that the major themes of the Declaration were laid out for Jefferson by the committee before he started writing, and implied that Congress had to make sweeping revisions before it was deemed suitable (p. 126).

Onuf (1998) examined the role that the Declaration of Independence played in shaping the burgeoning national identity of America. He argued that the first paragraph of the Declaration, despite its relative lack of attention by scholars, is meaningful for its assertion that the Americans constitute one people. As Onuf stated, "the natural rights talk of the second paragraph may have been pregnant with profound implications for later generations of democrats and libertarians, but it is Jefferson's *first* paragraph that changed the world" (p. 71). He qualified this by pointing out the impact that the Revolution itself had in formulating the values of the early Americans, particularly their sensitivity to tyranny, whether real or perceived. As Onuf argued, singular credit cannot be given to Jefferson or any Republican for this cultural trend; a quote attributed to John

Adams shows that revolutionary sentiment had been brewing for 15 years prior to 1776 (p. 73). Yet Jefferson's rhetoric synthesized with this existing ideological trend to elevate it into a lasting bond of national unity::

Joined in an act of parricide, risking death for their treason against the Crown... for Jefferson, the claim to nationhood set forth in the Declaration's opening paragraph depends, in theory, on the social contract principles of the second paragraph. But it is Jefferson's sense of betrayal and rejection... by the British people—"unfeeling brethren"—that gives those general principles their particular force... No federal alliance or constitution could make the "union" the American patriots declared more perfect, for in the act of killing the king they had made themselves into a new nation (p. 80).

This is how Jefferson laid the foundation for his later political victories. By codifying the narrative of liberty versus tyranny into this founding document and cementing it in the psyche of the American people, Jefferson created (intentionally or not) a touchstone for his future rhetorical works. Rather than having to delve into natural philosophy or obscure mythology, as he did with earlier works like his *Summary View*, it would afterward be sufficient for him to paint his opponents as tyrants, as he did to Hamilton and the Federalists with general success.

Laracey (2008) examined the rise of partisan newspapers in the US and how they were used by both Jeffersonians and Federalists to sway public opinion and promote their sponsors' point of view. While the Federalists were the first to establish a wide network of these newspapers, with nearly three-quarters of such papers in 1795 reporting with a Federalist slant, Republican publications achieved parity and then surpassed the



Federalists papers in number by the time Thomas Jefferson was sworn in as President of the United States in 1801 (p. 11). However, Jefferson went further than any other Federalist or Republican, becoming the first president to have a partisan newspaper directly associated with him (p. 12); the *National Intelligencer* was established in the nation's capital by a close friend of Jefferson's while he the latter still a candidate for the presidency. The *Intelligencer* also directly benefited from Jefferson's patronage once he was elevated to the presidency. Laracey described how Republicans in Congress granted the paper lucrative printing contracts; according to one example, Jefferson himself provided an advance copy of his inaugural address to the *Intelligencer* so that the full text could be available in print the same day as the inauguration (pp. 12-13).

As Laracey theorized, the Jeffersonian newspapers, especially the *Intelligencer*, played a vital role in shaping the popular conception of the presidency, as well as the values of a representative democracy:

During this period, the newspaper articulated many of the principles of Jeffersonian Republicanism, such as those of popular majority rule, the "will of the people," and the primacy of "public opinion," that have played such an important role in American political theory, becoming, in Joyce Appleby's words, "the country's guiding principles." The paper also repeatedly characterized the president as the "real representative of the American people," thereby promoting the early version of the "plebiscitary presidency" that has come to so thoroughly dominate the modern conception of that office. The newspaper's articulation of these principles contributed to the development of a robust concept of responsive representational democracy, and to the establishment of a deep personal

connection between Americans and their president. These concepts helped provide the popular foundational validation for the new American nation-state, and reinforced the national perception of the presidency as the personification of the new federal government. (p. 9)

Although Laracey conceded that the actual impact of newspapers on the popular opinion at that time is impossible to measure without sufficient data, he provided quotes from leading political figures of the time that show that there was, at the very least, a widespread belief in their power to sway public opinion (pp. 10-11). The fact that the public view of democratic norms still follows the example espoused by these early newspapers suggests a significant and lasting impact.

During the presidential campaign, *The Intelligencer* became an extension of Jefferson's rhetorical style, accusing President Adams of having subverted the Constitution and establishing himself as the "master" of Congress (Laracey, p. 15), while printing rumors that Adams wanted to establish a hereditary monarchy in the US. It also advanced Jefferson's populist agenda, espousing the now-common argument that the Electoral College should always follow the results of the popular vote, and that Jefferson was the only legitimate candidate because of his popular support. Laracey also notes the revolutionary sentiment of these papers, threatening a popular revolt if Federalists in the government did not submit to a Jefferson presidency (pp. 32-33). Laracey shows textual similarities between essays in the *Intelligencer* and a post-inauguration letter written by Jefferson, speculating that he may have personally authored some of these editorials (p. 20); the conciliatory note that the *Intelligencer* struck once Jefferson was declared the victor similarly mirrors the later themes of Jefferson's inaugural address.

Brown (1999) examines the political parties that arose in the wake of Jeffersonian Republicanism, and how both the Whigs and Democrats were able to consider themselves to be the true heirs of Jefferson. It was the Jacksonian Democrats who carried Jefferson's populist torch, ensuring political power by appealing directly to the interests of voters rather than the social order which Jefferson secretly prized. As Brown observes, "the old Democratic-Republicans, those who formed the nucleus of the original Jeffersonian movement in the 1790s, felt little kinship with the second generation of Democrats, who based their claim to political power on democracy, or worse, mere popularity" (p. 24). Yet Democrats cited Jefferson's own early arguments against the Federalists as evidence of their ideological purity, turning Jefferson's own narrative against his party. According to Brown, "by selecting various episodes in the conflicts between the Federalists and the Jeffersonians in the eighteenth century, Jacksonians argued that battle between 'agrarians' and 'aristocrats' was reborn in the nineteenth century. In the 1790s as well as the 1830s, the Democratic coalitions invoked egalitarian ideals and were the most popular" (pp. 24-25).

More importantly, however, was the Democrats' adherence to Jefferson's rhetorical style. Brown relates a quote from Democrat James K. Polk, regarding the Bank of the US, that "the political principles of Thomas Jefferson... can never be overturned or destroyed by the corrupt power of an irresponsible corporation which seeks by its money to control public affairs, and rule the destinies of the nation" (p. 25). The national bank had survived three Republican presidencies, Browne claimed, and Jefferson himself employed the bank "extensively" during his presidency. Furthermore, by the Democrats' time, the bank and the Treasury were far less politically powerful than they had been in

Hamilton's day. These facts did not appear to matter in the face of the public narrative that the Democrats built against the bank, and its destruction allowed Democrats to "cement their political base and provide Jackson with a winning campaign issue in 1832" (p. 26). Like Jefferson before him, Polk's rhetorical assault on the bank was vague and hyperbolic, and created an impression that their struggle was simply a chapter in a larger drama of liberty versus tyranny; more than any political or constitutional issue of that time, the question of the bank evolved into a question of whether America would choose to live up to its founding principles. Ironically, although Jefferson was skeptical of Jackson's fitness for the presidency, in the end it was Jefferson's own mode of political discourse that propelled Jackson to that very office.

Kolchin (1993) was the author of *American Slavery: 1619-1877*, which, as the title suggests, provided an overview of slavery first within the American colonies and then the new American nation. Although Kolchin's analysis extends to both the early colonial era as well as the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the section that was most enlightening was his focus on the pre-Revolutionary and Revolutionary War eras of American history. He examined the changing views on slavery and the evolution of natural rights philosophy throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as well as looking at the emerging rift between the North, for whom slavery was always on the periphery, and the South where it was integral to their way of life. He also discussed the impact of the Declaration of Independence with its emphasis on natural rights and the enslavement of the colonists at the hands of King George III. As Kolchin related, even in the midst of the Revolutionary War, it became somewhat of an ideological sore spot for the revolutionaries that they were loudly lamenting the state of their own rights while at the same time denying those same rights

to others. There was a growing discomfort over slavery, particularly in the North and especially among the supposedly enlightened Founding Fathers, who had complex and contradictory views regarding the institution of slavery. Many of these Founding Fathers, including Jefferson, owned slaves but hoped that the institution would eventually and peacefully wither away.

#### **Literature Review Section IV: Overview and Findings**

Ultimately, the review of the literature left unanswered questions that this research will attempt to answer by examining Jefferson's original rough draft of the Declaration of Independence rather than the final text. Of particular interest is Jefferson's grievances against King George III, which, in the original text, would have reached their crescendo with a scathing indictment of King George III over the institution of slavery in the colonies. Given the long, complex history and unquestioned position slavery held in the New World, as well as the fact that Jefferson himself was a lifelong slave owner, it was an unusual choice for the document's stated objective of explaining the Americans' reasons for separating from Great Britain, and again begs the question of Jefferson's motives in how he chose to construct the text. More than just one accusation of many, Jefferson's indictment against slavery was intended to be the deepest cut against King George, and in fact informed much of Jefferson's language elsewhere in the text. While my interest remained with Jefferson's reasons for how he constructed his arguments against the king, and the legacy of the text, my focus shifted to the theme of slavery that Jefferson wove throughout his original draft, and what removing its most explicit argument did to our understanding of the final document.

Throughout the literature, nearly every author based their analysis upon the finished text of the Declaration of Independence and took for granted Jefferson's stated motivation "to place before mankind the common sense of the subject, in terms so plain and firm, as to command their assent, and to justify ourselves in the independent stand we feel compelled to take" (Jefferson, 1825). Stephen Lucas (1991) undertook the most in-depth line-by-line analysis of the document, but even his analysis fixated on the final version. His examination of motive looks exclusively at how Jefferson crafted the document to villainize the king and compel readers to sympathize with the colonists. Edwin Gittleman (1974) observed the slave narrative that Jefferson originally built in his rough draft, which was cropped out from the final text, but his analysis is grounded more in literary theory than rhetorical criticism, and he stops short of exploring the implications of the narrative's premature ending. In summary, these are the gaps or questions that remain after the literature review on Jefferson's legacy:

1. What was Jefferson's motivation for building the case for American independence around the theme of slavery, despite the virtually unchallenged status of slavery within both Britain and the American colonies at that time?
2. Given that the decision to separate from Great Britain had already been made by the time Jefferson begins his original draft of the Declaration of Independence, of what and to whom is the rhetor trying to persuade?
3. How does the removal of Jefferson's indictment of the king over the slave trade change our understanding of Jefferson's rhetorical goals, and what does this reveal about the final document's impact on the American identity?

The following chapters will endeavor to answer these questions through an analysis of Jefferson's original rough draft of the Declaration, in order to better understand his original vision, prior to Congressional "mutilations."

## METHODS

Up to now, the majority of existing research has overlooked simple, but fundamental questions that Gittleman brought to light but never fully explored: What was Jefferson's motivation for building the case for American independence around the theme of slavery? Why was it written as a persuasive text, and who was he trying to persuade, given that the decision to declare independence was made well before anybody in the public laid eyes on the document? Finally, how did the removal of the slavery grievance change the intended purpose of the document, and what have the consequences been in terms of its popular impact?

In order to answer these questions, like Lucas, this study primarily employed the methodology of close textual analysis (CTA). Unlike Lucas, however, this study focused primarily on the original rough draft of the Declaration, rather than its final iteration. CTA is a form of rhetorical criticism in which the critic closely examines the components of a rhetorical text to understand how it functions and what makes it persuasive. In Edwin Black's 1994 essay *Gettysburg and Silence*, he used the metaphor of a prism to explain his critical approach:

The Address is prismatic. Its aspects reflect back and forth on one another with such radiant multiplicity that, diamond-like, its fires are somehow both protean and integral. [...] One mark of a masterpiece may be its critical inexhaustibility: its capacity to accommodate the diverse partialities of its observers, and yet to abide in its integrity. And the uniquely prismatic character of the Gettysburg Address brings it to reflect, with uncommon brilliance, any light that is thrown at



it, however dim. How does one examine a prism? By looking at it through one facet after another, in no particular order (p. 22).

What Black describes above is the method known as Close Textual Analysis (CTA). Using this method, the rhetorical document or act is an artifact for study, and the purpose of research is to understand how its component pieces, including the rhetor's language, arguments, use of metaphor, and construction of drama, build upon each other and draw from the author's cultural and historical context in order to function persuasively. This approach differs from other forms of rhetorical analysis such as the Neo-Aristotelian or Neoclassical approach, which focuses more upon the delivery of the speech than its contents, and measures the value of rhetoric by the impact that it has on its immediate audience, and above all else whether it achieved the goals of the speaker. Close textual analysis, on the other hand, is most concerned about the content and structure of the rhetorical act as a persuasive text.

In this research, close textual analysis was preeminently useful because of the type of document under examination. The Declaration of Independence is not a single speech or act that can be analyzed in terms of its delivery, nor its immediate effect on any single group of readers or listeners. The Declaration of Independence is a document that has resonated throughout the decades and been consumed in a variety of media, including physical text, digital text, audio recordings, live performances, and even references in entertainment media, but its impact has not been diminished by its conversion to other formats. Therefore, an analysis of its style and delivery when it was first presented in the 18<sup>th</sup> century would reveal little about its relevance in the 21<sup>st</sup>.

Regardless of format, however, the one thing that has not changed throughout the years is the construction of the Declaration of Independence as a *text*. Therefore, this study employed CTA in order to deconstruct the original document and then, like Edwin Black, look at one facet of it after another and synthesize the discoveries into a coherent whole. The aim of this research was to identify key arguments, patterns and themes that occur in not only the final approved text of the Declaration of Independence, but also in Jefferson's original "rough draught," and compare the differences between the two. CTA highlights rhetorical techniques that Jefferson employed in the service of particular goals and strategies, and in so doing, allows the critic to draw conclusions about Jefferson's often-obscured priorities and motivations that led him to construct the document in the particular way that he did.

Besides CTA, this research also incorporated the theories of Lloyd Bitzer (1968) and Kenneth Burke (1941). Bitzer is responsible for the conception of the "rhetorical situation," which he defines as "a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence" (p. 49). He defines three constituents of a rhetorical situation: 1) the *exigence*, or urgent problem that can only be solved by the introduction of discourse, 2) the *audience*, those persons who, so compelled by the rhetorical act, are able to take action to resolve the problem, and 3) the *constraints*, or the people, events, or objects that can restrict the necessary action. In order to uncover Jefferson's motivations for his chosen construction of the Declaration of Independence, it is important to understand the audience that he was writing for, and the exigency he

perceived as being in need of resolution through discourse. In and of itself, the cause of independence was probably not the primary rhetorical situation that Jefferson was responding to when he made certain rhetorical choices; the alternative reasons are explored in the following chapters.

Kenneth Burke is the father of Dramatism, an approach to rhetorical criticism that looks at a rhetorical work as a drama that the author, or rhetor, puts together for his or her audience. By examining the various pieces of the drama and their relationships, particularly the ones that the rhetor chooses to emphasize, the critic can draw conclusions about the rhetor's underlying motive for taking rhetorical action and constructing the drama in a particular way for a particular purpose. Oftentimes, as Burke shows in his 1941 analysis "The Rhetoric of Hitler's 'Battle,'" the purpose of the drama is to scapegoat a particular individual or group for a societal ill, or expunge a negative feeling. The five elements of a rhetorical drama according to Burke are the Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, and Purpose; these form what Burke referred to as a "Pentad." Traditionally, rhetorical criticism in this tradition uses the Pentad as a formal structure for identifying key elements of a particular drama and aligning them to a category within the Pentad (Who is the lead actor? What action do they take? When/where does this take place? How do they undertake their act? Why?). The Act is always at the heart of the drama, but each of the other four aspects of the Pentad (the Agent, Scene, Agency, and Purpose) influence how the Act is interpreted by the drama's audience. As a critic, identifying which of the other four is emphasized most within the drama, and whether it controls the Act or vice versa, reveals the rhetor's worldview and allows the critic to draw conclusions about the rhetor's motive. The analysis and discussion are also rooted in the

underlying theory of dramatism that “to use language is to act, as well as to convey content. Moreover, for Burke, language *is* reality; it is not a symbol for reality. Thus, language reflects as well as influences a rhetor’s attitudes, values, and world view” (Burgchardt, 2010).

Together, these three forms of analysis create a better understanding of not only *what* the author of the Declaration did in order for it to function rhetorically, but also *why*. They identify underlying arguments and themes, explore the particular rhetorical moment that the document existed within, and extrapolate motives from the text itself. This allows the critic to demystify the Declaration of Independence and explore meanings beyond the obvious and culturally-embedded ones. Finally, in the “Discussion” chapter, this study explores the long-term cultural implications of the Second Continental Congress’s decision to cut Jefferson’s repudiation of slavery from the final text, but leave in place the rhetorical foundation that would have built to it.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following chapter will be broken into four sections. The first three sections comprise the three methodological approaches employed for this study: Bitzer, CTA, and Dramatism. The analysis in each section interweaves research results with a partial discussion of that method's findings. The fourth and final section are an overall discussion of findings that examines and synthesizes the overall patterns and themes that emerge from the use of these three methods, draws conclusions, and seeks to answer the study's fundamental questions.

### **Rhetorical Analysis: The Rhetorical Situation**

One of the most surprising findings in the review of the literature was Gittleman's literary analysis of the aborted slavery narrative which Jefferson built into the Declaration of Independence. As Gittleman revealed, Jefferson's fundamental argument was that King George III's goal was to enslave the colonists. Jefferson's indictment of the King's involvement in the continuance of the slave trade, followed by inciting violent revolution amongst the slaves, was intended to be the strongest, most damning evidence of this. Given that Jefferson was himself a slaveowner, possessing an average of 200 slaves throughout the last 40 years of his life, and never fewer than 165 (Meacham, p. 48), this emphatic condemnation of slavery, as well as its prominent placement at the Declaration's climax, would seem a surprising rhetorical choice for Jefferson. In order to make better sense of the slavery grievance and contextualize the writing of the Declaration, we turn to Bitzer's theory of the rhetorical situation. The use of this method

allows critics to understand the purpose of a piece of rhetoric in terms of the problem that the author or speaker observed in need of discursive resolution.

The first facet of the rhetorical situation is the rhetorical exigence, which Bitzer (1968) defined, essentially, as the problem in need of resolution by means of discourse. It is tempting to take a famous document like the Declaration of Independence at face value in terms of its purpose. As I was told by a reviewer at one communications conference, “Frankly, I believe that Jefferson and the others who wrote the Declaration of Independence made their motives quite clear.” Yet Bitzer’s own definition of the rhetorical exigence calls this perspective into question. While there can be many exigences in any given situation, the rhetorical exigence must be a problem still in need of solving:

Any *exigence* is an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be. In almost any sort of context, there will be numerous exigences, but not all are elements of a rhetorical situation—not all are rhetorical exigences. An exigence which cannot be modified is not rhetorical. (p.50)

Although Jefferson later wrote that “this was the object of the Declaration of Independence... to place before mankind the common sense of the subject, in terms so plain and firm as to command their assent, and to justify ourselves in the independent stand we are compelled to take” (Jefferson, 1825), from a Bitzerian perspective this answer is problematic.

Although a plain justification for the separation was certainly an exigence, and arguably even the most important one from the perspective of the Continental Congress

and Jefferson's colleagues, it was not a *rhetorical* exigence. Advancing the cause of independence could certainly be argued as the rhetorical exigence for something like Thomas Payne's "Common Sense," which was specifically designed to sway public opinion in favor of rebellion. But Jefferson was not writing to convince the public of the need for independence, nor his colleagues in the Continental Congress. In fact, the finished Declaration of Independence was not ratified by the Congress until two days after the adoption of the Lee Resolution, and was not made public until another two days after that (Meacham, p. 106). As Chernow (2004) pointed out, "the Declaration of Independence did not achieve sacred status for many years and was not even officially inscribed on parchment for another two weeks" (p. 77). The primary purpose of the Declaration of Independence was to justify the Americans' separation from Great Britain, and justification is inherently a persuasive, rhetorical action. Yet, "to justify" means that the desired action has already been taken. Some may counter that the justification would bolster support for the revolution, but if Jefferson and the Congress wanted to appeal directly to the American people for that aim, there were arguably more efficient means of doing so, as Payne's "Common Sense" demonstrated. Years later, the "Federalist Papers" of Hamilton, Madison, and Jay would prove this point again.

On the other hand, the historical record suggests another imminent problem for the new republic. Despite his own lifelong slave ownership, Jefferson was keenly aware, and clearly uncomfortable, about the latent hypocrisy of decrying tyranny while simultaneously imposing it on their fellow men. His early political career was marked by unsuccessful efforts to reform or abolish slavery, including the removed lines in the Declaration regarding slavery. As early as 1769, Jefferson was attempting to pass

legislation in the Virginia House of Burgesses to allow slave owners to emancipate their slaves, rather than appealing to the royal government (Meacham, pp. 48-49). As Jefferson later remarked in his autobiography (1821), “I made one effort in that body for the permission of the emancipation of slaves, which was rejected: and indeed, during the regal government, nothing liberal could expect success” (Jefferson, para. 4).

In 1779, he wrote a bill for the General Assembly of Virginia to gradually abolish the slave trade: “Be it enacted that no persons shall, henceforth, be slaves within this commonwealth, except such as were so on the first day of this present session of Assembly, and the descendants of the females of them” (51, Founders Online). Presented in 1785, it met with a similar fate to his 1769 effort. Jefferson also maintained in his autobiography that he had prepared an amendment on emancipation in the General Assembly, although this was defeated as well:

The principles of the amendment however were agreed on, that is to say, the freedom of all born after a certain day, and deportation at a proper age. But it was found that the public mind would not yet bear the proposition, nor will it bear it even at this day. (para. 133)

Jefferson later supported a version of the Ordinance of 1784 which would have prohibited slavery on Virginia land set aside for the creation of new territories. This version of the bill failed by one vote in Congress (Meacham, 173). Finally, Jefferson’s “Notes on the State of Virginia, published in 1785, included a plan to gradually eliminate slavery by emancipating and relocating the freed slaves to the interior of the continent” (Chernow, p. 212).



As Meacham argued throughout *Thomas Jefferson: the Art of Power*, (2012) Jefferson was a pragmatic politician who did not generally pick fights that he couldn't win, and "after an early legal and legislative life attempting to abolish slavery, Jefferson... made a calculated decision that he would no longer risk his 'usefulness' in the arena by pressing the issue" (p. 174). In 1776, however, Jefferson had not yet given up on abolition. The period from 1769-1785 is important to the question of exigence because it was the only time in Jefferson's political career wherein he attempted any decisive action on the question of slavery. The abolition of slavery was important enough to Jefferson for him to revisit the subject multiple times, even though he had no political capital to spend in that particular arena.

Gittleman (1974) revealed the theme of slavery which escalated throughout the Declaration, peaking with his condemnation of both the King and the slave trade. A sober statement of facts justifying the case against Great Britain did not require such a narrative (and in some ways, the use of the slavery narrative was counter-productive to that goal), but if Jefferson's aim was to simultaneously turn public opinion against the slave trade within the new republic, then the references to injustice, tyranny, and slavery are more appropriate. At a time when slavery was both entrenched and unquestioned in the colonial culture and economy, independence marked a singular opportunity to expunge systems of slavery in America along with the other remnants of British hierarchy and control. There was an urgency marking this exigence; if the institution of slavery was allowed to slide into the new American culture unacknowledged and unchallenged, it would become nearly impossible to dislodge later on. The moment of declaring independence was the only chance to make a clean separation, while ties to old,

comfortable systems of tyranny were being severed and the new American identity was still being debated.

If the abolition of slavery was the exigence that informed Jefferson's rhetorical choices, rather than his stated objective of declaring the causes of the American separation, then the next question is, who was Jefferson's audience? According to Bitzer (1946), the rhetorical audience "must be distinguished from a body of mere hearers or readers: properly speaking, a rhetorical audience consists only of those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change" (p. 50). To answer this question, we again turn to the historical record. When the Lee Resolution was passed in 1776, the Declaration of Independence was not the only document that it authorized:

Resolved, That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved.

That it is expedient forthwith to take the most effectual measures for forming foreign Alliances.

That a plan of confederation be prepared and transmitted to the respective Colonies for their consideration and approbation. ("Transcript of Lee Resolution," 1776).

The third resolution, regarding the "plan of confederation," is the most relevant to the question of audience. It would be over a year before the Continental Congress adopted the Articles of Confederation, and another four years after that for the states to

ratify the first constitution of the United States (“The Articles of Confederation,” n.d.). Jefferson’s rhetorical audience, by Bitzer’s definition, had to be comprised of those people who would have the power to enact reform for his exigency. His audience, therefore, must have been the delegates to the Continental Congress as well as the representatives of the various state legislatures. By impressing upon them the inherent hypocrisy of slave ownership in a land that claims to value freedom above all else, then when it came time to write and ratify the Articles of Confederation, the states would be compelled to include language abolishing slavery within their new nation. Jefferson failed in this aim, as his language condemning slavery was stricken from the Declaration before it was approved or published. Because he failed to leave a mark even on his colleagues at the Continental Congress, his rhetoric never reached much of its intended audience.

The third and final facet of the rhetorical situation is the set of constraints that, as Bitzer explained, were “made up of persons, events, objects, and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence” (p. 51). There are two sources of constraints in a given rhetorical situation: (1) situational constraints like beliefs, attitudes, and traditions, and (2) constraints imposed by the rhetor such as his or her character, rhetorical style, personality, and the strength of his or her arguments. Starting with the situational constraints, the most essential was the colonial attitude toward slavery. As Kolchin (1993) explained in “American Slavery,” the moral implications of slavery weren’t something that most people even considered. While there were isolated instances, such as the heated exchange in 1700 between Samuel Sewall, author of “The Selling of Joseph”

and John Saffin, a merchant and politician, these failed to make much of a popular impact. Kolchin affirmed that “until the middle of the eighteenth century there was little questioning in the colonies—or anywhere else, for that matter—of slavery... Largely taken for granted, the institution was simply not much of an issue for the white colonists” (pp. 63-64). This apathy and institutional inertia was something that Jefferson had to attempt to overcome with his rhetoric.

Besides entrenched cultural indifference, the other major environmental constraint was the role of slavery in the economy, especially in the more populous and influential South. By the time of the Revolution, slavery had become firmly entrenched not only in the South, which annually produced for export millions of pounds of tobacco, rice, and sugar, almost exclusively by the slaves which made up a majority of the population in many areas, but even in areas of the North that could support wide-scale commercial agriculture. In New York and Rhode Island, where slaves cultivated wheat, cows, and racehorses, they could make up more than 20% of the population in some areas (Kolchin, pp. 26-27). Jefferson was not only challenging traditions and beliefs, but the basis of an entire way of life.

The constraints to this situation were not only situational, however. Jefferson himself was a deeply flawed and conflicted advocate on the subject of slavery. As mentioned previously, Jefferson was highly pragmatic, and his inclination was toward caution, rarely over-extending himself when the outcome was uncertain (the Revolution being a notable outlier). Even with his other efforts to reform slavery, he never committed himself 100%, operating through proxies or bowing to political pressure apparently without much resistance. His views on slavery and emancipation were

themselves complex and problematic: most notably, his belief that any plan for emancipation must include a plan to deport the freed slaves because of his conviction that free whites and blacks could never live together without the matter coming to bloodshed (Meacham, p. 124). On a personal level, his views about the African peoples were regressive even amongst many of his contemporaries:

Unlike many others of his generation, however, Jefferson harbored serious doubts that blacks' "depravity" could be attributed entirely to their slave status, and he expressed strong views on what he considered their innate racial characteristics. In his celebrated *Notes on the State of Virginia* (written in 1781-82 and published in 1785), he argued that blacks were physically unattractive, [...] stressed their deficiency in reasoning, and proclaimed that "in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous" (Kolcher, p. 88).

While Jefferson at this phase of his life and career obviously had a deep conviction that slavery was immoral, his political opportunism and his personal biases constrained his ability to write passionately and convincingly on the subject. Becker (1922) recognized this in his own analysis of the Declaration, stating that Jefferson's writing was a poor match for the scale of his task:

But in spite of every effort, the passage somehow leaves us cold; it remains, like all of Jefferson's writing, calm and quiescent; it lacks warmth; it fails to lift us out of our equanimity. There is in it even... a sense of labored effort, of deliberate striving for an effect which does not come. (Becker, p. 212)

Ultimately, from our vantage point in the present, we know that the constraints in this rhetorical situation won out in the end: the slavery grievance was removed, the

audience unmoved, and the exigence unfulfilled, at least at that time. It would be a long and bloody century before slavery was officially ended in the US with the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment.

### **Rhetorical Analysis: Close Textual Analysis**

Of Thomas Jefferson's writings and political documents, none is better-known, nor had a more lasting legacy in American political thought, than the Declaration of Independence. Part of its enduring power is its ability to function rhetorically on many levels. Taking the final document at face value, Jefferson's objective was obvious: to justify the case for American independence through vilification of King George III. However, a deeper narrative thread weaves through the evolution of the document, demanding a closer analysis as well. Edwin Gittleman (1974) addresses this narrative foundation to an extent in his literary analysis, describing Jefferson's construction of the colonists as slaves to the tyranny of George III, but only addresses the overarching themes of his rhetoric and stops short of drawing any major conclusions. Stephen Lucas (1990), in his close textual analysis, provides a broad framework for organizing and deconstructing the Declaration of Independence, and analyzes a fair portion of Jefferson's language and rhetoric, but only in service of its *prima facie* objectives, and only that which remains in the final draft of the document.

Further rhetorical analysis is required in order to synthesize and expand the findings of these previous scholars, and to move beyond their studies in order to better understand Jefferson's original purpose in the framing and construction of the Declaration of Independence. In order to better identify Jefferson's original purpose, this

close textual analysis examines not the final draft of the Declaration, but rather, Jefferson's original rough draft. The following excerpts are drawn from Professor Julian Boyd's reconstruction of the Jefferson draft (1950). As in Boyd's draft, all spelling and formatting errors are attributed to Jefferson and left unedited. The sections where Jefferson's original draft differs from the final draft have been **bolded** for emphasis, and if the final draft replaced Jefferson's original text, then the text from the final draft has been included in brackets and as plain text next to the bolded section. The full text of both the original and final draft have also been included without edits or commentary in the appendices of this study.

The close textual analysis below is arranged in five sections aligned with the separate movements in Jefferson's original draft: Introduction, Preamble, Grievances against King George, Indictment of the British People, and Conclusion.

### **The Introduction**

*when in the course of human events it becomes necessary for **a people to advance from that subordination in which they have hitherto remained** [one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another], & to assume among the powers of the earth the **equal** & independant station to which the laws of nature & of nature's god entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the **change** [separation].*

From the very first word, Jefferson's prose served to elevate the circumstances of his writing above the petty political squabbles that have led the beleaguered colonists to this point. "When, in the course of human events" lent the weight of history to the words

that followed, suggesting that the British/American separation was the culmination not only of their own shared history, but that of all mankind. It also gave an air of normalcy, and therefore legitimacy, to the notion of independence. While he had some historical precedents to point to such as the *Plakkaat van Verlatinge* and Declaration of Arbroath, no such document as the Declaration of Independence existed prior to Jefferson. Unlike these previous examples, Jefferson's text did not ask for permission from any earthly authority (whether King or Pope). Rather, he boldly asserted that the colonists were simply reclaiming a power to which they had always been entitled, by "Laws of Nature and of Nature's God." His language served to put listeners at ease in the face of a claim that at the time was virtually unthinkable.

In the final draft of the text, the language in the introduction is benign and neutral, and has an air of universality about it. Jefferson's rough draft was much more damning in its characterization of the British-American relationship: "When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for a people to *advance from that subordination in which they have hitherto remained.*" Jefferson was not writing about a separation between two equal powers, the way one might characterize ending a treaty between two nations, but was explicitly writing about a subjugated people casting off the yoke of their oppressor. The different language reflects a corresponding shift in message; in the final draft, the colonists were represented as always have been free and equal to the people of Great Britain, notwithstanding their final years under King George III. Jefferson's draft, however, stated that the colonists were *advancing* from subordination to equality and independence.



“In the Course of human events” takes on new meaning in light of the final clause, that “a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the change.” Not only referring to the past, Jefferson also had an eye to the future. Regardless of the many battles, both military and political, that would follow the approval of the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson wrote as though the matter had already been decided. The document was written for future generations as much as it was for Jefferson’s contemporaries. He would have known that the sort of separation that the colonists proposed was virtually unprecedented; if they were successful, however, it was almost a certainty that other subordinated peoples, in the course of future events, would follow their example.

### **The Preamble**

*We hold these truths to be **sacred & undeniable** [self-evident]; that all men are created equal & independant, that **from that equal creation they derive rights inherent & inalienable, among which are the preservation of** [endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are] *life, & liberty, & the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these ends, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government shall become destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, & to institute new government, laying it's foundation on such principles & organising it's powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety & happiness. prudence indeed will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light & transient causes: and accordingly all experience hath shewn that**

*mankind are more disposed to suffer while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. but when a long train of abuses & usurpations, **begun at a distinguished period, & pursuing invariably the same object,** evinces a design to **subject them to arbitrary power** [reduce them under absolute Despotism], it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government & to provide new guards for their future security. such has been the patient sufferance of these colonies; & such is now the necessity which constrains them to **expunge [alter]** their former systems of government. the history of **his present majesty** [the present King of Great Britain], is a history of **unremitting** injuries and usurpations, **among which no one fact stands single or solitary to contradict the uniform tenor of the rest**, all of which have in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states. to prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world, **for the truth of which we pledge a faith yet unsullied by falsehood.***

From the first few words, a critical difference is felt in the tone of Jefferson's draft. The "self-evident" truths of the final draft were, to Jefferson, "sacred and undeniable." As with the shift in the introduction from "advance from subordination" to "dissolve political bands," the final draft's stance on the fundamental rights of mankind is much weaker and less decisive than Jefferson's version. Among these sacred truths, Jefferson argued that all men are created "equal and independent," which in the final draft was condensed simply to "equal." Although similar, "equal" used here referred to all men being equally endowed with the rights that Jefferson enumerated in the following clause, "independent" suggested that no man owed another his allegiance due to the conditions of his birth, and kings deserved fealty only to the extent that they secured

those rights. Both ideas were stated later in the preamble, but the removal of “independent” lessened its prominence throughout the text as an idea – the idea that men cannot legitimately be born into servitude lost focus in the final draft.

Although Jefferson’s statement on unalienable rights has undoubtedly left the most palpable impact on American culture, in the final draft it was almost a parenthetical. The section on equality and natural rights could be edited to say “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, and that to secure these rights, Governments are instituted...” and still constitute a coherent, if somewhat more ambiguous, statement within the larger argument of the document. The relative insignificance of the section on natural rights to the Declaration as a whole, irrespective of its popular legacy, is a symptom of the editing and reworking that the Declaration underwent by Congress. The language and tone of the preamble, and therefore its purpose, naturally mirrored that of the document that it introduced. It follows, then, that if the statement on natural rights could be removed without undermining the rest of the argument, the reasons for and intent of the Declaration of Independence must also exist outside of that philosophical claim. This makes sense, as the primary purpose of the Declaration of Independence was not to espouse the natural rights of mankind or the proper role of government in the abstract, but to provide justification for the American Revolution by demonstrating that Britain had violated its obligations to the American people.

There is a temptation to dismiss anything that does not immediately serve the goal of justifying independence as merely being a flowery or poetic flourish. However, knowing Jefferson’s mastery of the art of rhetoric, we must take care not to be too hasty

in dismissing these sections. On the contrary, the arguments that seem unnecessary or ill-fitting may prove the most fruitful for study.

Returning to the Preamble, the most common word in the document, perhaps unsurprisingly, is “Government(s)” – between the singular and the plural case, Jefferson used the term 6 times within the preamble. The phrases that the word appears in are as follows:

- That to secure these rights, *governments* are instituted among men
- Whenever any form of *government* becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it and establish new *government*
- *governments* long established should not be changed for light or transient causes
- It is their right, their duty, to throw off such *government*, and to provide new Guards for their future security
- Such now is the necessity which constrains them to expunge their former Systems of *government*

The repetition of the word throughout this section serves to guide listeners through the paragraph and identify the most important ideas, a technique that Jefferson would repeat to great effect in the grievances against the king. With the preamble, Jefferson transitioned subtly from discussing abstract or universal concepts to arguing the specific case of the colonies, and the repetition of “Government” was the common thread that guided listeners from one to the other. Jefferson first made his case for the basic role of government, the right of the people to overthrow governments that have overstepped that role, and the importance that the Americans took this step (reinforced by first acknowledging that revolution should be the last measure that an unsatisfied populace

takes in order to achieve satisfaction, then referring to the *necessity* of such an action in the case of the Americans). The Declaration of Independence, fundamentally, was a document about governments, and about the government of King George III in particular.

In the second to the last sentence, Jefferson made the claim, “The history of his present majesty is a history of unremitting injuries and usurpations, among which no one fact stands single or solitary to contradict the uniform tenor of the rest, all of which have in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states.” There are several elements of this sentence that introduce the audience to a theme that Jefferson would revisit throughout the document. First and foremost is where he placed blame for the charges to follow – not with Parliament, or the British people, or even advisors to the king, but directly at the feet of King George himself. When he said “the history of *his present majesty*,” he was explicitly arguing that George III was the direct cause of all of the American’s woes, and implying that the shared history of America and Britain was problem-free until George III ascended to the throne.

However, this claim by itself still gave the King some benefit of the doubt – even if a listener agreed that the king himself was the source of the problems and tensions with the colonies, the matter could be blamed by a sympathetic audience on miscommunications or misunderstandings between the king and his ministers, or between the British government and that of the colonies. At worst, these problems could be attributed to incompetence or neglect on the part of the king. Jefferson immediately put those doubts to rest, however, in saying that the charges to follow all share “in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states.” In other words, Jefferson asserted, there was no innocent misunderstanding or novice mistake at the heart

of their grievances. Instead, these injuries and injustices stemmed from a deliberate and malicious intent on the part of the King to remove the natural and God-given right of the colonists to their liberty.

Jefferson followed this with the line, “To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.” As Stephen Lucas suggested (1990), this section contains two key elements: the first was the assertion that the accusations to follow are Facts – as opposed to opinions or fictions – and that a truly candid audience would be swayed by those accusations. Second, the implication behind “a candid world” was that if one was not compelled by Jefferson’s arguments, it wasn’t due to any fault of the document, or because the claims lack veracity, but because of biases on the part of the listener. Before he had made a single argument against the king, Jefferson had subtly put his audience on the defensive to make them more receptive to those accusations. Within the larger context of the Declaration of Independence and its rhetorical goal of turning public opinion against the king, this second section of the Preamble is much more relevant in an immediate sense than its opening lines. However, it also set the stage for Jefferson to make more controversial claims within the document as well. As Jefferson stated, “no one fact stands single or solitary to contradict the uniform tenor of the rest.” A truly candid audience, in other words, would be equally appalled by his accusation that the king had rendered the military superior to the civil power as they would by the accusation that the king had perpetuated the existence of the slave trade.

Another potentially significant choice of language in this section is Jefferson’s use of “abolish” in two places: first, when he argued that “that whenever any form of government shall become destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or

to abolish it, & to institute new government.” The second is when Jefferson stated that “all experience hath shewn that mankind are more disposed to suffer while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.” The shared usage, much like with “Governments” before it, guides listeners from the abstract to the concrete: first, Jefferson introduced the idea that people have a right to abolish bad forms of government, then used the same language to describe the reluctance of the colonists in taking their present action. This relates two ideas to the listener: (1) that the colonists were not merely altering or reforming their government, but expunging it outright; and (2) that they were doing so because their old form of government had become destructive to their life, liberty, and happiness.

However, the second use of “abolish” warrants further attention. The Declaration’s central claim, particularly in the final draft, is that the forms to which the colonists had become accustomed had already been abolished by the king: their laws, their liberties, and their way of life. The purpose of declaring independence, broadly speaking, was to restore the familiar social order that had been stolen from them. Jefferson, however, was here suggesting that declaring independence could lead to broader changes to the social fabric that would be unfamiliar and uncomfortable to the colonists. He was leaving the door open for additional reforms that would cause the colonists to “right themselves” and cast out other evils that had taken hold in their society.

### The Grievances against King George III

Having set the tone and expressed the purpose of the document, Jefferson then set himself to the task of proving these claims. The grievances make up the body of the document, the “Facts” that are being submitted for the consideration of his audience. As Stephen Lucas (1990) noted, there are three main categories or sets of grievances. The first set, charges 1-12, lists “abuses of the king’s executive power.” The second set, charges 13-22, “attacks the king for combining with ‘others’ (Parliament) to subject America to a variety of unconstitutional measures.” The third set, charges 23-27, accuse the king of “waging war against his American subjects” (para. 44).

1. *[Unchanged from final draft] he has refused his assent to laws the most wholesome and necessary for the public good:*

Immediately, Jefferson was at work assigning blame for the train of usurpations to follow. Rather than “They have,” or “England has,” Jefferson began this grievance with “He has,” referring specifically to the personage of King George III. He accused the king of having “refused his assent” to laws; in so doing, he revealed something to the audience of the king’s intentions. A refusal is a conscious action, a choice that the King made to not take action. It is an active verb, rather than a passive one, and Jefferson’s usage here made it clear from the outset that the problem was no accident. The end of the sentence, however, was more obscure – “Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.” Again, Jefferson made a bold claim, that these laws were *the most* necessary to the well-being of the colonies. However, the statement brought up, but left unanswered, several potentially significant questions: Which laws are being referred to by Jefferson?



What was their significance for the public good, and what detriment had befallen the colonists because they were obstructed? Perhaps most importantly, *why* did the king refuse his assent? Although Jefferson would later reveal the answers to these questions, at this stage his listeners would be left unsatisfied.

2. *he has forbidden his governors to pass laws of immediate & pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has **neglected utterly** [utterly neglected] to attend to them.*

He began again with the “He has,” identifying the King as the principle actor in this scenario, rather than the colonial governors who failed to pass the laws. In this grievance, there are two accusations against the king – first that he had “forbidden” the governors to pass laws without his assent, then that he had “neglected” to attend to them. Although neglect is a more passive word than the “refused” of the previous grievance, the first clause and the use of “forbidden” made it clear once again that this was not accidental on the part of the King. In essence, Jefferson claimed that the King had enacted a system wherein the most important colonial laws required his personal assent before they could take effect, and then, it seems deliberately, he had done nothing with them, neither giving nor refusing his assent. Combined with the description of these laws as having “immediate and pressing importance,” this grievance again revealed something of the king’s disposition toward the colonists, at least in Jefferson’s construction. By deliberately creating a system wherein his assent would be required, and then “utterly” neglecting the laws that were submitted to him, Jefferson accused the king of not caring about the well-being of his citizens in the colonies. Despite the immediate need in the

colonies, the King had no qualms about allowing these laws to remain in limbo, lacking even the courtesy to formally refuse his assent so that the colonists could move forward with either fighting for their law or moving on to other issues. Since the specific acts being neglected were again left ambiguous, the listener was left to speculate what need is being neglected. In the worst case, could there have been an unresolved issue of safety or security which could put peoples' lives at stake? Why wouldn't the king take action? Again, Jefferson denied his audience a satisfactory answer, moving directly to the next charge.

3. *he has refused to pass other laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of representation [in the Legislature], a right inestimable to them, formidable to tyrants only.*

Here, Jefferson returned to the more active verb “refused” versus “neglected” – again, he was accusing the king of making a conscious decision to obstruct the rights of the colonies. This charge is more technical and specific than the first two – unlike the previous vague references to “laws” in the general sense (characterized only by their goodness and pressing importance), Jefferson here narrowed the lens to a specific category of laws, specifically laws relating to the creation of new towns or districts. Jefferson did not mire the listener with too many technical details, however. The second clause of the grievance – “unless those people would relinquish the right of Representation” – was where Jefferson revealed its importance. In the preamble, Jefferson asserted that the only legitimate form of government is one that derives its powers from “the consent of the governed.” In the British parliamentary system, this

consent came about through the process of electing officials to represent them. By forcing the colonists to relinquish this right in order to settle down, build lives, and pursue their happiness, George III undercut his own legitimacy as ruler in the pursuit of power.

The first two charges addressed the king's misuse of his own powers. While Jefferson could claim that the king was refusing assent to good laws, or assenting to bad laws, he could not say that the king lacked the power to do so. That changed with the third charge. At last, Jefferson pivoted toward an answer to the questions that he had allowed to build up so far – “formidable to *tyrants* only.” This was not the first time within the document that Jefferson made reference to tyranny – he transitioned into the grievances with the statement that “the history of his present majesty, is a history of unremitting injuries and usurpations... all of which have in direct object the establishment of an *absolute tyranny* over these states.” However, there are two key distinctions between the two passages. First, in referencing “the history of his present majesty,” Jefferson could be referring to any number of culprits. This same language could refer to a weak-willed king who had been taken advantage of by ruthless and grasping councilors and ministers. Yet, by this point in the document Jefferson had begun three charges with the same phrase which pointed to the identity of the true aggressor: “He has.” There was only a single culprit in Jefferson's drama, for only one person has the power to unilaterally commit these acts.

Second, with this accusation Jefferson made a subtle shift from “tyranny” to “tyrant.” No longer talking about tyranny in an abstract sense, or as a general condition imposed on the colonies, Jefferson revealed it as the core characteristic of the king. Rhetorically, there is a stark difference between naming someone and defining them.

*Defining* statements such as “King George is a tyrant” or “King George wants to establish a tyranny” are more open-ended and left open for debate. These types of claims beg for proof and justification (and conversely, leave space for rebuttal). On the other hand, *naming* statements (“Tyrant King George”) close the issue as soon as the words are said. With this grievance, and those moving forward, Jefferson named George III (or more accurately, the figure of “He”) as a tyrant, which informed the audience of both the king’s character and motive.

4. [He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.\*]

***\*This accusation is not present in Jefferson’s original draft.***

5. *He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly & continually, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.*

The rhetorical weight of this grievance was placed on the second half of the charge. By this point, he had already accused the king in several ways of blocking the peoples’ right to representation. Although the enumeration of similar charges helped to strengthen the case for their validity as a whole, the accusation’s true significance was once again in how it characterized the relationship between the king and colonists.

Jefferson stated that the reason that the assemblies had been dissolved is because they opposed the king’s overreaches with “manly firmness.” Jefferson essentially argued that

“any real man would oppose these measures,” and therefore, that the king was not a real man. Not only was his portrayal of King George III a tyrant, but a coward as well.

The drama that Jefferson was unfolding within the Declaration was not an especially nuanced one. There was no equivocation, no moral gray areas; just as the king could *only* be a villainous, grasping tyrant, the colonists were similarly one-dimensional. By this point in the text, Jefferson had described the colonists in three ways: “patient” (in “such has been the patient sufferance of these colonies...”) “manly,” and possessing “a faith yet unsullied by falsehood.” Just as Jefferson was creating a particular portrayal of the king, at the same time he was painting a picture of the colonists as pure, upright, and strong, standing in stark opposition to the drama’s villain.

Additionally, the word “manly” in “manly firmness” connotes not only the idea of masculine power, but also relates back to the more general usage such as “mankind.” Jefferson’s draft, compared to the final Declaration, placed more emphasis on the “sacred and undeniable” rights of men. In another sense, then, “Manly firmness” could also refer to the recognition by the colonists of their equal and independent station relative to the king, and a refusal to defer to illegitimate authority.

Over the first five grievances, Jefferson created a certain portrayal of the king. He had obstructed the rule of law within the colonies, endeavored to limit their political power, and he has continuously grasped at power for himself, usurping not only the colonial legislatures but his own governors as well in the process. The reason for all of this, according to Jefferson, was because the king was a tyrant. Now that his listener had the proper context in mind, Jefferson explains the harm that the king has done by taking these actions.

6. *he has refused for a long **space of time** [after such dissolutions] to cause others to be elected, whereby the legislative powers, incapable of annihilation, have returned to the people at large for their exercise, the state remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, & convulsions within:*

The fundamental purpose of the Declaration of Independence was to lead listeners to the unquestionable conclusion that the rejection of George III's rule was the *only* solution to the colonists' problems. To that end, it is not enough to solely focus on the violation of abstract rights; Jefferson had to also demonstrate tangible consequences to the king's actions. This charge began in a similar vein to those that preceded it, accusing the king of refusing (marking the third time that Jefferson used that particular verb) to allow new representatives to be elected after disbanding the existing legislatures. Rather than ending there in order to simply highlight it as a violation of natural rights and principles, as he had before, or leaving it completely vague for the reader's imagination to fill in the blanks, he then explained two significant repercussions of the king's refusal: tumult within the colonies (again without naming specifics – the “convulsions” of which he speaks could equally refer to the uncertainty of a stalled government, or to pandemonium and riots in the streets), as well as leaving them vulnerable to attack. The king's misrule, Jefferson suggested, has threatened not only the rights and honor of the colonists, but their very lives.

7. [Unchanged from final draft] *he has endeavored to prevent the population of these states; for that purpose obstructing the laws for naturalization of foreigners; refusing to pass*

*others to encourage their migrations hither; & raising the conditions of new appropriations of lands:*

From a rhetorical analysis standpoint, this grievance is somewhat of a challenge. Stephen Lucas (1990) argues that every phrase of Jefferson's text is precisely placed for maximum impact, to the extent that removing even one line would undermine the rhetorical power of the document as a whole. At first glance, however this charge seems out of place. Thematically, it echoed the third grievance: the king had refused to pass laws for the accommodation of large districts. This accusation would therefore seem to make more sense immediately following that charge. The question, then, is why Jefferson had them separated in the text. Even in his original rough draft, this was how the grievances were organized, and it went unchanged after several rounds of revision, so it stands to reason that Jefferson had a purpose for the separation.

For clues, we look at what has been discovered about the text thus far, in particular, the escalation that has been building throughout the previous charges. Each grievance built on the ones that came before it, and was increasingly more severe in terms of tone and content. Therefore, there are two aspects to consider – first, that Jefferson considered this charge to be significantly worse than the ones that came before it. Alternatively, Jefferson believed that this charge logically extended from the ones that came before it. The most plausible explanation is that Jefferson likely saw the king's efforts to prevent the population of the colonies as being bad enough that it could not be grouped with his third accusation even though they expressed similar sentiments. Immediately preceding this charge, Jefferson had accused the king of dissolving the representative houses, refusing to allow the people of the colonies to hold new elections,

and leaving the colonies vulnerable to internal turmoil and external threats. He argued that George III did this because the colonists were too strong to fall victim to his predations, resisting his invasions with “manly firmness” at every turn, and in the process suggested that the king himself was unmanly. With the addition of this latest accusation, that characterization became stronger – already too weak and too poor a ruler to ensure compliance with his measures, he took steps to ensure that the colonists did not become any stronger. As long as they were small and scattered, they were easier to manipulate via schemes to fatigue them into compliance and waive their rights as British citizens. A strong, numerous, and vibrant population would only become more difficult to control.

## 8. Abuses of the judiciary

- a. *he has suffered the administration of justice totally to cease in some of these colonies,*  
[He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by] *refusing his assent to laws for establishing judiciary powers:*
- b. *he has made our judges dependant on his will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and amount [and payment] of their salaries:*

The eighth and ninth grievances were part and parcel with one another. Having usurped the colonial legislatures, as well as the royal governors who ostensibly ruled in his stead, the king then turned his designs on the judiciary, intent on bending it to his will in the same way. Again, Jefferson here conflated the roles of the king, his council, and the governors, laying the blame for any overreach squarely at the feet of the king himself. This was made more blatant in the latter grievance with the phrase “dependent on his



Will alone” – any other representative of the king is absolved of blame for the charge Jefferson is laying.

What was not stated, this time, is why it mattered that that the king made this change. However, the implication is clear enough: if the king was bent on establishing tyranny and usurping the traditions and laws of the colonies, then by declaring that judges in the colonies serve only at his pleasure, he corrupted them to serve his purpose as well, another weapon with which to force the colonists to submit to his will.

9. *he has erected a multitude of new offices **by a self-assumed power**, & sent hither swarms of officers to harrass our people & eat out their substance:*

In a similar vein to the last two, this grievance elaborated on the king’s reliance on minions in order to force the colonists to submit to his tyranny. The vague nature of this charge (to what new offices does he refer specifically? Jefferson, once again, never elaborated) supported Jefferson’s characterization of the officers. Since he did not enumerate a legitimate purpose for them, it was easier to imagine that they did not have one. With this accusation, Jefferson returned to the “sole purpose” rhetoric that he had employed elsewhere. If these faceless multitudes of Officers did not have legitimate business in the colonies, then their only purpose could be the one that Jefferson did describe: to make life difficult for the colonists, and again break down their will, and their “manly firmness” to resist the king’s despotism.

Jefferson’s apocalyptic language which he used to describe these officers should also be highlighted. There are a number of words that he could have used, all with different connotations. “Crowds of officers” would be a more neutral way of describing

them without overly diminishing the message of the grievance. “Hordes of officers” would be closer to Jefferson’s intent, calling to mind an army massing at the doorsteps of beleaguered Americans. But “swarms of officers” is a particularly striking way of describing them; in the one sense, it renders them as something subhuman, like mindless insects that the king has unleashed upon the colonists (and in robbing them of their own agency, kept the focus squarely on the king). But there is also something almost supernatural about the imagery – it calls to mind the Old Testament of the Bible when God unleashed a plague of locusts upon the Egyptians. Compare the language of this grievance, specifically the king having “sent hither swarms of Officers to harrass our people, and eat out their substance,” to the text of Exodus 10:12:

And the Lord said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come up upon the land of Egypt, and eat every herb of the land, even all that the hail hath left (Exodus 10:12, King James Version).

Although the appointment of new offices and officers is a fairly mundane power in any government, let alone for a king with unilateral authority, the way that Jefferson framed this charge makes it seem larger than life. Jefferson’s particular choice of biblical allusion is deserving of mention as well. While there were certainly some parallels that could be drawn between the exodus from Egypt and the cause for independence, in the story of Moses the plagues and horrors were unleashed upon those who kept the Jewish people in bondage – in making a connection between the exodus and his own narrative, Jefferson cast George III as God, and the Americans in the role of the slaveholding Egyptians. The “He” of which the document spoke was growing beyond the flesh and

bone of King George III, and taking on an almost mythic quality, as though it were a god or monster unleashing these torments on the colonists rather than a mortal man.

## 10. Usurpation of the Civil Government

- a. *he has kept among us in times of peace standing armies & ships of war* [without the Consent of our legislatures]:
- b. *he has affected to render the military, independant of & superior to the civil power:*

These charges continued the theme of the king's illegitimate proxy rule within the colonies that appears in the last two grievances. First, Jefferson argued, the king dissolved the colonial legislatures, and refused to allow the colonists to replace them. Next, he rendered the courts subservient to him by making them dependent on his goodwill for their continued tenure. Then, he created a host of new offices which lacked any legitimate purpose, but instead existed only to harass the colonists. Finally, as an added precaution, he installed his armies in the colonies and elevated them above the colonial government. Like the corrupted judges, the military served as an extension of the king's will, but with the added threat of violence or death if the colonists do not comply. Where previously the king had simply threatened their liberties and happiness, with this charge Jefferson claimed that the king had made veiled threats against their life.

The key phrase in the first of the two military charges are "in times of peace." Although less explicit here than he was in the "swarms of officers" accusation, Jefferson again dispelled any notion that these standing armies were either wanted or needed. In the absence of an active threat for the armies to safeguard against, there is no necessity for them to be stationed in the colonies, and since the colonial governments were not even

consulted to obtain their consent, Jefferson was suggesting that their presence was not for the benefit of the colonists, and instead that they were there in service of another goal.

Within the larger context of the Declaration, of course, this purpose is known: to intimidate the colonists and force them into compliance with the king's measures. Rather than benign guardians or protectors of the colonies, Jefferson argued that they were more akin to overseers or prison wardens, meant to keep the colonists in line and ensure that the king's goal (the establishment of tyranny over the colonies) was fulfilled.

In the second of the two grievances, he reinforced this suggestion; not only did the king render the military "independent of" the colonial government, but "superior to" it as well. His use of the term "civil power" rather than specifying, for instance, the colonial legislatures, was also significant. Given that the royal armies were never directly answerable to the colonial legislatures, the only "Civil powers" in the colonies that they could have been rendered independent from were the royal governors. If the governors were the object of the "independent of" clause, then it follows that they would also be the object of "superior to." This charge, then, seems to be not only a grievance on behalf of the colonists, but also the king's governors, warning them that the king had cast them aside and placed them in an inferior station to the military.

- 11. he has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitutions and unacknoleged by our laws; giving his assent to their pretended acts of legislation, *for quartering large bodies of armed troops among us*\*,**

*\*The bolded section was moved to a separate line for the final draft.*

- a. *for protecting them by a mock-trial from punishment for any murders they should commit on the inhabitants of these states;*
- b. *for cutting off our trade with all parts of the world;*
- c. *for imposing taxes on us without our consent;*
- d. *for depriving us [in many cases] of the benefits of trial by jury;*
- e. *for transporting us beyond seas to be tried for pretended offences: **for taking away our charters**, [abolishing our most valuable Laws,] **& altering fundamentally the forms of our governments;**\**

*\*The bolded section was moved to a separate accusation in the final text.*

- f. [For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies:\*

*\*This grievance was not present in Jefferson's original draft.*

- g. *for suspending our own legislatures & declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever:*

Within Jefferson's narrative, these charges are immediately notable for the rhetorical feat of blaming the king for acts passed by Parliament. Jefferson ensured that the figure of the king would be clear and defined – "He has combined," "giving his Assent," – but leaves other actors in this section obscure – "combined with others," "a jurisdiction foreign," "their Acts of pretended Legislation." With Jefferson's choice of language, this section sounds sinister, even treasonous. Rather than referring to a king assenting to the laws of his own ministers, this grievance sounds as though the king was

conspiring with a foreign power to subvert the rule of law for his subjects. It's almost difficult to tell in this section who Jefferson was pointing to as the greater villain; "combined with others to subject us" gives the king more agency and suggests that the obscure "Others" to which Jefferson referred were just tools to enact the king's will. On the other hand, "giving his assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation" seems to place culpability in the hands of these obscure Others by making them responsible for the acts of legislation. By naming the king, and not the Others, however, Jefferson's target ultimately was still the king himself. This foreign jurisdiction, whoever they were, was obviously an enemy to the colonists; they masqueraded as legislators and pretended to pass legitimate laws, but secretly shared the king's aim of installing a tyranny in the colonies. A good king would have protected the colonists from their machinations. By assenting to their advances, Jefferson argued, George III abdicated this sacred obligation.

The charges that followed in this section lack some of the rhetorical intrigue as Jefferson described specific acts rather than ascribing motivations or characterizing the actors involved. He also repeated charges that were already made elsewhere in the document. One element that does warrant mention here was the change to how these accusations were introduced: rather than the now-familiar "He has," these grievances begin with "For." This shift in language indicates to listeners that these grievances follow from the "Combined with others" charge, each one serving as the second half of a sentence now revealed to be incomplete. Therefore, implicitly each one still derives from the "He has" beginning the "combined with others" grievance. The change in wording acts as a signpost for Jefferson's audience, alerting them that there had been a change in focus within the document and that they should pay closer attention to this section.

Throughout the preceding charges, a rising action can be observed in Jefferson's drama as each charge builds upon the ones before it. First, Jefferson showed how the king misused his own powers (refusing assent to legitimate laws and refusing to allow his surrogates in the colonies to do so). He then accused the king of conspiring to keep the colonies small, weak, and subservient by denying them their right to representation, taking measures to fatigue them into compliance, disbanding their legislatures and leaving them in a vulnerable state of chaos, and erecting obstacles to the population of the colonies. Jefferson then moved to the king's usurpation of the independent judiciary, corrupting the arbiters of the law in the colonies into agents of his despotic will, by restricting their service at his pleasure only. He unleashed a swarm of officers to harass the colonists, again with the purpose of demoralizing and rendering them too weak to fight against his despotism. Finally, Jefferson claimed, the king installed a standing army to oversee the weakened colonists, and worked against them with a foreign power to subject them to any number of tyrannical laws.

Already, Jefferson had made a compelling case against the king as a just ruler. But for the purposes of declaring independence, that would not be sufficient. Jefferson needed to prove that the abuses against the colonists ran so deep as to render a reconciliation impossible. It could not be sufficient for Britain to belatedly address their complaints, or even to replace the king. Independence needed to be understood as the only solution as a matter of survival. With that, Jefferson moved into what Stephen Lucas referred to as the war grievances (1990).

12. *he has abdicated government here, withdrawing his governors, & declaring us out of his allegiance & protection* [and waging War against us]:

The first part of the charge, “He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his protection,” also serves to retroactively make the previous charges doubly damning. The king’s overreaches were harmful in and of themselves because they pitted some rights such as life and property and happiness against the colonists’ right to liberty, forcing the colonists to sacrifice one for the other. With the phrasing in this charge, he argued that the king, after making himself so central to the colonial government that it could effectively do nothing without his approval, abandoned this new order, stripping away the illusions of law and order allowing it to crumble apart. With this language, Jefferson may have been speaking directly to the loyalists in the colonies, as if to say “You chose comfort and familiarity over liberty, and now you are left with neither.” This section could also potentially have served as a warning for their Canadian neighbors of how easily order and normalcy in a despotic state could be stripped away.

13. [Unchanged from final draft] *he has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns & destroyed the lives of our people:*

Immediately one can notice a difference in tone here even compared to the previous charges. Up until this point, Jefferson’s verb choices reflected that he was referring to a head of state, even a despotic one: “refused,” “obstructed,” “dissolved,” and “erected” are more legalistic and procedural verbs, reflective of a king’s executive powers. But here, the verbs he uses are more savage and brutal: “plundered,” “ravaged,” “burnt,” and “destroyed.” Jefferson was suggesting that by his actions, the king had



diminished himself and his station and had devolved into something cruder than his predecessors.

In Jefferson's previous major work, the *Summary View of the Rights of British America*, he likened the American colonists to their Saxon forebears, using this historical example to outline the singular importance of individual liberty in British history and culture. It is interesting then that his description of the king's military actions against the colonies sounded more reminiscent of a Vikings raider or Norman conqueror than the warfare of a civilized monarch. Again, Jefferson was indicating the king's fall from grace by likening him to a boogeyman from Britain's ancient history. The image this evokes is that of the king himself at the head of a band of raiders marching into unsuspecting coastal towns to pillage their wealth and murder their inhabitants.

**14.** *he is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation & tyranny, already begun with circumstances of cruelty & perfidy [scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally] unworthy the head of a civilized nation:*

In the "Combined with others" accusation above, Jefferson accused the king of working with "a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution" in order to impose his tyranny upon the colonists. His use of the word "foreign" in this section was literal rather than figurative, but conveyed the same sense of enmity on the part of the king. Again, Jefferson suggested that the king was conspiring against his own citizens with an ominous foreign Other. In the next sentence, the phrase "the works of death, desolation, and tyranny" deserve special attention for their inversion of the natural rights that

Jefferson espoused in the Preamble – under the British king, life in the colonies gave way to death, liberty to tyranny, and happiness to desolation. Not only had the king failed to secure these rights for his subjects, but had in fact actively worked against them by the actions that Jefferson described. The last remark, “begun with circumstances of cruelty & perfidy unworthy the head of a civilized nation,” restated and reinforced Jefferson’s central argument that the king was unfit to rule over the colonies.

15. [He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.]\*

*\*This charge was not present in Jefferson’s original draft.*

16. [He has excited domestic insurrections among us, and] *he has endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers the merciless Indian savages, whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes, & conditions of existence:*

Again, this accusation is somewhat of a paradox within the context of Jefferson’s larger narrative. Jefferson’s chief argument was that all people are born equally with the same unalienable rights, although the prevailing wisdom taken from the final draft is that Jefferson was writing about white males only when he spoke of life, liberty, and happiness. And yet, as will be argued in the next chapter, Jefferson did intend it in precisely the universal sense that his language suggested. His reference to the Native Americans as “merciless Indian savages” was especially problematic, then, in how it strips these people of their agency and renders them subhuman, like savage beasts. In

contrast to Jefferson's emphatic claim below that it was MEN being bought and sold in the slave markets, here he was more than willing to tap into prevailing fears and prejudices to bolster his argument. While this section has by no means aged well, especially given the canonization of the Declaration in the American public consciousness, from a rhetorical standpoint it also bears examination because of the stark contrast it makes with both the beginning and conclusion of the document.

Jefferson's drama only contained room for three types of actors: King George, his victims, and his agents; their moral quality was determined based on which category they fell into. The colonists, according to Jefferson, were innocent victims of the king's senseless brutality, and so they were portrayed as pure, virtuous, and morally upright. The Africans who had been transported into slavery in the colonies, even more victimized by the king's penchant for tyranny, were rendered in a sympathetic light as well. Conversely, those parties that Jefferson depicted as allies to the king were anonymous extensions of the royal will, such as the armies of foreign mercenaries sent to complete his works of death, desolation, and tyranny, and the swarms of officers sent to harass the American people. In this context, the "merciless Indian savages" were yet another anonymous tool of the king.

***17. He has incited treasonable insurrections in our fellow-subjects, with the allurements of forfeiture & confiscation of our property.\****

***\*This charge was omitted from the final text.***

As with the charge above it, Jefferson again stripped the conflict in the colonies of any complexity or nuance; those colonists who were opposed to the king were virtuous,

whereas any who allied themselves with the king did so out of greed or avarice. There was no room in his drama for a colonist who felt that the British Crown and Parliament were acting within their prerogatives and saw the revolutionaries as the ones who were out of line. Instead, Jefferson insinuated that the loyalists knew in their hearts that the king was a tyrant, and they only allied themselves with him because of the chance for material profit that the king had offered to them.

With that said, however, this section is also the only time that Jefferson gave agency and motive to any actor other than the king himself. Unlike the officers, mercenaries, or Native Americans, the loyalists were depicted as thinking and rationalizing, with the king having to appeal to their self-interest rather than merely deploying them as a weapon to destroy the rebels. That, combined with the fact that Jefferson still blamed the king here, rather than the loyalists themselves (“He has incited...”), suggests that Jefferson desired a reconciliation with the loyalists, and left the door open for them to reject their allegiance to the king as well by scapegoating him for their disloyalty to their kin.

***18. he has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating it's most sacred rights of life & liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. this piratical warfare, the opprobrium of infidel powers, is the warfare of the CHRISTIAN king of Great Britain. determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought & sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce: and that***

*this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished die, he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them, & murdering the people upon whom he also obtruded them; thus paying off former crimes committed against the liberties of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the lives of another.\**

*\*This charge was omitted from the final text.*

Here, at last, is the single most important distinction between Jefferson's draft and that of the Continental Congress. The most controversial of his accusations, it was also the most significant, most meaningful, and the most damning indictment of the king's character. Jefferson surely realized the danger that this accusation could pose to the overall argument of the text, because its rhetorical execution is masterful in a way that puts the rest of the document, even the much vaunted preamble, to shame.

The text here began with an element of subterfuge. For two entire clauses, Jefferson gave no indication that he had changed his focus from the plight of the colonists: "he has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating it's most sacred rights of life & liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him." Previously in the document, Jefferson had used nearly this exact language to describe the situation in the colonies and the reasons for independence: "sacred and undeniable," "preservation of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," and later, "circumstances of cruelty & perfidy unworthy the head of a civilized nation." With the next clause, however, "captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither," Jefferson threw back the curtain and revealed that the Americans were not the only people whose rights had been trampled by

the British Crown. His next line, “this piratical warfare,” served to strengthen the parallel between the African slaves and the American colonists; after all, just a few lines previously he accused the king of having “plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns & destroyed the lives of our people,” a condition to which “piratical warfare” is the only apt description.

Besides creating a sympathetic narrative relationship between the Americans and African slaves, Jefferson’s blaming of George III for the continuation of slavery in the colonies marked the culmination of the accusations that he had built up over the previous charges. It interanimated with them to imbue them with new meaning, and answered the questions that he had allowed to linger in his listener’s mind throughout. When he earlier accused the king of refusing assent to laws that were “necessary and proper to the common good,” with this charge Jefferson revealed why: “he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce.” When he hinted at “treasonable insurrections” a few lines previously, here he clarified his meaning: “he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them, & murdering the people upon whom he also obtruded them.” Consider also Jefferson’s earlier complaint that the king had refused to accommodate large districts of people unless they would relinquish their right to representation. There, Jefferson accused the king of pitting one right (property and the pursuit of happiness) against another (liberty). Jefferson made a similar accusation with this charge: “thus paying off former crimes committed against the *liberties* of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the *lives* of another.”

Most importantly, however, is how this accusation changed the meaning of the preamble. Jefferson's statement on natural rights, practically a throwaway line in the final text of the document (its later cultural impact aside), in the original draft laid an early foundation for the claims that Jefferson would make at the drama's climax: "All men are created equal and independent," he argued, "with sacred rights to life, liberty, and happiness." In this final accusation against King George III, Jefferson brought that full circle with the following line: "determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought & sold." That emphasis, wherein "MEN" was written in all capital letters, present in both Carl Becker and Julian Boyd's transcriptions of the original draft, was Jefferson's own, as was the similar emphasis on "warfare of the CHRISTIAN king of Great Britain." Jefferson's blunt and audacious tone was used here to the document's greatest effect: "All men are created equal and endowed with sacred God-given rights. The people of Africa are MEN, and endowed with those same rights. Therefore, the slave trade is a violation of God's law and un-CHRISTIAN."

***19. in every stage of these oppressions we have petitioned for redress in the most humble terms; our repeated petitions have been answered by repeated injury. a prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a people who mean to be free. future ages will scarce believe that the hardiness of one man, adventured within the short compass of 12 years only, on so many acts of tyranny without a mask, over a people fostered & fixed in principles of liberty.***

Having laid out George III's excesses and depravity, Jefferson demonstrated one more time that the king's actions were not provoked by any fault of the colonists. From

Lucas (1998), we know that Jefferson's use of the phrase "petition for redress in the most humble terms" had a particular meaning in terms of 18<sup>th</sup> century political speech: "Every kind of petition was inherently a communication from a subordinate to a superior... To have any chance of being granted, they had to be obsequious in tone and to acknowledge the superior power, status, and wisdom of the recipient" (p. 147). By characterizing their previous attempts to seek resolution with the king as a "petition," Jefferson was informing his audience of the tone and form of the colonists' previous efforts, and demonstrating that they had attempted to follow the proper protocols to resolve the conflict with Britain before taking the drastic step of declaring a separation from their mother nation.

With this section of the Declaration, Jefferson revealed another facet of George III's character: in addition to being a cruel, weak, tyrannical king, he was also a spiteful one. Jefferson argued that each time the colonists approached him, observing all of the proper forms that a subject does when seeking redress from their sovereign, they were punished by the king with yet more crimes against their sacred rights. The implication is that this king wanted nothing less than immediate and unquestioning compliance with his measures. Again, we see Jefferson's characterization of the British-American relationship as that of master and slave.

Jefferson then restated the central premise of the document for the third time in the text, that George III is not fit to rule over the colonists: "a prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a people who mean to be free." Just to be absolutely clear, Jefferson then took the additional step of explicating the claim that throughout the document had mostly been implied: that the



blame for all of the colonists' woes could be laid only at the feet of the current king. In his original draft, Jefferson even went so far as to remind listeners of the short period of 12 years over which all of these troubles arose. This section, stating that "future ages will scarce believe" all of the crimes that the king openly committed against his subjects, also demonstrated that Jefferson, even while writing the original draft, had an eye toward the future and what type of legacy would be left behind after the present conflict had closed. The candid world of which Jefferson wrote in the preamble was not merely his contemporaries, but also those future generations who would judge all of them by their words and deeds.

### **Indictment of the British People**

*Nor have we been wanting in attentions to our British brethren. we have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend a jurisdiction over these our states. we have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration & settlement here, no one of which could warrant so strange a pretension: that these were effected at the expence of our own blood & treasure, unassisted by the wealth or the strength of Great Britain: that in constituting indeed our several forms of government, we had adopted one common king, thereby laying a foundation for perpetual league & amity with them: but that submission to their parliament was no part of our constitution, nor ever in idea, if history may be credited: and we appealed to their native justice & magnanimity, as well as to the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations which were likely to interrupt our correspondence & connection. they too have been deaf to the voice of justice & of consanguinity, & when occasions have been given them, by*

*the regular course of their laws, of removing from their councils the disturbers of our harmony, they have by their free election re-established them in power. at this very time too they are permitting their chief magistrate to send over not only soldiers of our common blood, but Scotch & foreign mercenaries to invade & deluge us in blood. these facts have given the last stab to agonizing affection, and manly spirit bids us to renounce for ever these unfeeling brethren. we must endeavor to forget our former love for them, and to hold them as we hold the rest of mankind, enemies in war, in peace friends. we might have been a free & great people together; but a communication of grandeur & of freedom it seems is below their dignity. be it so, since they will have it: the road to glory & happiness is open to us too; we will climb it in a separate state, and acquiesce in the necessity which pronounces our everlasting Adieu!*

The indictment of the British people is the section of the Declaration of Independence that changed the most from Jefferson's draft to the final text. Nearly half of the text was cut out for the final version, and in reading Jefferson's draft it is easy to see why. More so than perhaps any other section, Jefferson's bitterness and anger was on full display in this section, revealing the hollowness of his claim that the Declaration was merely a statement of facts relating to the reasons for independence. Perhaps because this section is more emotionally charged than some others in the Declaration, it is somewhat unsurprising that Jefferson's additions here were ultimately cut – they are some of the weakest arguments in the text.

Jefferson made the argument that by settling in the New World, the colonists had effectively already established an independent state from Great Britain, and that they had done so without any assistance, whether economic or military, from their mother country.

Just barely over a decade out from the resolution of the French and Indian War, this is a somewhat baffling claim to make, even relative to other bold assertions that he made throughout the grievances. A subtle distinction between the rough and final draft can be observed in this section as well, while in the final draft, the Continental Congress complains of Parliament's efforts to "extend an "unwarrantable jurisdiction over us," or in other words, overstepping their rightful authority over the colonies, Jefferson's original language was "extend a jurisdiction over these our states," and went on to assert that the colonists had never agreed to submit to the British Parliament:

That in constituting indeed our several forms of government, we had adopted one common king, thereby laying a foundation for perpetual league & amity with them: but that submission to their parliament was no part of our constitution, nor ever in idea, if history may be credited.

For Jefferson, then, it was not a matter of Parliamentary overreach, but whether Parliament should have any jurisdiction in the colonies at all. He asserted that they should not, as the Americans were not British subjects but in fact a separate people that just happened to share a common king and culture. Jefferson's attempt to frame the American migration from England in this way was characteristically audacious, but in this case was unconvincing and not borne out by historical fact.

Another likely reason for this section having been pared down for the final draft is that it contradicted Jefferson's own central argument: that it was George III, and no other, who was responsible for the crimes against the colonists. However, in another of the removed arguments from Jefferson's draft, he accused the British people of not only

having failed to “disavow” the crimes of the British crown, as the final text states, but also having chosen to reelect their tormentors:

When occasions have been given them, by the regular course of their laws, of removing from their councils the disturbers of our harmony, they have by their free election re-established them in power. at this very time too they are permitting their chief magistrate to send over not only soldiers of our common blood, but Scotch & foreign mercenaries to invade & deluge us in blood. these facts have given the last stab to agonizing affection, and manly spirit bids us to renounce for ever these unfeeling brethren.

The problem with this claim is that the king was not elected by the British people. By referring to Parliament as “the disturbers of our harmony,” Jefferson was undercutting his own claim that George III was the mastermind behind it all. The stronger argument within the larger context of Jefferson’s drama is the one that ultimately remained in the final draft: that the British people, out of moral obligation, should have condemned the King’s actions and put pressure on him to change his ways.

This section also marks the fourth and final use of “foreign” within the draft, and the third that uses it as a pejorative for one of the king’s allies (“jurisdiction foreign to our constitution,” and then two uses of “foreign mercenaries”). Curiously, when describing the armies marching toward their doorstep, Jefferson placed them in three categories: “soldiers of our common blood,” “Scotch [mercenaries],” and “foreign mercenaries.” It is unclear from the text alone why Jefferson singled out the soldiers of Scottish descent, labeling them neither as their brethren nor as foreigners; the most likely explanation, especially given how uncharacteristically sloppy this part of his draft was

from a rhetorical standpoint, is that this represents either a private or societal prejudice that, either deliberately or subconsciously, Jefferson was playing into.

Conversely, it is possible that Jefferson's irrationality in this section was in fact intentional. The entire text leading up to this point had built to an emotional crescendo that reached its peak with his blistering indictment of the slave trade (by targeting King George III). From its reflections on the natural rights of men and the proper role of government and throughout the grievances against George III, each of which built upon the ones before it in terms of tone and severity, and up to this section, Jefferson was deliberately working to ensure that the people in the colonies would thoroughly despise the British king and his enablers. Although the indictment of the British people was not as rhetorically precise as other sections, it may be that this section, with its fiery rhetoric, overblown arguments, and even its appeals to base prejudice, was designed to escalate those negative feelings even further so that his audience would have no choice but to lash out against those that he had presented as their enemies.

## Conclusion

*We therefore the representatives of the United States of America in General Congress assembled do, in the name & by authority of the good people of these states, **reject and renounce all allegiance & subjection to the kings of Great Britain & all others who may hereafter claim by, through, or under them; we utterly dissolve & break off all political connection which may have heretofore subsisted between us & the people or parliament of Great Britain;** and finally we do assert and declare these a colonies to be free and independant states, and that as free & independant states they shall hereafter*

*have power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, & to do all other acts and things which independent states may of right do. And for the support of this declaration[, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence,] we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, & our sacred honour.*

As with the other sections, close examination of the original draft's conclusion reveals an important break from the final Declaration. The final draft proclaims that the new United States are "Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown." Jefferson's draft, however, was more forceful, declaring that the Congress and the people of the states "reject and renounce all allegiance and subjection to the kings of Great Britain & all others who may hereafter claim by, through, or under them." There are two distinctions here that should be noted. The first, of course, is the active verbs of Jefferson's draft – "reject and renounce" suggests forceful action on the part of the states, a deliberate choice to expunge the British monarch from their society. "Are absolved," on the other hand, is a passive framing that strips the states of agency; for them to *be* absolved, there must be a higher power (God or even the opinions of the "candid world") granting absolution. The second, more subtle, difference is that between "the British Crown" and "the kings of Great Britain." While both phrases refer to the British monarchy, Jefferson had just expended a great deal of ink vilifying not the monarchy, but this particular monarch over the span of 12 years. In Jefferson's narrative, King George III had undone all of the kindred goodwill that the colonists had for the British people and the Crown. Jefferson had also, through his rhetorical construction, projected a number of problems, ranging from taxation to slavery, onto the personage of the king and accused him of being the sole mastermind of these predations. It was critical, as the resolution of

the Americans to declare independence was revealed in this final section, that his audience not be thinking in terms of declaring independence from Great Britain, or from Parliament or even the Monarchy. He wanted them to declare independence from King George III. Even though his construction also addressed the monarchy in a more universal sense, referring to “kings” in the plural as well as all who would follow them, his language kept “King” in the forefront of his listener’s mind, locking into place with the phrase “reject and renounce.” The shift in language to “The British Crown” weakened this effect. No longer were the Americans expunging the villainous figure of the king, but instead politely dissolving political bands with the British government.

### **Rhetorical Analysis: Dramatism**

A recurring, fundamental question for this research has been “Why did Jefferson construct his original draft of the Declaration of Independence the way that he did?” When a critic becomes concerned with the motivation of the rhetor, it is not uncommon to turn to Kenneth Burke’s theory of Dramatism as one of the most useful tools for discerning motive. By examining a rhetorical work as a drama that is being staged by the rhetor, Dramatism reveals possible motives to the critic. For Burke, language is not merely representative of reality, it is reality. Therefore, the rhetor’s language “reflects as well as influences a rhetor’s attitudes, values, and world view. Given this notion, dramatism allows a critic to analyze the reality experienced by different rhetors” (Burgchardt, p. 237). The main tool of analysis in Dramatism is the Pentad. The rhetor’s drama will typically contain the same five elements: the Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, and

Purpose. Roughly speaking, these correspond to the journalist's lead questions: What, When/Where, Who, How, and Why. Analyzing which of these elements are dominant within the drama reveals the type of story the rhetor was telling, and therefore, what reality the rhetor experienced. This analysis aligns the elements of Jefferson's original draft of the Declaration of Independence to the Pentadic framework before moving on to deeper analysis.

### **The Act**

In Dramatism, the Act is always at the heart of the drama; it is merely modified in its interpretation by which of the other components are given greatest prominence by the rhetor (Tonn et al., 1993). Generally, the Act is the action that was taken by the drama's Agent. Within Jefferson's drama, the central act will vary depending on who is revealed as the Agent.

There are two main actions within the drama of the original draft of the Declaration: (1) King George III's abuses and usurpations against the colonies, and (2) the Continental Congress declaring independence from Great Britain. Already, these two Acts have quite different implications for the overall structure and purpose of the drama.

### **The Agent**

As mentioned previously, the Agent in Dramatism is the actor who instigates the drama's Act. The identification of the two potential Acts left us with two possible Agents: either King George III or the Continental Congress. Either would seem logical, given the stated purpose of the Declaration in proclaiming the reasons for America's separation from Great Britain. However, the language and structure of Jefferson's original draft reveals its primary Agent. The word "He" appears 24 times, compared to 14



instances of “We.” Furthermore, while “Our” is used a total of 32 times, 19 of those uses are tied to actions of the King and Parliament, such as “he has plundered *our* seas, ravaged *our* coasts, burnt *our* towns & destroyed the lives of *our* people,” compared to 13 which arise from the attitudes or actions of the colonists or Congress (such as “we mutually pledge to each other *our* lives, *our* fortunes, & *our* sacred honour.”) And although “Us” similarly appears 13 times in the text, only three of those uses relate to action or agency on the part of the colonists; the other 10 appearances, as with “Our,” relate back to actions that have been undertaken by the British, including “Imposing taxes on *us*.”

Furthermore, it is the king’s actions, not those of the colonists, which take the Declaration from its opening lines about universal, sacred rights to its closing remarks that the United States are, and ought to be, free and independent. Prior to the concluding paragraph, when the colonists do take action within the drama, in most cases it is in response to something the king has done: “we have petitioned,” “we have warned,” “we appealed.” And yet, when the king takes action, as in “He has refused,” “He has sent hither,” and “he has incited,” it escalates the drama and each time pushes the colonists closer to independence. Ultimately, George III is the main character of Jefferson’s drama, and so, returning to the question at the end of the previous section, we can now conclude that it is this king’s abuses of the colonists and their rights which makes up the central Act of the drama.

### **The Scene**

The Scene in Dramatism is the setting or context in which the drama takes place, and can be either physical or metaphoric; in the drama of Jefferson’s original draft, it is a

mixture of both. The American colonies, perhaps unsurprisingly, are the Scene that forms the backdrop of the drama. When Jefferson portrayed the crimes of the King or Parliament, he kept the focus squarely upon the American colonies, and he limited the scope of his grievances to those actions which have affected his kinsmen specifically. If the drama had called for it, the characterization of George III as a tyrant could have included mention of injuries against Ireland/Scotland or the colonies in the Caribbean, or even against Great Britain itself. However, not only are the British not portrayed as having been victimized by the king's excesses, they are depicted as willing participants in the victimization of the American colonies, and there is no mention of British colonies elsewhere in the world. The only exception to this narrow focus is Jefferson's slavery grievance, which acknowledges the suffering inflicted upon "the persons of a distant people who never offended him." Even then, Jefferson ultimately brought the accusation back to the plight of the colonies by arguing that the King was now inciting these slaves toward rebellion against their (implicitly unwilling) masters in the colonies.

The colonies represent more than a physical setting, however. George III's abuses matter because of the circumstances under which the colonies were settled:

we have reminded [the British] of the circumstances of our emigration & settlement here, no one of which could warrant so strange a pretension: that these were effected at the expence of our own blood & treasure, unassisted by the wealth or the strength of Great Britain: that in constituting indeed our several forms of government, we had adopted one common king, thereby laying a foundation for perpetual league & amity with them: but that submission to their

parliament was no part of our constitution, nor ever in idea, if history may be credited.

Interwoven into the Scene is the notion that the colonies were always independent of Britain. Jefferson argued that the American colonies maintained ties with their mother country and allegiance to a common monarch purely out of affection and convenience. This provides important context for the king's depravity, signaling that his actions matter most because they violate his original agreement with the colonists. The Scene of Jefferson's drama serves to lend legitimacy to his accusations.

### **Agency**

The Agency is the component of the Pentad that addresses how the Agent undertook the Act described. In other words, within this particular drama the Agency would be the means by which King George III inflicted his crimes upon the colonies. There are multiple means that George III uses to inflict harm upon the colonists (bureaucrats, judges, armies, Parliament, and his own powers), but ultimately all derive from his status as monarch. The King's abuses and usurpations are all made possible by the near-unilateral authority that he enjoys as a result of his station. He is able to singlehandedly prevent laws from going into effect, raise armies and install them over the civilian government, recruit mercenaries, create new offices, and bend the legislative and judicial powers to his whim, none of which would be possible if he was even merely a minister within the British government.

### **Purpose**

The fifth and final aspect of the Pentad is the Purpose, which should not be confused with the rhetor's purpose in writing or delivering the rhetorical text. Rather, it is

the Agent's purpose within the drama in undertaking his Act. Just as Jefferson is not the Agent of his own drama, the purpose of the Declaration as a text is different than the Purpose within the Pentad. What is the King's purpose in inflicting these wounds against the colonists? This time, it is sufficient to take Jefferson at his word. The Preamble alleges that "when a long train of abuses & usurpations, begun at a distinguished period, & pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to subject them to arbitrary power, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government & to provide new guards for their future security." According to Jefferson, all of the king's crimes pursued the same purpose: to subject the colonists to "arbitrary power," or in other words, reduce them to vassals under despotism and tyranny.

### **Analysis of Motive**

To summarize, these are the five points of the Pentad for Jefferson's original draft:

- Act – repeated injuries, usurpations, and abuses
- Agent – King George III
- Scene – the American colonies
- Agency – the (abused) powers of the monarchy
- Purpose – to reduce the colonies under an absolute tyranny

For Burke, the Act is always the central feature of the drama, but is interpreted differently depending on which of the other four elements of the Pentad are emphasized by the rhetor:

Act may be substantially reinterpreted by featuring other terms either singly or, more commonly, by emphasizing a dominant term in a Pentadic ratio. Arguments

dominated by “scene,” Burke claims, reflect a perspective that is committed to viewing the world as relatively permanent and deterministic... By contrast, arguments that feature “agent” reveal a perspective that views agents as rational and reality as constructed or caused by human choices. (Tonn et al., p. 254)

By examining Jefferson’s language use, the most frequently used words in his draft, (excluding the common words “of,” “the,” “to,” “a,” and “in”) are “our,” “for,” and “He.” “Our” has already been addressed as mostly following from to the actions of George III—“He has done *x* to **our** *y*.” “For,” which appears 30 times in the text, at first glance would seem to be indicative of statements relating to Purpose. However, when these appearances are situated in the text, most of them are used to introduce more information, rather than indicating the king’s larger purpose: “He has refused to pass laws *for* the accommodation of large districts,” or “giving his assent to their acts of pretended legislation, *for* quartering large bodies of armed troops among us.” Only once in the document does “for” appear in the same line as “purpose,” but in that case the purpose it relates to is “to prevent the population of these states,” which as the CTA shows, was part of the King’s larger purpose, but was not, in itself, the Purpose of the drama.

This leaves “He” as the most frequently-appearing word in the text which in every case relates to its component of the Pentad. Every use of “He” refers to King George III, and as mentioned previously, is the root of many of the other elements of the drama; it is the King’s actions, and no one else’s, that propels the drama from its introduction to its conclusion. Furthermore, Jefferson made the argument with the Declaration that George III inflicted these injuries and violated the colonists’ sacred rights because he is a tyrant:

“a prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a people who mean to be free.” The Agent’s character is defined, or brought into definition, by his every Act. It is not the Act which has transformed the Agent into a tyrant, but rather, he undertakes those actions *because* he is a tyrant. Therefore, the central relationship, or ratio, within the Pentad is Agent:Act. As explained above, from this ratio it can be inferred that Jefferson’s perspective on reality was focused on people and their agency; they construct their reality by their actions and beliefs, rather than being defined by their environment. This corresponds with what the literature review revealed regarding Jefferson’s opinions on the faculty of reason. But what does this reveal of his motive?

Just as the King had agency to inflict his injuries upon the colonists, so too did the colonists possess agency to expunge him from their midst. In Dramatism, this motive can be explained through the concept of scapegoating. Burke argued that “Criminals either actual or imaginary may... serve as [curative] scapegoats in a society that ‘purifies itself’ by ‘moral indignation’ in condemning them” (Ott & Aoki, p. 276). Jefferson’s construction of George III was as an absolute criminal. Throughout his draft, he argued that the King had committed crimes against his subject’s rights, committed war crimes against them and incited others to do the same, and had waged war against human nature itself through his enslavement of the African people. Scapegoating within Dramatism is more than the arbitrary placement of blame, however. It requires the society to cast out old identities and reform them in opposition to the scapegoat as well. Burke described three stages to the process of identity formulation:

An original state of merger, in that the iniquities are shared by both the iniquitous and their chosen vessel; (2) a principle of division, in that elements shared in common are being ritualistically alienated; (3) a new principle of merger, this time in the unification of those whose purified identity is defined in dialectical opposition to this sacrificial offering. (Ott & Aoki, p. 276)

Consider how accurately this process describes the course of the American Revolution within Jefferson's drama. In the original state of merger, the colonists are willing, or at least conscious, participants in a despotic system: "prudence indeed will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light & transient causes: and accordingly all experience hath shewn that mankind are more disposed to suffer while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed." Not only did the colonists allow the King to violate their own sacred rights, but they themselves were guilty of tyranny and the violation of the rights of others through their participation in the transportation, purchase, and sale of the people of Africa.

The principle of division, Burke's second step, takes place over the course of Jefferson's grievances. Ritualistically, each repetition of "He has" brings in a new facet of the collective sin to be purged, stirs feelings of doubt and guilt in his listener, and then enshrines it in the figure of the King, purifying the audience in the process. Importantly, the colonial legislatures were complicit in every one of the king's misdeeds (despite Jefferson's protests to the contrary, as in "resisting with manly firmness") by their failure to act to protect the lives, liberties, and happiness of the men within their territory, to prevent the passage of vital laws, to allow justice and democracy to break down within

the colonies, to inflict cruel punishment against their own subjects, and, most importantly, to wage war against human nature itself. By placing blame for their failures solely with the king, Jefferson absolved his audience, readying them to re-forge their identity in opposition to these iniquities.

More than merely a shocking indictment of the King's character, as Gittleman (1974) argued, Jefferson's inclusion of the slave trade as the gravest of George III's sins was an attempt to ritualistically cut ties to an institution which Jefferson could only describe as "assemblage of horrors," while at the same time absolving his American audience of guilt through rejection. The framing of Jefferson's Declaration subtly builds to the issue of slavery, beginning instead with universal, sacred truths (that all men are entitled to equality, independence, and their natural rights), and the argument that any government that deprives men of their natural rights is illegitimate. He continues on the theme that the King of Great Britain has reduced the colonists to a state of slavery. Jefferson's drama seeds the idea that it is morally indefensible to strip men of their liberty and happiness, creates outrage at the idea of enslaving free men, and then, at its climax, reveals the shared sin of the Americans by participating in the slave trade, while at the same time removing blame from them and casting it upon his scapegoat. His drama makes the slave trade synonymous with the British Crown, so that the patriotic revulsion of the latter would extend to cover the former as well. By expunging their connections to Great Britain, it was Jefferson's aim that the colonies could break free from their dependence on slavery as well.



Finally, the third step to Burke's concept of scapegoating is for the society to unify in opposition to their chosen vessel. Again, Jefferson's own language in the conclusion of his original draft demonstrates the fulfillment of this stage of the drama:

We therefore the representatives of the United States of America in General Congress assembled do, in the name & by authority of the good people of these states, reject and renounce all allegiance & subjection to the kings of Great Britain & all others who may hereafter claim by, through, or under them; we utterly dissolve & break off all political connection which may have heretofore subsisted between us & the people or parliament of Great Britain.

Unlike the final draft, in which the Americans are "absolved" of their allegiance, within Jefferson's original drama the colonists would, upon declaring independence, build their new identity around the *rejection* of British tyranny in all its forms. The drama brings closure to the negative feelings and uncomfortable questions that were stirred up by Jefferson, and absolves the Americans of their complicity in the perpetuation of injustice. By declaring that the United States "are, and ought to be, free and independent," the ritual was completed, and the Americans freed from the sins of Great Britain. Jefferson's closing remark that "for the support of this declaration we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, & our sacred honour" was a promise to the people of the newly independent states that such crimes against the people would never be repeated.

This drama was not allowed to play out to its conclusion. The edits of the Continental Congress, made to avoid alienating the British or upsetting southern slaveholding states, undercut the third stage of Burke's scapegoating process and so

denied absolution to the colonists. On the contrary, in the final draft the colonists appear from the outset as innocent victims, and so their own guilt is never examined. Rather than reforming their identity by rejecting the corrosive influence of Britain and its King, the removal of the slavery grievance and the changes to the language of the conclusion gave the colonists permission to merely reform as separate and equal to their mother country without examining or resolving their own sin. Any guilt or discomfort brought on by Jefferson's slavery narrative, still felt as an undercurrent in the Declaration's final draft, would have to be internalized and justified in the minds of his audience, rather than purged or redeemed.

## **Summary and Discussion**

This final section of the Results and Discussion chapter first summarizes the results and findings from the three methods described above. After that, the discussion turns to how those results fit together in order to answer the study's underlying research questions.

First, Bitzer's theory revealed that although the primary reason for the Declaration of Independence's existence was to justify the American separation from Great Britain, Thomas Jefferson was responding to his own rhetorical exigence. The writing of the Declaration of Independence fell within Jefferson's most active and vocal period of abolitionism, and echoed the themes that he was arguing elsewhere in his political career. Independence was a moment of new beginnings, defined by high patriotic and humanistic ideals and the rejection of the old norms of domination and control. It was the only time in American history when a clean break from slavery could serve as a catalyst for the fledgling nation's new identity on the world stage.

In order to enact this urgent change, Jefferson's audience was not the candid audience of the world, but rather, his colleagues in the Continental Congress as well as in the various state legislatures. The Lee Resolution authorized not only the Declaration of Independence, but also the first American constitution; by framing the case for independence around the rejection of enslavement and tyranny, Jefferson's aim was to introduce the notion of abolition into the debate around the Articles of Confederation, and build support for the end of slavery amongst the states that would ultimately have to ratify it.

The constraints around this exigence proved too much for Jefferson to overcome, and in the end the language condemning slavery was stripped from the Declaration, rendering the rhetorical situation unfulfilled. Jefferson's constraints were not only the external political, economic, and cultural forces that opposed changing the status quo; his own attitudes and biases worked against him as well, preventing him from writing with as much passion and conviction as the situation required.

The close textual analysis, or CTA, deconstructed the original draft of the Declaration in order to highlight the themes and strategies that Jefferson employed. It was observed that, compared to the final draft, Jefferson's language was much more forceful and precise: truths that were "self-evident" in the final draft were, to Jefferson, "sacred and undeniable." Where the final draft called upon the necessity to "dissolve political bands," Jefferson argued that the Americans must "advance from that subordination in which they have hitherto remained." And while the final draft declared the Americans "absolved" of their allegiance to the British Crown, Jefferson wanted the Continental Congress to "reject and renounce all allegiance and subjection to the kings of Great Britain."

The CTA offered detailed attention to the grievances against King George III, observing the techniques that Jefferson employed in order to construct the villainous persona of the King. Chief among these was the strategy, noted by Lucas, Gittleman, and others, of making vague, ambiguous, and hyperbolic accusations. By defining offenses in broad terms and leaving them ambiguous, listeners would naturally fill the void according to their own fears and preconceptions. This, combined with how each charge built upon the ones that came before it, slowly built up the characterization of the

tyrannical king over the course of the text, urging the listener toward the most dramatic charges that followed.

Analysis of the original draft also focused extensively on the theme of enslavement that Jefferson wove throughout the Declaration: that of a proud and free people who had done no harm to the British King but had nevertheless been systematically stripped of their rights, oppressed into slavery, and ultimately faced the threat of death for daring to speak out against this perversion of the natural order. While this narrative thread is still present in the final draft, it is made more obscure by the removal of Jefferson's most emphatic indictment. At the height of the grievances, having accused the king of declaring war and murdering his own subjects, Jefferson accused the king of waging "cruel warfare" against human nature itself by subjecting the free people of the African continent to misery and death in enslavement. This accusation was designed to interanimate with previous sections to render them with new meaning. For instance, when Jefferson made the vague claim that the king had blocked passage of laws that were "wholesome and necessary" for the public good, with this grievance he revealed that the necessary laws were in fact attempts to restrict or reform the slave trade. The powerful statement about the latent equality and natural rights of men, almost a throwaway line in the final draft, becomes even more meaningful with Jefferson's declaration that the king was "determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought & sold."

Finally, the Dramatistic analysis employed the Pentad in order to deconstruct Jefferson's original draft as a drama and clarify his motive as a rhetor. The Pentad revealed the following 5 aspects of the drama:

- Act – repeated injuries, usurpations, and abuses
- Agent – King George III
- Scene – the American colonies
- Agency – the powers of the monarchy
- Purpose – to reduce the colonies under an absolute tyranny

Analysis of not only which Dramatistic elements appeared most frequently within the text, but also which had the greatest impact on the Act, demonstrated that the principle ratio within the drama was Agent:Act. The King is the singular villain of the drama, whose actions advance the colonists further into servitude, as well as closer to declaring independence. Jefferson's motive was to create a scapegoat out of George III for the systems of oppression that had taken root within the colonies.

The analysis showed how the drama of Jefferson's original draft followed Burke's three stages of scapegoating: (1) the original state of merger in which the sin is shared by the community as well as the scapegoat; (2) the principle of division, in which blame for the sin to be purged is laid upon the scapegoat; (3) the new state of merger wherein the community unifies against the scapegoat and defines itself in opposition to its iniquities. Within Jefferson's original drama, the colonists were originally complicit in both their own oppression as well as the enslavement of others. By laying blame upon the tyrannical figure of King George III, they expunge their own guilt by their rejection and renunciation of the king.

While this was the drama that Jefferson crafted within his draft, it was altered and obscured by the edits of the Continental Congress. By not only removing the slavery grievance, but also softening the language of the Declaration ("reject and renounce"

being changed to “absolved,” for example), the shared iniquity was obscured (though not erased) and the cathartic expunging of guilt was denied. Rather than unifying in principled opposition to British tyranny, the final draft of the Declaration instead rendered Americans as separate, equal, and coexisting with their former oppressors. Rather than clearly identifying and providing release for the iniquity, it was instead left as an undercurrent in the final text, to be internalized rather than expunged.

Having summarized the findings, let us now return to the research questions:

1. What was Jefferson’s motivation for building the case for American independence around the theme of slavery, despite the virtually unchallenged status of slavery within both Britain and the American colonies at that time?
2. Given that the decision to separate from Great Britain had already been made by the time Jefferson begins his original draft of the Declaration of Independence, of what and to whom is the rhetor trying to persuade?
3. How does the removal of Jefferson’s indictment of the king over the slave trade change our understanding of Jefferson’s rhetorical goals, and what does this reveal about the final document’s impact on the American identity?

As the three methods demonstrated, Jefferson’s motivation for using these themes of oppression and slavery in his original draft was to turn public opinion against the slave trade and set the stage for emancipation. Both the CTA and Dramatistic analysis showed how Jefferson carefully constructed his arguments against King George, first to build anger at the king for the tactics that he had used against the colonists in order to deprive them of their liberties and often their very lives. Jefferson then revealed to his audience

the colonists' complicity in perpetuating this exact same form of tyranny against another people.

Jefferson presented a vivid and gruesome picture to his fellow revolutionaries of an innocent people who were being ripped from their homes (preventing them from pursuing their own happiness) and crowded into ships to either be sold into slavery (stripping away their liberty) or die in the crossing (violating their sacred right to life). Those who did make it to the end of their journey would be bought and sold by the very men who were so sensitive to the denial of their rights that they were willing to go to war for it. Jefferson's rhetoric exposed the enormous hypocrisy that cast a pall over the entire revolutionary spirit. Rather than condemning the colonists, however, he gave them an outlet for their guilt in the personage of George III. It was the King's fault, Jefferson argued, that the colonists had been unable to reform or abolish the slave trade. Even though they all intrinsically knew the moral depravity of holding MEN (emphasis Jefferson's) in captivity who had done nothing to deserve it, they had been forced to continue the practice. Even though, Jefferson reminded them, they held the notion that all men are created equal and independent to be a sacred and undeniable truth, George III had forced them to commit sacrilege against their own sacred ideals.

The unquestioned place that slavery held within colonial life was precisely the reason why Jefferson needed to call attention to its corrosive effect within his draft of the Declaration. His goal was to expose the fallacy of battling for one's own liberty while denying other men those same rights. The fight for liberty and independence was a worthy one, but as long as the Americans continued to enslave others, their total victory would never be realized. As the Bitzerian analysis brought to light, a new beginning was



wasted. If the Americans set up their new norms and laws without addressing the fundamental issue of slavery, then it would be nearly impossible to make meaningful change in the future, at least without a great deal of strife.

Regarding question two, analysis of the rhetorical situation showed that, rather than the Declaration being primarily addressed to the “candid world,” Jefferson’s primary audience for persuasion was in fact the colonial lawmakers, including the delegates to the Continental Congress as well as the state legislative houses. But, why would he need to persuade *them*? Because they would ultimately be responsible for ushering in the laws and governing structures for the new nation. Ratifying the Declaration of Independence was only the beginning for the new American republic, and arguably far from the most important step. It would be another year before the Continental Congress would approve the draft of the Articles of Confederation, and another four years until it was ratified by the states. Jefferson’s drama was designed to convince his peers to not only separate from Great Britain, but to construct their new identity around the rejection of British tyranny in all its forms. At the same time, he attempted to portray slavery and the slave trade as a form of British tyranny, rather than something intrinsic to the American way of life. If his drama could have been successful in both goals, then a general emancipation and abolition, or at the very least the end of the slave trade, would be a realistic item for debate amongst the delegates. Further, if Jefferson’s message could similarly have reached the legislators of the South, it stood at least a small chance of ratification.

Years later, Jefferson would write to Henry Lee that the purpose of the Declaration was to put the subject into simple terms for his audience:

This was the object of the Declaration of Independence. Not to find out new principles, or new arguments, never before thought of, not merely to say things which had never been said before; but to place before mankind the common sense of the subject, in terms so plain and firm as to command their assent, and to justify ourselves in the independent stand we are compelled to take. (1825)

While the CTA proves Jefferson's arguments and rhetoric were anything but plain, for one grievance in particular, the phrase "to place before mankind the common sense of the subject, in terms so plain and firm as to command their assent" rings true. Jefferson's persuasive goal was to prove a simple argument: (1) All men are created equal, (2) the "distant people" he referred to in his condemnation of slavery are MEN, and (3) therefore, these people have the same rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness that the colonists held so dear. If he could command the political actors of the Revolution to assent to those three points, then none of them could, in good faith, justify perpetuating slavery into their new system of government.

Finally, how did the removal of the slavery grievance change the popular understanding of Jefferson's rhetorical goals? By removing that one line, but leaving all of the passages that built up to it within Jefferson's drama, the Continental Congress weakened the power of his drama. In the final draft, the king is still rendered as a tyrant on an almost mythic scale, a barbaric despot whose only motive was the enslavement of the colonists. However, listeners were never forced to confront their own similarities to the king. In fact, the final draft paints the colonists as archetypically heroic in stark contrast to the villainous figure of the king, simultaneously humble and patient subjects, innocent victims, and manly rebels.

The removal of Jefferson's lines regarding slavery, more than merely preventing a narrative from reaching its conclusions, disfigured his argument and stripped it of all ideological integrity. Jefferson's aim with his original draft was to show the speciousness of protesting an attack against one's own rights while depriving the rights of another. In the final draft, the hypocrisy that Jefferson meant to call attention to as a call to action was instead enshrined in the text. Without Jefferson's ultimate argument, the final draft's uncritical appropriation of the language of enslavement now appears almost Machiavellian. Instead of a declaration of principles, his rhetoric was reduced to mere propaganda to be wielded against an opponent.

This hypocrisy did not go unnoticed by either the colonists or the British either, as Kolchin (1993) observed:

Patriots commonly denounced the "slavery" they suffered at the hands of the British, and insisted that they would rather die than remain slaves; although there was considerable hyperbole in this rhetoric... the irony of fighting a war for liberty at the same time that they held one-third of their own population as slaves was not lost upon them. They might not have liked the way British Tory author Samuel Johnson phrased the matter when he asked rhetorically, "How is it that we hear the loudest *yelps* for liberty among the drivers of negroes?" but they were acutely aware of the problem (pp. 76-77).

The final draft, still containing the bulk of Jefferson's original rhetoric, succeeded in its goal of sensitizing the colonists to their own enslavement. However, with the removal of its most important lines, it failed to generate empathy or compassion for the

other enslaved population of the colonies. Although the final document still (unintentionally) hinted at its true purpose, the colonists were never forced to confront their own tyrannical nature. Accusations like Johnson's only caused them to internalize the guilt that they were never able to expunge, causing them to attempt to justify their slave ownership rather than righting themselves by eliminating the practice. Within the span of a century, a major presidential candidate would freely announce, to cheering and affirmation from the crowd, the opinion that the Declaration of Independence was never intended to apply to nonwhites:

I hold that the signers of the Declaration of Independence had no reference to negroes at all when they declared all men to be created equal. They did not mean negro, nor the savage Indians, nor the Fejee Islanders, nor any other barbarous race. They were speaking of white men. (Douglas, 1858)

The removal of the lines on slavery didn't just cancel out the intended effect of Jefferson's text, they conveyed precisely the opposite effect. The gap left open an ideological space for the colonists to feel like victims but remain justified in their victimization of others.

Stephen Lucas (1990) wrote that "[w]hile the Declaration continues to command an international audience and has created an indelible popular image of George III as a tyrant, Lind's tract remains a piece of arcana, buried in the dustheap of history."

Ironically, its power as a propaganda document proved too much even for Jefferson; his original vision has been relegated to the same dustheap as John Lind's rebuttal. It was not just the image of the king that was irrevocably changed by the Declaration; Jefferson's failure at this pivotal stage in his career undoubtedly had much to do with his shift later in

life toward passive optimism that the slavery issue would someday resolve itself. That, along with his infamous relationship with Sally Hemmings and his lifelong ownership of hundreds of slaves, has defined the popular image of Jefferson on the issue of slavery far more than any of his early attempts to abolish it. The popular image of Jefferson as an apologist for slavery was further complicated by his adoption of the final draft of the Declaration as his own. His immediate response to the edits of the Congress was to be horrified, even going so far as to refer to the “depredations” of the Congress in a later recollection and observing that “I was not insensible to these mutilations” (Jefferson, n.d.). Jefferson even sent copies of his original draft to several of his friends and colleagues, and wrote to one, “You will judge whether it is the better or worse for the critics” (Meacham, p. 108). By the end of his life, however, as Renker (1989) points out, he had assumed full ownership of the *final* draft, included its full text in his autobiography, and included its authorship as one of a mere few achievements on his tombstone. In the end, Jefferson’s pragmatism won out over his ideals.

## CONCLUSION

Bell Hooks, in her 1994 essay “Love as the Practice of Freedom,” observed that activists are often only concerned with stopping those forms of oppression that affect them directly:

It has always puzzled me that women and men who spend a lifetime working to resist and oppose one form of domination can be systematically supporting another... Critically examining these blind spots, I conclude that many of us are motivated to move against domination solely when we feel our self-interest directly threatened. Often, then, the longing is not for a collective transformation of society, an end to politics of dominations, but rather simply for an end to what we feel is hurting us (p.1).

Although there are countless other factors at work within this dynamic, ultimately what Hooks described as a missing “ethic of love” is the ignoble legacy of the Declaration of Independence and the enduring failure of Thomas Jefferson. Highly sensitized to any perceived oppression of our own lives, liberties, and the individual pursuit of happiness, we are painfully slow to respond to threats to the rights of others, and oftentimes we proudly display our justifications and biases, seeking reasons why somebody else’s sacred liberties are any less than our own.

My research began with a question about how Americans consume political media as a result of the Declaration of Independence in its final state, but that was soon eclipsed by the revelation of an original draft all but forgotten within American popular culture, yet rich with unexplored meaning. The most important and fascinating discovery from the review of the literature, which drove me to analyze Thomas Jefferson’s original

rough draft more thoroughly, was the argument that the Declaration of Independence was originally built on a narrative of slavery and oppression which culminated in a condemnation of King George III for supporting the slave trade. Aside from passing references throughout the literature, Jefferson's original draft lacked an in-depth textual analysis, and the superiority of the final draft was essentially unquestioned. From the review of the literature, three key research questions emerged: (1) Why did Jefferson construct his argument around the theme of slavery, (2) Who was his audience and what was he trying to persuade them of, and (3) How did the changes between the original and final draft alter how we understand its rhetorical goals and impact?

In order to answer these questions, I applied three methods of critical rhetorical analysis to Jefferson's original draft of the Declaration: Bitzer's theory of the rhetorical situation, Edwin Black's method of close textual analysis, and Kenneth Burke's theory of Dramatism. Utilizing these three methods, I was able to deconstruct the text of Jefferson's original draft in order to reveal not only how Jefferson constructed his draft, but within what historical context and for what purpose. I discovered that the slavery grievance was not only a narrative device or indictment against the king, but was in fact the most important part of the Declaration after the "sacred and undeniable" truths of the Preamble.

Jefferson was not merely writing to justify the American separation from Great Britain, but to show the hypocrisy of fighting for independence while holding other men as slaves. His language made the colonists feel like they had been enslaved by the British crown, and then revealed that they were complicit in doing exactly the same thing to another distant people. He attempted to give his fellow Americans a scapegoat for this

iniquity by blaming King George III for perpetuating the Atlantic slave trade and the slave markets in the New World. By rejecting and renouncing George III and the British people, Jefferson wanted the Americans to reject British tyranny in all its forms, giving themselves a clean slate free from the old systems of domination that had defined them as colonies. His goal with his particular construction of the Declaration was to build a case for general emancipation and the abolition of slavery within the new republic that the Continental Congress was building.

Although this was Jefferson's original purpose, obviously this did not come to fruition. The slavery grievance was removed from the Declaration, but his other language, making the colonists feel that they had been oppressed and enslaved, remained intact. Furthermore, Jefferson's language against Britain was softened, leaving open the possibility of reconciliation as two equal nations, rather than the emphatic rejection that Jefferson originally envisioned. The effect was that the colonists were sensitized to their own oppression, but never had to critically examine their own moral failure, and so internalized rather than expunged the hypocrisy which Jefferson sought to dismantle.

Just as Hooks argued, the colonists of Jefferson's time passionately resisted what they perceived as British oppression. Their soaring rhetoric on the rights and dignity of mankind continues to set the standard of how we expect American public figures to speak. As recently as 2013, Barack Obama proclaimed these same values in his second inaugural address:

We, the people, declare today that the most evident of truths — that all of us are created equal — is the star that guides us still; just as it guided our forebears through Seneca Falls, and Selma, and Stonewall; just as it guided all those men



and women, sung and unsung, who left footprints along this great Mall, to hear a preacher say that we cannot walk alone; to hear a King proclaim that our individual freedom is inextricably bound to the freedom of every soul on Earth. It is now our generation's task to carry on what those pioneers began. (The White House, 2013)

At the same time, however, their actions failed to live up to their stated values: because the Declaration's most important argument was cut from the text, the Americans never had to confront their own identity as oppressors. Rather than confronting and resolving their iniquity, they were allowed to believe their own rhetoric. They forged their new identity around a mythology of enlightened American exceptionalism. When they were confronted with their refusal to live up to their own ideals, they internalized and sought to justify their guilt. The hypocrisy that Jefferson strove to confront and purge from their republic was instead enshrined within their identity. By the time Stephen Douglas stood before a crowd and proclaimed that the self-evident rights of the Founders could only refer to white men, the right of the states to allow slave ownership was deemed sacrosanct (Douglas, 1858).

Reading Jefferson's bold, unequivocal stance that the people of Africa were MEN imbued with the same rights of life, liberty, and happiness as the white colonists, it's difficult to resist the what-if and could-have-been scenarios that come to mind. How different might American history have been, had the young delegate from Virginia been successful in his rhetorical gambit? What tragedies could have been averted (or conversely, what new crises might have emerged)? In what bold new directions could our culture have evolved, freed of our desire to emulate the norms of Great Britain? These

aren't questions that this study can answer definitively; however, a few broad claims seem reasonable. Assuming, of course, that Jefferson's drama had the intended effect within the states as well as the Continental Congress, then the Articles of Confederation would likely have included a general ban on slavery, or else the individual states would have amended their constitutions to outlaw its practice within their own borders. Given the complex views that the Founders held regarding the slaves, especially Jefferson, one challenge that would have arisen would have been the question of either coexisting with the freed slaves or forcing them to relocate.

Without the exigence of the slavery question driving a wedge between the North and South, the bloodshed of the Civil War may never have occurred. Without the justifications for slavery that white Americans invented regarding the inherent inferiority of nonwhite races, the era of Jim Crow may have been averted. It would be irresponsible to paint this alternate America as a utopia of racial harmony, because there is no way to know what unforeseen challenges and crises would have developed to fill these historical voids. However, at minimum, it can reasonably be argued that enshrining the principle of universal equality within one of our most important founding documents, nearly a century earlier than the real-world ratification of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> amendments to the US Constitution, would have had a profound impact on our culture, as well as the course of our history. That Jefferson meekly allowed his most important work to be mutilated, as he later described, and then helped to elevate the final document and whitewash over its original message when he saw an opportunity for personal glory, is a true tragedy.

There are several avenues for further research that are opened up by the findings of this study. Discourse analysis or ethnographic methods may be beneficial for further

exploring the cultural impact of the Declaration in its final form. Of particular interest might be whether identification with the rhetoric and imagery of the American Revolution correlates with opinions regarding cross-cultural oppression. The transformation of the Declaration of Independence from a statement of ideals to an opportunistic smear against the character of the British King would also seem to be worthy of study. This research began with an interest in the similarities between Jefferson's arguments against the king and the political rhetoric of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and one of the themes discovered through the literature review was that early American political rhetoric adhered fairly closely to the rhetorical style of the Declaration. Given the importance of the Declaration as a founding document in the United States, its final form as a propaganda document in the guise of a statement of principles may prove significant for future study.

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## APPENDICES

### **Appendix A: Jefferson's Original Rough Draft of the Declaration**

A Declaration of the Representatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in  
General Congress assembled.

When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for a people to advance from that subordination in which they have hitherto remained, & to assume among the powers of the earth the equal & independant station to which the laws of nature & of nature's god entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the change.

We hold these truths to be sacred & undeniable; that all men are created equal & independant, that from that equal creation they derive rights inherent & inalienable, among which are the preservation of life, & liberty, & the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these ends, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government shall become destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, & to institute new government, laying it's foundation on such principles & organising it's powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety & happiness. prudence indeed will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light & transient causes: and accordingly all experience hath shewn that mankind are more disposed to suffer while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. but when a long train of abuses & usurpations, begun at a distinguished period, & pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to subject them to arbitrary power, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such



government & to provide new guards for their future security. such has been the patient sufferance of these colonies; & such is now the necessity which constrains them to expunge their former systems of government. the history of his present majesty, is a history of unremitting injuries and usurpations, among which no one fact stands single or solitary to contradict the uniform tenor of the rest, all of which have in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states. to prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world, for the truth of which we pledge a faith yet unsullied by falsehood.

he has refused his assent to laws the most wholesome and necessary for the public good: he has forbidden his governors to pass laws of immediate & pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has neglected utterly to attend to them.

he has refused to pass other laws for the accomodation of large districts of people unless those people would relinquish the right of representation, a right inestimable to them, formidable to tyrants alone:

he has dissolved Representative houses repeatedly & continually, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people:

he has refused for a long space of time to cause others to be elected, whereby the legislative powers, incapable of annihilation, have returned to the people at large for their exercise, the state remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, & convulsions within:

he has endeavored to prevent the population of these states; for that purpose obstructing the laws for naturalization of foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither; & raising the conditions of new appropriations of lands:

he has suffered the administration of justice totally to cease in some of these colonies,  
refusing his assent to laws for establishing judiciary powers:

he has made our judges dependant on his will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and  
amount of their salaries:

he has erected a multitude of new offices by a self-assumed power, & sent hither swarms  
of officers to harrass our people & eat out their substance:

he has kept among us in times of peace standing armies & ships of war:

he has affected to render the military, independant of & superior to the civil power:

he has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitutions  
and unacknoleged by our laws; giving his assent to their pretended acts of legislation, for  
quartering large bodies of armed troops among us;

for protecting them by a mock-trial from punishment for any murders they should  
commit on the inhabitants of these states;

for cutting off our trade with all parts of the world;

for imposing taxes on us without our consent;

for depriving us of the benefits of trial by jury;

for transporting us beyond seas to be tried for pretended offences: for taking away our  
charters, & altering fundamentally the forms of our governments;

for suspending our own legislatures & declaring themselves invested with power to  
legislate for us in all cases whatsoever:

he has abdicated government here, withdrawing his governors, & declaring us out of his  
allegiance & protection:

he has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns & destroyed the lives of our people:

he is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation & tyranny, already begun with circumstances of cruelty & perfidy unworthy the head of a civilized nation:

he has endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers the merciless Indian savages, whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes, & conditions of existence:

he has incited treasonable insurrections in our fellow-subjects, with the allurements of forfeiture & confiscation of our property:

he has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life & liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. this piratical warfare, the opprobrium of **infidel** powers, is the warfare of the CHRISTIAN king of Great Britain. determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought & sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce: and that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished die, he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms against us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them, & murdering the people upon whom he also obtruded them; thus paying off former crimes committed against the **liberties** of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the **lives** of another.

in every stage of these oppressions we have petitioned for redress in the most humble terms; our repeated petitions have been answered by repeated injury. a prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a people who mean to be free. future ages will scarce believe that the hardness of one man, adventured within the short compass of 12 years only, on so many acts of tyranny without a mask, over a people fostered & fixed in principles of liberty.

Nor have we been wanting in attentions to our British brethren. we have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend a jurisdiction over these our states. we have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration & settlement here, no one of which could warrant so strange a pretension: that these were effected at the expence of our own blood & treasure, unassisted by the wealth or the strength of Great Britain: that in constituting indeed our several forms of government, we had adopted one common king, thereby laying a foundation for perpetual league & amity with them: but that submission to their parliament was no part of our constitution, nor ever in idea, if history may be credited: and we appealed to their native justice & magnanimity, as well as to the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations which were likely to interrupt our correspondence & connection. they too have been deaf to the voice of justice & of consanguinity, & when occasions have been given them, by the regular course of their laws, of removing from their councils the disturbers of our harmony, they have by their free election re-established them in power. at this very time too they are permitting their chief magistrate to send over not only soldiers of our common blood, but Scotch & foreign mercenaries to invade & deluge us in blood. these facts have given the last stab to agonizing affection, and manly spirit bids us to renounce for ever these

unfeeling brethren. we must endeavor to forget our former love for them, and to hold them as we hold the rest of mankind, enemies in war, in peace friends. we might have been a free & great people together; but a communication of grandeur & of freedom it seems is below their dignity. be it so, since they will have it: the road to glory & happiness is open to us too; we will climb it in a separate state, and acquiesce in the necessity which pronounces our everlasting Adieu!

We therefore the representatives of the United States of America in General Congress assembled do, in the name & by authority of the good people of these states, reject and renounce a11 allegiance & subjection to the kings of Great Britain & all others who may hereafter claim by, through, or under them; we utterly dissolve & break off a11 political connection which may have heretofore subsisted between us & the people or parliament of Great Britain; and finally we do assert and declare these a colonies to be free and independant states, and that as free & independant states they shall hereafter have power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, & to do all other acts and things which independent states may of right do. And for the support of this declaration we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, & our sacred honour.

**Appendix B: Official Transcript of the Declaration as Approved**

**The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America,** When in the

Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable 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, -- That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.--Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and

usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.

He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only.

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.

He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.

He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers.

He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harrass our people, and eat out their substance.

He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.

He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power.

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended

Legislation:

For Quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:

For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:

For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:

For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:

For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury:

For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences

For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies:



For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:

For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation.

He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.

He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

Nor have We been wanting in attentions to our Brittish brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which, would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

## VITA

Author:	Patrick McHugh
Place of Birth:	Camas, Washington
Undergraduate School Attended:	Eastern Washington University
Degree Awarded:	Bachelor of Arts, 2012
Honors and Awards:	<p>Honors Student, 2009-2010, Eastern Washington University</p> <p>Dean's List, 2009-2012, Eastern Washington University</p> <p>Outstanding Senior Award, 2012, College of Social and Behavioral Sciences and Social Work, Eastern Washington University</p> <p>Graduated Magna Cum Laude, 2012, Eastern Washington University</p>
Professional Experience:	<p>Campaign Advisor, Schroll for Mayor 2019, 2017-Present</p> <p>Communication and Research Intern, Washington State Council of Faculty, 2017</p> <p>Election Returns, Associated Press Election Center, 2016</p> <p>Referral Coordinator, Multicare Rockwood Clinic, 2016-Present</p> <p>Deputy Field Organizer, Organizing for America, 2012</p>