The Declaration of Independence at 250: Foundations and Legacy

By Kimberly Casey

July 4, 2026, marks the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the 200th anniversary of the death of its principal author, Thomas Jefferson. This bibliographic essay surveys significant scholarship on or related to the Declaration, reflecting the broad thematic range it has inspired. Studies have explored the individuals and groups as well as the intellectual influences associated with the document. Other works consider elements of the Declaration's enduring legacy within the United States and in global contexts, acknowledging it as a force in shaping human rights and democratic governance.

This essay is not intended to be comprehensive, but rather representative of various interests in the document. Given his role as the text's principal author, Thomas Jefferson occupies a central place in its scholarship and in this essay. Yet, the contributions of others in its creation, along with evolving interpretations of the document over time, are vital to scholarly understandings of the Declaration's collective legacy.

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The essay is organized thematically, with sources arranged chronologically in the first section and topically in the remainder. Each of the four major themes addresses some aspect of scholarship on the Declaration. The first section examines monographs devoted exclusively to the Declaration itself. The second focuses on scholarship addressing the significant figures and institutions related to the document, as well as works on the American Revolution that encompass the Declaration of Independence as part of the larger historical event. Works associated with philosophical influences present within the text constitute the third section. Finally, the fourth section considers scholarship on the Declaration's influence on other documents and its legacy in the United States.

Monographs and Volumes Focused on the Declaration of Independence

There is no evidence of any monographic works devoted exclusively to the Declaration of Independence in either the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries. A later scholarly critique noted that, while the act of declaring independence was increasingly celebrated in the nineteenth century, the Declaration itself, both as a physical document and in terms of its substantive content, was largely ignored. The irony in the lack of monographic interest is the availability of copies of the document and journal records of the Continental Congresses, which were privately published in the 1770s, and passed through various government entities until assumed by the Library of Congress beginning in 1903. In the early twentieth century, the journals were published in thirty-four volumes as The Journals of the Continental Congress 1774-1789, and today are readily accessible to the public online through the Library's website.

The development of focused scholarship has proved slow, uneven, and fragmented. Nevertheless, four identifiable strains of research emerged in the twentieth century concerning the document and continue to shape current scholarship. The first and earliest research primarily concerned the Declaration as a historical event, focusing on the circumstances of its creation and acceptance. In this approach, the individuals most associated with the drafting and adoption of the document often assume

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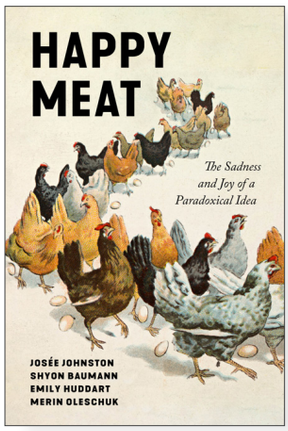

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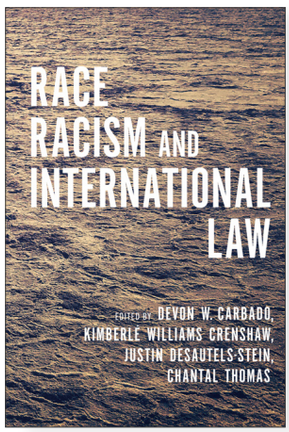

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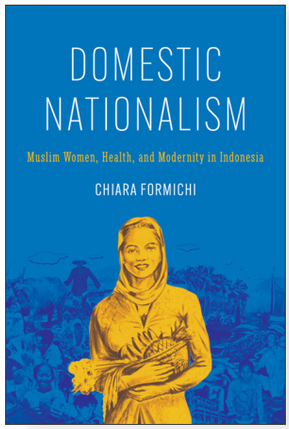

Domestic Nationalism
Muslim Women, Health, and Modernity in Indonesia
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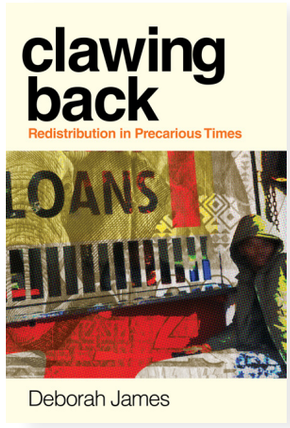

Clawing Back
Redistribution In Precarious Times
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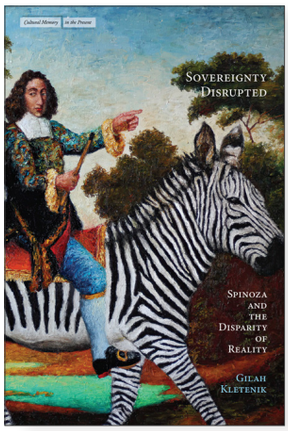

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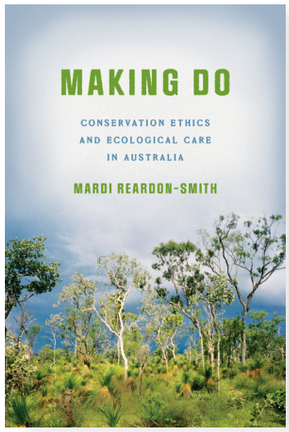

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center stage. The second strain of research addresses the physical document itself and its fate after 1776. The third applies textual analysis of the Declaration, examining its language, meaning, and ideological significance. While the first two approaches are primarily the domain of historians and are sometimes combined in a single monograph, the third type opens the Declaration to interdisciplinary analysis, particularly from literary studies, political science, and philosophy. Although some works attempt to incorporate these three types of approaches into an integrative fourth, textual analysis and ideological significance have become the dominant focuses of contemporary scholarship.

It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that the document was the subject of a book. John Hazelton's 1906 book, *The Declaration of Independence: Its History,* focuses on the events related directly to the document's creation, but also addresses the reactions of the Second Continental Congress members and traces what happened to the signed document through 1894. The historian's approach to treating the Declaration as part of a historical event was continued sixteen years later by Carl Lotus Becker in *The Declaration of Independence: A Study in the History of Political Ideas.* Becker introduced the third analytical approach in this work: textual analysis. Becker also helped introduce a major theme in later scholarship concerning the Declaration: the document as a universal statement of human rights.

The textual focus was further advanced by Julian Boyd's 1945 work, *The Declaration of Independence: The Evolution of the Text as Shown in Facsimiles of Various Drafts by Its Author, Thomas Jefferson,* which analyzed the document's progression from draft to final version as a synthesis of Enlightenment ideas and Jefferson's distinctive prose. Edward Dumbauld continued this trend in 1950 with *The Declaration of Independence and What It Means Today,* examining phrase by phrase the document's philosophical meaning and its continuing relevance to modern political discourse.

That same year, two additional works returned to scholarly interest the history of the event and the physical document. David Freeman Hawke's *A Transaction of Free Men: The Birth and Course of the Declaration of Independence* continued the tradition of historical analysis, focusing on the events surrounding the document's creation and adoption, particularly the roles played by Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. In *The Declaration of Independence: The Story of a Parchment,* David C. Mearns extends the narrative begun by John Hazelton by tracing the journey of the physical document over time.

From the 1970s through the 1990s, scholarship vacillated between historical and textual analysis. Gary Wills, in his 1978 book *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence,* returned to textual analysis, advancing beyond the text's intent or literal interpretation to a deeper thematic and philosophical examination of its intellectual influences. Wills challenges the accepted narrative that Jefferson's final draft is primarily an application of John Locke's social contract theory, positing that other significant influences from political thought, such as classical and Scottish Enlightenment theorists, are apparent.

In the 1990s, Jay Fliegelman's *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance* examined the copies of both extant drafts as rhetorical works, written and punctuated to be read as an oral proclamation. Pauline Maier's 1998 publication, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence,* returns to historical analysis, dissecting the making of the Declaration as a twofold process. First, it was an event that that produced the conventional textual document, and second, it involved the American people communally remaking the document's ideals into something not intended: a statement of values that has largely united, but sometimes divided, the nation.

The 1999 volume *What Did the Declaration Declare?*, edited by Joseph J. Ellis, represents the first concerted effort to reflect on central issues and questions rendered by previous scholarship, including the influence of the text; Jefferson's role as author and the contributions made by the Continental Congress; and its philosophical influences. The effort brought together imminent Declaration historians, including Becker, Willis, and Maier. Similarly, *Declaring Independence: The Origin and Influence of America's Founding Document,* edited by Christian Y. DuPont and Peter S. Onuf, brings together historians for additional essays on the Declaration, including David Armitage's contribution focusing on the global context of the document.

The Declaration's Significant Figures: Thomas Jefferson

Thomas Jefferson was and is a polarizing figure. Popular public interpretation lauds his ideals, beginning with the Declaration of Independence and the crafting of fundamental ideas that became part of the American creed. In addition to authoring the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson further elaborates on themes related to it, such as individual rights and enslavement, in his only book, Notes on the State of Virginia, first published anonymously in Europe in 1785. His extensive correspondence and writings are still being published as part of The Papers of Thomas Jefferson. Volume 1, edited by Julian Boyd, includes documents through 1776, but some of Jefferson's most revealing reflections on his authorship of the Declaration appear in later volumes. Jefferson also discusses the events surrounding the Declaration in his brief Autobiography, written nearly fifty years afterward and published after his death. He provides little insight into the document's intellectual influences or meaning, aside from noting that his harsh condemnation of Great Britain's role in promoting colonial enslavement was removed.

Jefferson's life has undergone multiple treatments by scholars, especially in trying to reconcile his authorship of the Declaration with deeply controversial aspects of his personal life, such as his ownership of enslaved people, fathering children with one of them, who were in turn enslaved, and frequent hypocritical behaviors that did not align with the document's ideals. After early interest in his life in the nineteenth century, Jeffersonian scholarship revived in the 1940s and 1950s with two significant works offering more comprehensive details about his life, including his role in drafting the Declaration and the growing recognition of American ideals within the text. During the 1940s, Dumas Malone began his meticulous, six-volume work, *Jefferson and His Time*. Volume 1, *Jefferson the Virginian,* covers Jefferson's early

life through the end of the American Revolution. The final volume, *The Sage of Monticello*, recounts the defamatory attacks lobbed at Jefferson's authorship of the text by his political enemies as the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration loomed and Jefferson's rebuttal of those criticisms. Yet, despite Malone's comprehensive account of Jefferson's life, he avoids confronting the paradox between Jefferson's public ideals and personal contradictions, particularly his relationship with enslavement, which has left scholars ample opportunity to grapple with unresolved tensions underlying Jefferson's life and his most significant work.

It was not until the 1960s that scholarship began to acknowledge the problems created by the divide between Jefferson the ideologue and the complexities of his later actions and character. Merrill D. Peterson, in *The Jefferson Image on the American Mind,* reflects on Thomas Jefferson's reputation and influence on American thought, ideas, and public opinion since his death. Although Peterson acknowledged the paradox of Jefferson's dual persona, he did not engage with it directly.

Between the 1970s and the 1990s, the confrontation between Jefferson's position with the American public as the principal statesman of American political rights through the Declaration and his reputation occurred, predominantly over his relationship with enslavement. In 1997, Annette Gordon-Reed in *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy* offered compelling historical evidence about Thomas Jefferson's relationship with his enslaved woman (and dead wife's half-sister), Sally Hemings, with convincing DNA studies indicating that Jefferson had fathered at least one of Sally's four surviving children. For those avoiding Jefferson's contradictory behaviors, Gordon-Reed's work made clear that Jefferson's personal life could not be ignored in context of his statements about equality and rights in the Declaration.

The first major monograph addressing the post-Gordon-Reed Jefferson, Joseph J. Ellis's *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson,* responds to ongoing scholarly debates by shunning the "life of Jefferson" style of biography. Instead, Ellis focuses on five critical periods in Jefferson's political career, examining each within its specific historical context to better understand the seeming contradictions of his character. During his "revolutionary moment," the years 1775–1776, Ellis suggests that Jefferson was focused on the ideal society in a radically new formulation. What appears to be a contradiction between his advocacy of liberty and equality and his later stated positions and actions occurred because of personal and professional evolution.

Since the late twentieth century, many works about Jefferson have moved away from the large-scale biographical approach, focusing on specific facets of Jefferson's life, career, or contributions. Two exceptions are the chronologically focused *Thomas Jefferson: The Revolution of Ideas* by R. B. Bernstein, which places Jefferson's Declaration of Independence in the larger context of his support for the universality of the American Revolution, and John B. Boles's *Jefferson: Architect of American Liberty,* which concisely addresses both the event and Jefferson's influences.

Two books from this era focus on Jefferson's collective intellectual influences and the Declaration. Allen Jayne's *Jefferson's Declaration of Independence: Origins, Philosophy and Theology* probes the ideology of the Declaration and who he believes Jefferson's sources were, specifically John Locke and several Scottish Enlightenment figures. In *The Road to Monticello: The Life and Mind of Thomas Jefferson,* Kevin J. Hayes frames a comprehensive biography by focusing on Jefferson's literary interests, particularly the books he read, purchased, and recommended to others. Hayes parses through the wording and phrases of the Declaration, connecting them to possible sources.

Significant Figures: Beyond Jefferson

While Thomas Jefferson is often credited as the principal author of the Declaration of Independence, he himself acknowledged that the document was not wholly the product of his original thought, but rather an assemblage of established ideas. The final version also reflected contributions made during the revision process by the Committee of Five, charged with drafting the Declaration, and the delegates to the Second Continental Congress. In addition to Jefferson and congressional delegates, other individuals stand out as influential to the Declaration's creation.

Among the formative influences on Jefferson prior to his drafting of the Declaration was his law teacher and fellow Signer, George Wythe, a relationship examined in Bruce Chadwick's *I Am Murdered: George Wythe, Thomas Jefferson, and the Killing that Shocked a New Nation.* Another significant figure in Jefferson's intellectual and political development was Richard Bland, Jefferson's first cousin once removed. While Bland's prerevolutionary pamphlet, *An Inquiry into the Rights of the British Colonies,* exerted an indirect influence on Jefferson's political thought, more direct impact came through personal mentorship.

The two Virginians who had the most direct influence on Jefferson's contributions to the Declaration of Independence were Peyton Randolph and George Mason. Randolph, Jefferson's first cousin once removed and the most powerful political figure in Virginia at the time of Jefferson's entry into public life, played a pivotal role in advancing his legal and political career. Randolph was instrumental in his selection for the Second Continental Congress. Robert M. Randolph's *Peyton Randolph and Revolutionary Virginia* documents Randolph's leadership as Speaker of the House of Burgesses and its successor, the Virginia Convention; his tenure as the elected president of both the First and Second Continental Congresses; and his mentorship of Jefferson.

George Mason's influence on Jefferson is most clearly reflected in the Virginia Declaration of Rights, which Mason drafted in the spring of 1776, shortly before the Declaration of Independence. The substance of Mason's Declaration, particularly its articulation of inherent rights, strongly informed Jefferson's famous assertion that "all men are created equal" in the second paragraph of the Declaration. Kate Mason Rowland's *The Life of George Mason, 1725–1792* remains the most comprehensive account of Mason's contributions to Virginia's constitutional convention and the drafting of the Virginia Declaration of Rights.

The Committee of Five consisted of delegates appointed by the Continental Congress. Aside from Jefferson, the most active member of the committee was John Adams. Several monographs provide valuable insights into Adams's role in the Continental Congresses

and his contributions to the Declaration of Independence. In *John Adams: A Life,* John Ferling highlights Adams's leadership at the Second Continental Congress and explains how he leveraged his political influence to secure support for the Declaration's adoption. Richard Alan Ryerson's *John Adams's Republic: The One, the Few, and the Many* offers a detailed exploration of Adams's political and intellectual thought, including those related to the Declaration. Joseph J. Ellis's *Passionate Sage: The Character and Legacy of John Adams* is especially notable for its examination of Adams's retrospective views on the Declaration. The complex and evolving relationship between Adams and Jefferson, particularly their differing perspectives on the Declaration and the broader revolutionary era, is explored through their own words in Lester J. Cappon's edited volume *The Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams* and in Gordon S. Wood's *Friends Divided: John Adams and Thomas Jefferson.*

Benjamin Franklin, Robert R. Livingston, and Roger Sherman were the remaining members of the Committee of Five. Only one work offers substantial insight into their contributions to the Declaration. David Mark Hall's *Roger Sherman and the Creation of the American Republic* provides a valuable examination of Sherman's Calvinist world view, exploring how his religious convictions shaped his political philosophy. Hall suggests that Sherman may have influenced the Declaration either directly through his involvement on the committee or indirectly through the broader influence of Calvinist ideas, thoughts that were shared by other members of Congress.

Works focusing on the Second Continental Congress and its collective membership are limited but do exist. Among the earliest are the nineteenth-century biographical study by Benson J. Lossing, *Biographical Sketches of the Lives of the Signers of the Declaration of American Independence: The Declaration Historically Considered and a Sketch of the Leading Events Connected with the Adoption of the Articles of Confederation and of the Federal Constitution*. Later scholarly works that emphasize the Declaration as a product of the Second Continental Congress include Edmund Cody Burnett's *The Continental Congress,* Jack Rakove's *The Beginnings of National Politics: An Interpretive History of the Continental Congress,* and Richard Beeman's *Our Lives, Our Fortunes and Our Sacred Honor: The Forging of American Independence, 1774–1776.* These studies offer insight into the institutional dynamics, ideological developments, and political pressures that shaped the Congress and, ultimately, the Declaration. Benjamin H. Irvin's *Clothed in Robes of Sovereignty: The Continental Congress and the People out of Doors* explores the broader impact of the Declaration and the Revolutionary War on the formation of a distinctly American political identity and popular consciousness.

Other delegates at the Continental Congress are associated with the Declaration. Due to the prominence of his signature, John Hancock, president of the Second Continental Congress, is inevitably associated with the Declaration. Brooke Barbier's *King Hancock: The Radical Influence of a Moderate Founding Father* explores Hancock's leadership role during the Congress and his influence on the revolutionary movement. Kent J. McGaughy's *Richard Henry Lee of Virginia: A Portrait of an American Revolutionary* examines Lee's critical role as the delegate who formally proposed independence on behalf of Virginia.

A final figure critical to the Declaration of Independence's creation and meaning is the king who was its primary target: George III of Great Britain. Recent research has been more sympathetic to George III than the founding generation and earlier biographers. Comprehensive in its treatment of George's life, Jeremy Black's *George III: America's Last King* highlights the King's involvement in the events leading to and during the American Revolution, while Andrew Roberts's *The Last King of America: The Misunderstood Reign of George III,* provides a revisionist perspective of the reviled king, creating a powerful case for reevaluating the traditional American perspective of him.

Significant Events: The American Revolution and the Declaration

The Declaration of Independence also serves as a central marker of revolutionary action and identity, and as such, it features prominently in broader works on the American Revolution. In *Whose American Revolution Was It?: Historians Interpret the Founding,* Alfred F. Young and Gregory H. Nobles survey the evolving historiography of the Revolution. They argue that regardless of historians' interpretations, at the heart of the American Revolution lies the Declaration of Independence, with its powerful promises of liberty and equality, serving as both a benchmark for societal progress and a guidepost for continuing goals. Robert Middlekauff's *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763–1789* examines the Declaration as the culmination of actions prior to its adoption and as the prelude to the war and subsequent events.

In *The Radicalism of the American Revolution,* Gordon S. Wood explores the democratization of Americans as an outcome of the American Revolution. The audacity that the nonaristocratic populace could rule themselves was, compared to any movement in world history, deeply radical. Thus, the Declaration of Independence was a political message aimed at the British government, but also communicated a social one as well, predicated on the pursuit of happiness and equality.

Alan Taylor, in *American Revolutions: A Continental History, 1750–1804,* emphasizes that American Revolution was far broader in scope than traditionally acknowledged, encompassing a wide array of competing visions among various colonial, Indigenous, enslaved, and loyalist groups. While the Declaration of Independence articulated a vision specific to the "patriot" faction within the thirteen colonies, calling for separation from British rule, its association with equality would later play a divisive role in early American political life.

Philosophical Influences: Direct Sources

When assessing the philosophical impact of the Declaration of Independence, two considerations emerge: the ideas that shaped its creation and its influence on subsequent political thought. While the previous sections have largely addressed individuals involved in

influencing some aspect of drafting the document, this section turns first to works that explore the intellectual traditions informing its content and then to those that examine the Declaration's enduring place in the development of political and philosophical thought.

A seminal work on the philosophical impact of the Declaration of Independence is Bernard Bailyn's *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution.* The fiftieth anniversary edition, published in 2017, recounts Bailyn's central argument that political ideas, rooted in English constitutional development and transmitted through revolutionary-era pamphlets to the public, played a critical role in shaping the American Revolution. Among these pamphlets is Thomas Jefferson's *A Summary View of the Rights of British America,* a precursor to the Declaration, which articulates many of the latter's principles.

Among the pamphlets associated with revolutionary ideas, Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* stands out as the most influential in shaping public opinion among colonists and guiding the Founders and the development of the Declaration of Independence. Two works, Jack Fruchtman's *The Political Philosophy of Thomas Paine* and Gregory Claeys's *Thomas Paine: Social and Political Thought,* examine Paine's contributions not only to the ideological foundations of the Declaration, but also to broader revolutionary thought in the Atlantic world, including the later French Revolution.

Naturally, Jefferson's philosophical interests are of particular importance for understanding the ideas within the Declaration's text. Garrett Ward Sheldon's *The Political Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson* provides a comprehensive perspective.

Other works focus more directly on thought associated with the Founders' approach to the American Revolution and the creation of the Republic, shaped primarily through the Enlightenment. A transnational, transatlantic expansion of ideas politically predicated on themes such as natural rights and limited government, the Enlightenment was a major contributor to the American Founding. James MacGregor Burns in *Fire and Light: How the Enlightenment Transformed Our World* examines the ideas associated with the intellectual movement in its various manifestations in Great Britain, America, and France, paying particular attention to its political realization in the Declaration. *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment,* edited by Alexander Broadie and Craig Smith, further distinguishes between the English and Scottish components of the British Enlightenment. The second edition of the volume includes multiple essays that examine the movement's focal themes and its intellectual impact as reflected in the Declaration of Independence.

John Locke, a major figure of the English Enlightenment, is best known today for his association with natural rights and social contract theory, articulated most clearly in his *Two Treatises of Government*. Although Thomas Jefferson identified Locke as one of the three greatest men in history, the collaborative nature of the Declaration, coupled with the presence of diverse intellectual influences, has led to some scholars questioning the extent of Locke's contribution to its content and arguing that the classical traditions of ancient Greece and Rome exerted greater influence on the American Founding.

The edition of *Two Treatises of Government* edited by Peter Laslett offers a critical framework for understanding Locke's political theory. A. John Simmons's *The Lockean Theory of Rights* systematically categorizes Locke's thought, with particular emphasis on natural rights as foundational to American political ideas. Michael P. Zuckert's *The Natural Rights Republic* reinforces Locke's significance to American political philosophy by highlighting Jefferson's role in articulating a distinctly American version of natural rights theory. Jerome Huyler's *Locke in America: The Moral Philosophy of the Founding Era* offers a robust defense of Locke's significance to the Founding, pushing back against revisionist interpretations and affirming the Declaration as a cornerstone of natural rights liberalism.

Scholarly works that challenge John Locke's influence on the broader scope of the American Founding often emphasize the role of classical influences and republicanism. Important contributions in this tradition include Gordon S. Wood's *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787,* J. G. A. Pocock's *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition, and Paul A. Rahe's Republics Ancient and Modern: Classical Republicanism and the American Revolution.* These studies underscore the enduring relevance of ancient models of virtue, mixed government, and civic duty in shaping the American political tradition.

Attempting to span the perceived divide between liberalism and classicism, Thomas L. Pangle argues in *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism* that Locke's writings contain latent classical themes, especially those emphasizing civic virtue, that deeply resonated with the republican aspirations of the Founders. Similarly, Sheldon's *The Political Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson,* mentioned above, explores multiple philosophical currents in Jefferson's thought. While acknowledging various influences, the work affirms that the Declaration of Independence is most clearly grounded in Lockean principles.

Philosophical Influences: Other Considerations

There are other works that do not neatly fit in the classical and Enlightenment literatures on political thought but are notable for understanding the Declaration's philosophical influences. Hans L. Eicholz's *Harmonizing Sentiments: The Declaration of Independence and the Jeffersonian Idea of Self-Government* not only examines the Declaration as a product of revolutionary-era ideas but also evaluates the successes and shortcomings of its stated ideals. The work affirms Jefferson as the primary author and synthesizer of the document's ideas. In *Founding Visions: The Ideas, Individuals, and Intersections that Created America,* Lance Banning analyzes the liberal and classical influences on Thomas Jefferson. Gregg L. Frazer's *The Religious Beliefs of America's Founders: Reason, Revelation,* and Revolution investigates the religious beliefs of the major Founders, concluding they embraced "theistic rationalism," a view neither fully Deist nor Christian. This study includes a focused analysis of the Declaration's religious language.

The dynamic impetus behind the document—America's drive for political separation—is the focus of *Independence: The Strug-*

gle to Set America Free. In this work, John Ferling pays particular attention to Richard Henry Lee's proposal for independence on behalf of the Virginia delegation and Thomas Jefferson's drafting of the Declaration itself.

The Declaration's Influence and Legacy

Many scholarly works attest to the Declaration of Independence's influence and legacy on other groups or sources, but in differing contexts. Among these are studies that consider its impact on the United States's development. For instance, Alexander Tsesis's *For Liberty and Equality: The Life and Times of the Declaration of Independence* traces the development of the United States through its historical eras and events, arguing the relevance of the document to American identity, culture, law, and policy making. In a similar vein, *The Declaration of Independence: Origins and Impact,* edited by Scott Douglas Gerber, brings together essays from scholars to address the impact of the document has had on various aspects of American government and politics.

The Declaration of Independence was notably an important influence for Abraham Lincoln. In *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words that Remade America,* Garry Willis contends, with the use of rigorous rhetorical and textual analysis, that Lincoln used the Declaration of Independence's argument of equality for all men to reorient the Constitution and refocus the nation on that principle, invigorating his speech and reestablishing the Declaration's fundamental ideals as necessary for national identity. In *Lincoln's Political Thought,* George Kateb points to Lincoln's use of the Declaration as fundamental to his political beliefs, or "religion," and his commitment to human equality as inferred from the Declaration as a dominant force in his life.

In keeping with Lincoln's support of equality, Danielle S. Allen's *Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality* reinterprets the Declaration as an argument for political equality as a foundational component, alongside liberty, of democracy. While scholars have framed equality and freedom as conflictual, Allen contends that democracy depends on their coexistence.

The connection of the Declaration of Independence on both the antislavery and women's movements is profound. Manisha Sinha's *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* explains how the document's focus on equality served as an inspiration for early abolitionists and its text was a framework for abolitionist works. Similarly, early feminist Elizabeth Cady Stanton appropriated the Declaration's text and meaning to assert women's claims to equality. Stanton's appropriation of the document in *A Declaration of Sentiments* is explored in Judith Wellman's *The Road to Seneca Falls: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the First Woman's Rights Convention.*

Full-length studies of the Declaration's influence on the French Revolution and other global movements remain limited; however, in Tom Chaffin's *Revolutionary Brothers: Thomas Jefferson, the Marquis de Lafayette, and the Friendship that Helped Forge Two Nations,* Jefferson's consultation on the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* and other aspects of their cooperation across two revolutions is explored.

Lastly, in *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History,* David Armitage examines how the Declaration was viewed during Jefferson's lifetime as a model for similar documents around the world, a role that has only expanded over time. While Americans have a sense of the document's importance for themselves, understanding the history of its global significance has lagged. By tracing the international dissemination of the Declaration's ideas and its function as a product of early and modern globalization, Armitage offers a distinct perspective on its enduring significance.

Conclusion

This essay surveyed only a portion of the literature related to the Declaration of Independence. Its significance as a defining document for the American revolutionaries in 1776, its incorporation of both classical and early modern philosophical ideas, and its enduring influence on themes central to humanity make it a near peerless document in the realms of world history, literature, philosophy, and political science. The upcoming 250th anniversary, especially in the context of current global politics, is certain to renew public and scholarly interest in the Declaration's meaning and legacy.

In anticipation of this milestone, at least two works are set to be released in late 2025: *Declaring Independence: Why 1776 Matters* by Edward J. Larson (W. W. Norton) and *The Great Contradiction: The Tragic Side of the American Founding* by Joseph J. Ellis (Knopf). Both are poised to stimulate further interest and scholarship as they contribute to the evolving legacy of the Declaration of Independence.

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