What Did the Declaration Declare?

Readings Selected and Introduced by

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Selections by

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1. What was Jefferson’s role in the drafting of
the Declaration?  25

Dumas Malone

Herald of Freedom: 1776, From Jefferson
the Virginian

“So far as form is concerned, the continuing appeal of the
Declaration lies in the fact that it is clear and simple and that,
for all its careful craftsmanship and consummate grace, it was
not so highly polished to lose its edge.”
2. Is the philosophy of the Declaration Lockean?  43

**Carl Becker**

*The Natural Rights Philosophy, From The Declaration of Independence: A Study in the History of Political Ideas*

"It was Locke's conclusion that seemed to the colonists sheer common sense, needing no argument at all."

3. Or was Jefferson more influenced by Scottish thinkers?  65

**Garry Wills**

*Jefferson and the Scottish Enlightenment, From Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence*

"There is no indication that Jefferson read the *Second Treatise* carefully or with profit. Indeed there is no direct proof that he read it at all."

4. What was the cast of Jefferson's mind?  79

**Joseph J. Ellis**

*The Spring of '76: Texts and Contexts, From American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson*

"Though indebted to Locke, Jefferson's political vision was more radical than liberal, driven as it was by a youthful romanticism unwilling to negotiate its high standards with an imperfect world."

5. How much did the Continental Congress shape the Declaration?  95

**Pauline Maier**

*Mr. Jefferson and His Editors, From American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence*

"This was no hack editing job: the delegates who labored over the draft Declaration had a splendid ear for language."

*Making Connections*  107

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