

Comparing the Grievances

Thomas Jefferson's grievances in *The Declaration of Independence* is a slight expansion to the grievances proclaimed in the Preamble to the Virginia Constitution, which he wrote during mid-May to early June 1776.

Each charge against King George III appears in both documents, often with identical wording. Jefferson was not merely influenced by the Virginia grievances—but was their sole author. The complaints outlined in his Virginia draft were not confined to the concerns of a single colony; they served as a sweeping indictment of British rule, articulating frustrations shared throughout all thirteen colonies.

When tasked with drafting the Declaration, Jefferson did not need to construct a new case for independence—he had already done so for Virginia. Instead, he refined and expanded his well-established arguments, elevating them from a regional protest to a unifying call to the colonies. Striking similarities between the two documents confirm the ideological foundation for American independence was firmly in place before the Second Continental Congress acted. This was not merely a precursor—it was the foundation of America's call for independence.

From “A Summary View” to the Grievances

These grievances did not emerge in isolation; they distilled the essence of Jefferson's complaints first laid out in *A Summary View of the Rights of British America*, written two years earlier in July 1774. That document, delivered to Virginia delegates in session at Williamsburg, was Jefferson's bold attempt to define the American colonies' rights and to condemn British oppression.

His 1776 grievances generally follow the same sequence as those in his *Summary View*, beginning with the king's obstruction of colonial laws, his refusal to approve necessary reforms, and his interference with representative government. Jefferson denounced the king's dissolving of colonial legislatures, his failure to call new assemblies, and his restrictions on westward expansion—issues that also appear at the forefront of both the Virginia grievances and his Rough Draft of the Declaration. Condemning standing armies, foreign mercenaries, controlling our trade, and taxation without representation all appeared in his 1774 arguments.

By the time he wrote the Virginia grievances and the Declaration, Jefferson was not merely reacting to recent events—he was reinforcing a well-established case for independence that he had been refining for years.

Final Edits to the Grievances in The Declaration of Independence

As Jefferson copied the grievances from his Virginia document into the Rough Draft of *The Declaration of Independence*, he made very few changes. All the complaints stayed, with small tweaks to make them stronger. Some were expanded, like the King sending soldiers, and trifling with courts. Later, the clause blaming King George for promoting slavery was cut because southern colonies refused to sign if it remained. Other parts were reworked, showing how difficult it was for delegates to unanimously agree on content and phrasing. Referring to edits and deleting the Slavery Clause, Jefferson wrote that Congress had mangled it.

The Table of Grievances

Grievances that follow are not the product of passion, but of patience worn thin. Jefferson organized them like a lawyer drafting an indictment—each charge precise, supported by precedent, and escalating in moral force. Together they transform a list of colonial complaints into a sweeping legal and philosophical case for independence. The table that follows traces this evolution, comparing Jefferson's Virginia arguments to his final Declaration text and showing how his earlier logic matured into America's charter of accountability. Grievances highlighted in gray indicate those added in the final Declaration, appearing for the first time after the earlier drafts.



Refining the Grievances

#	Declaration of Independence Official Printed Version June 15 ^{+/} – 28, 1776	Declaration of Independence, Rough Draft June 11 – 14 ^{+/} , 1776	Jefferson’s Preamble to the Virginia Constitution Mid-May – June 10 ^{+/} , 1776
1	He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.	he has refused his assent to laws the most wholesome and necessary for the public good:	by putting his negative on laws the most wholesome & necessary for ye public good;
2	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 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.	by denying to his governors permission to pass laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operations for his assent, and, when so suspended, neglecting to attend to them for many years;
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 and formidable to tyrants only.	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:	by refusing to pass certain other laws, unless the person to be benefited by them would relinquish the inestimable right of representation in the legislature.
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.	<i>Not in the Rough Draft, but comes from the Virginia House of Burgesses Resolution (May 24, 1774) where Jefferson was a delegate:</i> “This House, being deeply impressed with the deplorable condition of our sister colony of Massachusetts Bay, whose Assembly is now held in a place at a distance from their records and from the body of their constituents.”	
5	He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.	he has dissolved Representative houses repeatedly & continually, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people:	by dissolving legislative assemblies repeatedly and continually for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people;
6	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 meantime, exposed to all the Dangers of Invasion from without, and convulsions within.	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:	when dissolved, by refusing to call others for a long space of time, thereby leaving the political system without any legislative head;

7	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, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.	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:	by endeavoring to prevent the population of our country, & for that purpose obstructing the laws for the naturalization of foreigners & raising the condition lacking appropriations of lands;
8	He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers.	Albemarle County Resolves: Jefferson, July 26, 1774: “We will ever maintain the legal and constitutional power of our own courts of justice, and protest against any attempt by the King or Parliament of Great Britain to suspend their operation or prevent the due course of justice within this colony.”	
9	He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.	While no direct precedent appears in Jefferson’s earlier writings, this grievance evolved naturally from colonial outrage over one of the Intolerable Acts, the 1774 Massachusetts Government Act, which made judges dependent upon royal will and salaries—widely condemned as the destruction of judicial independence.	
10	He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harrass our people, and eat out their substance.	The Grievance wording is Jefferson’s own invention—appearing first in his Fair Copy of the Declaration—but the complaint it expresses was rooted in colonial outrage over the Intolerable Acts (1774). Each expanded royal customs and tax enforcement, filling the colonies with swarms of officers to collect taxes. This phrase or concept is not found in any writings of other members of the Committee of Five. Jefferson did refer slightly to this in his <i>Summary View</i> .	
11	He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.	he has kept among us in times of peace standing armies & ships of war:	by keeping among us, in times of peace, standing armies and ships of war;
12	He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil Power.	he has affected to render the military, independant of & superior to the civil power:	lacking to render the military independant of & superior to the civil power;
13	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:	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,	by combining with others to subject us to a foreign jurisdiction, giving his assent to their pretended acts of legislation.
14	For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:	for quartering large bodies of armed troops among us;	for quartering large bodies of troops among us;
15	For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:	The Administration of Justice Act allowed any Crown official accused of murder or other capital crimes in Massachusetts to be removed from the colony and tried elsewhere—often in England—by courts sympathetic to the Crown. In practice, it placed royal officers above colonial law, ensuring that even the gravest abuses could escape local justice under the guise of a “lawful” trial.	
16	For cuttingxs off our Trade with all parts of the world	for cutting off our trade with all parts of the world;	for cutting off our trade with all parts of the world;
17	For imposing taxes on us without our consent:	for imposing taxes on us without our consent;	for imposing taxes on us without our consent;
18	For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury:	for depriving us of the benefits of trial by jury;	for depriving us of the benefits of trial by jury;

19	For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offenses:	for transporting us beyond seas to be tried for pretended offences:	for transporting us beyond seas to be tried for pretended offences; and
20	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:	<p>From: Jefferson's July 1775 draft of: <i>The Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms</i>:</p> <p>“They have erected in a neighbouring province, acquired by the joint arms of Great Britain and America, a tyranny dangerous to the very existence of all these colonies.”</p> <p><i>He drafted this as a delegate to the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia. His draft was considered a bit too harsh, so it was modified by John Dickinson to tone down the rhetoric.</i></p>	
21	For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:	for taking away our charters, & altering fundamentally the forms of our governments;	“No exercise of such a power, of dividing and dismembering a country, has ever occurred in his majesty's realm of England, nor could it be justified or acquiesced under there, or in any other part of his majesty's empire.” <i>Jefferson, Summary View</i>
22	For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.	for suspending our own legislatures & declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever:	for suspending our own legislatures & declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever;
23	He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.	he has abdicated government here, withdrawing his governors, & declaring us out of his allegiance & protection:	and finally, by abandoning the Helm of Government, and declaring us out of his Allegiance and Protection;
24	He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.	he has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns & destroyed the lives of our people:	by plundering our seas, ravaging our coasts, burning our towns and destroying the lives of our people;
25	He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation, and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & Perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and unworthy the Head of a civilized nation.	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 unworthy the head of a civilized nation:	by transporting at this time a large army of foreign mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation & tyranny already begun with circumstances of cruelty & perfidy so unworthy the head of a civilized nation;
26	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.	<p>On June 5, 1776, The Philadelphia Gazette reported that American sailors had been captured or impressed into British service—men forced to man the very guns turned against their countrymen. Between June 8 and 10, Congress received additional dispatches describing the abuse of American prisoners aboard British ships. Jefferson, seething at these reports, transformed outrage to ink by adding this to the Fair Copy of <i>The Declaration of Independence</i> after he had completed the Rough Draft.</p>	

27	<p>He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and 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, and conditions.</p>	<p>he has incited treasonable insurrections in our fellow-subjects citizens, with the allurements of forfeiture & confiscation of our property: <i>(Combined following notations in the Working Composition Draft, which was Jefferson's copy of his Preamble to the Virginia Constitution)</i></p> <p>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:</p>	<p><i>This is placed two clauses higher in Virginia Constitution's Preamble:</i></p> <p>by inciting insurrections of our fellow subjects, with the allurements of forfeiture and confiscation;</p> <hr/> <p><i>(These are two separate grievances in the Virginia Preamble)</i></p> <p>by endeavouring 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 of Existance;</p>
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Jefferson's Lost Clause—The "Slavery Clause"

Final Declaration of Independence	Rough Draft of the Declaration of Independence	Preamble to the Virginia Constitution
<p>The Slavery Clause in Jefferson's Rough Draft was removed at the insistence of representatives from Georgia and South Carolina.</p> <p>Those delegates refused to sign the Declaration if this clause remained. Eleven states were in favor of this clause.</p> <p>It was imperative that all of the colonies were united in this effort or it was doomed to fail.</p> <p>Jefferson blamed not only Southern interests for its removal, but also Northern slave merchants, "for tho' their people have very few slaves themselves yet they had been pretty considerable carriers of them to others."</p> <p>In the end, Jefferson was dejected, feeling Congress had "mangled it."</p>	<p>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 <u>CHRISTIAN</u> 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 obruded 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.</p>	<p>by prompting our negroes to rise in arms among us; those very negroes whom he hath from time to time by an inhuman use of his negative he hath refused permission to exclude by law;</p>

Indicting King George III

<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>by answering our repeated petitions for redress with a repetition of injuries;</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>Jefferson's First Draft of his Proposed Virginia Constitution: "From all which premisses it appears that the sd. George Guelp, not only for his criminal abuses of the high duties of the kingly office, but also by his own free & voluntary act of abandoning & putting us from his allegiance subjection & dominion, may now lawfully, rightfully, & by consent of both parties be divested of the kingly powers:"</p>

Jefferson's introduction to the Virginia grievances was introduced in the Virginia Constitution with these words:

"Whereas George Guelf king of Great Britain and Ireland and Elector of Hanover, heretofore entrusted with the exercise of the kingly office in this government hath endeavored to pervert the same into a detestable and insupportable tyranny;"

The Welf family—also spelled Guelf in old English—is one of the oldest noble families in Europe. The family originated in what is now southern Germany, and were part of the House of Hanover, a German royal dynasty.

When Jefferson called King George III "George Guelf," he was invoking the king's German ancestry. The name served as a subtle but pointed reminder that George was not truly British. Not only was he a tyrant, but, as Jefferson implied, "he's not even—really—one of us." The word Guelf is derived from the Old High German word Welf, which literally means "whelp" or "wolf."

Jefferson's indictment of King George III was not an act of rebellion but the culmination of two years of reason and composition. It began with his May-June 1774 *Albemarle County Resolves*, written in defense of Boston's suffering under tyrannical edicts, where he first linked local injustice to universal rights. It continued with his *Summary View of the Rights of British America* in June-July 1774—a sweeping argument that the colonies were independent by nature, joined to Britain only by mutual consent. The following year, in the *Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms*, Jefferson transformed protest into principle, asserting that liberty justified resistance. By May 1776, his Preamble to the Virginia Constitution refined these ideas into a compact series of grievances—becoming, in essence, the pre-Rough Draft of *The Declaration of Independence*.

Thus, the Grievances of 1776 were not spontaneous outrage but the polished result of years spent reasoning through tyranny and contradiction. Each stage of Jefferson's writing was both rehearsal and revelation, bringing clarity to America's moral purpose. The final Declaration did more than indict a king—it completed a philosophical journey that began in Albemarle and ended in Philadelphia. Liberty was declared. Principle became law. Jefferson's words captured the voice and conscience of a nation.

Jefferson's Epiphany

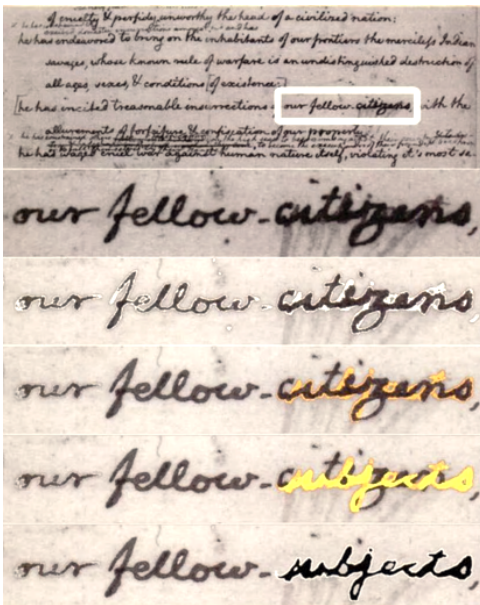
No longer Subjects, but Citizens

In his Rough Draft of *The Declaration of Independence*, Thomas Jefferson wrote, “**he has incited treasonable insurrections in our fellow-citizens.**” But before he had written “citizens,” he had written “**subjects,**” copying it from his Preamble to the Virginia Constitution. “Subjects” had defined people’s relationship to a king for centuries. Right then, **Jefferson had an epiphany—*We are no longer subjects to a king!* He wiped out the word “subjects” while the wet ink was still wet, and wrote “citizens.”**

With this one simple change, Jefferson transformed not just a sentence, but the entire future of America. By choosing citizens over subjects, he made it clear: the people of the new United States were not just members of a country—they were co-owners of it. In that moment, we became not just a new nation, but a new people—with a new social contract where we were **no longer “Subjects,” but “Citizens.”**

A Hidden Change, Discovered Centuries Later

For years, historians like Julian Boyd in his 1950 *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, suspected that Jefferson had changed his mind when writing this part of the Declaration. But the proof didn’t come until 2010, when scientists at the Library of Congress used a special imaging technology called hyperspectral imaging to examine Jefferson’s draft.



Hyperspectral imaging takes pictures using different parts of the light spectrum—including ones invisible to the human eye. This helped scientists see through the ink smudge and reveal the hidden word underneath.

Dr. Fenella France, one of the scientists, described the moment she realized what she had found:

“It had been a spine-tingling moment when I was processing data late at night and realized there was a word underneath citizens.”

She carefully examined the images and confirmed what no one had been able to see for over 230 years—Jefferson had originally written “subjects” and then deliberately changed it to “citizens.”

This discovery was huge. It revealed an important moment in Jefferson’s thinking. The people of the colonies weren’t subjects anymore. They were free citizens of a new republic.

Was This the First Time Jefferson Used “Citizens”?

After learning about this moment, this author wondered: Had Jefferson ever used the word “citizens” before? Or was this truly his epiphany—the moment when he realized what the American people had become?

Digging deep into historical record, may be found:

- **John Locke’s *Treatises on Government*** – Locke used “subjects” and “people” hundreds of times, but never “citizens.”
- **Jefferson’s *Summary View of the Rights of British America*** – No sign of the word “citizens.”
- **Jefferson’s Preamble to the Virginia Constitution** – No mention of “citizens.” Grievances Added After the Rough Draft

As Jefferson refined his Rough Draft into a “Fair Copy,” he did not draw from others but from his own judgment, memory, and sense of justice. He added seven charges to complete the moral and legal symmetry of the Declaration. The following Grievances filled the gaps in his Rough Draft. These were not merely appended at the end, but placed strategically in the list. The text in these Grievances bears Jefferson’s forensic fingerprint.

#	Added After the Rough Draft	Source Text
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.	Virginia House of Burgesses Resolution (May 24, 1774) with Jefferson present as a delegate: “This House, being deeply impressed with the deplorable condition of our sister colony of Massachusetts Bay, whose Assembly is now held in a place at a distance from their records and from the body of their constituents.”
8	He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers.	Sourced from Jefferson’s Albemarle County Resolves (July 26, 1774), in which he condemned parliamentary interference with “our internal polity and administration of justice,” informing Jefferson’s charge that the King had obstructed justice by refusing assent to judicial laws.
9	He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.	No direct precedents were in Jefferson’s earlier writings. This Grievance reflects colonial outrage over the 1774 Massachusetts Government Act, which made judges dependent on royal will and salaries—an act viewed as the destruction of judicial independence. Jefferson transformed this into a general indictment of executive control over justice.
10	He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance.	The phrase is Jefferson’s own invention—appearing first in his Fair Copy—but the complaint it expresses was rooted in colonial outrage over the enforcement of the Sugar Act (1764), Townshend Duties (1767), and later the Intolerable Acts (1774). Each expanded royal customs and tax enforcement, filling the colonies with swarms of officers to collect taxes. Jefferson transformed this long-festering economic Grievance into one of the Declaration’s most memorable indictments. <i>No source in earlier Jefferson or Adams writings reflects the wording of this Grievance.</i>
15	For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States.	The Administration of Justice Act (May 20, 1774), included this key clause: ...if any inquisition or indictment shall be found or made in the said province of Massachusetts Bay, or within any county, city, town, or place therein, against any person for murder, or other capital offence, in the execution of his duty as an officer of the Crown, it shall and may be lawful for the governor, or in his absence the lieutenant governor, to order that such person be sent to any other colony, or to Great Britain, to be tried for the same; and such trial shall be deemed, taken, and adjudged to be legal and sufficient, as if the offence had been committed and the trial had been in the province where the act was done.
20	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.	<i>Source: Jefferson’s June 1775 draft of The Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms:</i> They have erected in a neighbouring province, acquired by the joint arms of Great Britain and America (fighting as allies in the French and Indian War), a tyranny dangerous to the very existence of all these colonies.
26	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.	On June 5, 1776, The Philadelphia Gazette reported that American sailors had been captured or impressed into British service—men forced to man the very guns turned against their countrymen. Between June 8 and 10, Congress received additional dispatches describing the abuse of American prisoners aboard British ships. Jefferson, seething at these reports, transformed outrage to ink by adding this to the Fair Copy. <i>It was in this new Grievance that Jefferson employed the term “citizens”—the very word he had earlier substituted for subjects in his final domestic complaint. His evolution of thought is visible in these changes: from subjected loyalty imposed by a king to citizenship driven by conscience.</i>