

Separated at Birth: Text and Context of the Declaration of Independence

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The eye does not see things but images of things that mean other things.

—Italo Calvino

NEW YORK, July 9, 1776: A Declaration issued by the Continental Congress was received by General Washington and ordered proclaimed to his army.

EXETER, July 16, 1776: A Declaration was read aloud to a crowd gathered at the Court House.

BOSTON, July 18, 1776: A Declaration was recited at one o'clock from the balcony of the Town House.

AS EACH of the colonies received what we now refer to as the Declaration of Independence, it was arriving in yet other locations, carrying its message from Philadelphia to multiple destinations in near simultaneity. On the day following the Declaration's announcement in Boston, even as it continued to be broadcast, actions were taken that would alter its perception in the future. Two weeks after its printing, publication, and dissem-

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ination, its authors began to recast the document as a manuscript, a process that would divorce the text from its context in print culture. Originally an edition—a typographic plural—it was transmogrified into an artifact—a calligraphic singular. By reverting to a more primitive way of formalizing the written word, a copy was created that appears to predate that from which it was drawn. Calligraphic form has portrayed the content of the Declaration so convincingly that it has taken on a life of its own. Unlike the typography of the initial document intended for public reading, the life of the calligraphy has been defined in primarily visual, rather than verbal, terms. This paper will look at the implications of representing the Declaration through calligraphic form.

Today, examples illustrating the visual dominance of the Declaration abound in high and low culture alike. Valued for its immediately identifiable *texture*, the Declaration's distinctive calligraphy often lends itself to backgrounds, as in posters and advertisements for the film *Amistad* (fig. 1). On the jacket of Pauline Maier's *American Scripture* it recedes through light gray ink and cropping more appropriate to photography than text (fig. 2). And in the finale of the Broadway revival of *1776*, it performed as a giant transparency hovering ambivalently between foreground and background before coming forward momentarily (fig. 3).¹ These encounters with the document are constructed solely upon appearance. The text is instantly recognizable but never fully readable. The Declaration of Independence has become an icon of democracy itself (fig. 4).

We begin with a review of the evolution of the document. On June 7, 1776, Richard Henry Lee introduced a resolution calling for American independence from Great Britain. Three days later, the Continental Congress postponed a vote for three weeks, in part to commission a declaration that would coincide with passage of the resolution. The following day, Congress established a Committee of Five—Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John

1. Tony Walton, set designer of the Broadway revival of *1776*, in a letter to the author, March 3, 1998.

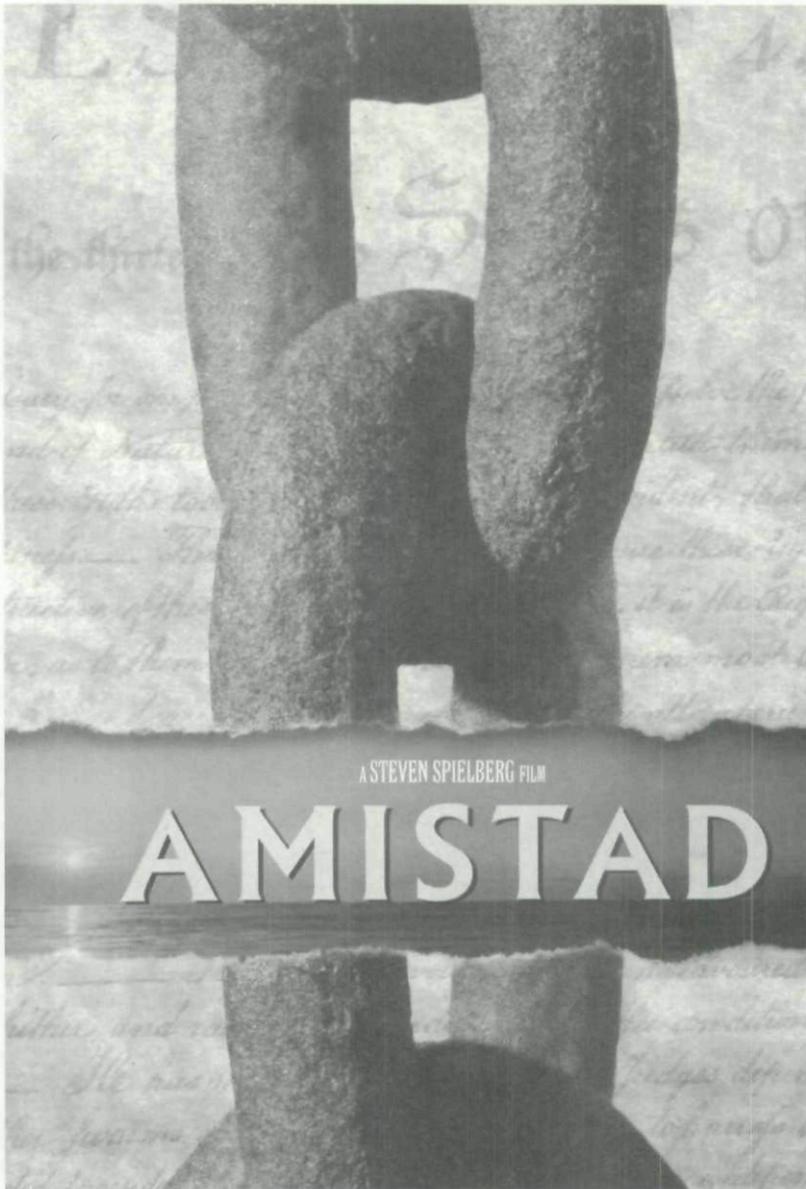


Fig. 1. Declaration calligraphy used as a background in motion picture advertisement. Courtesy of DreamWorks L.L.C.

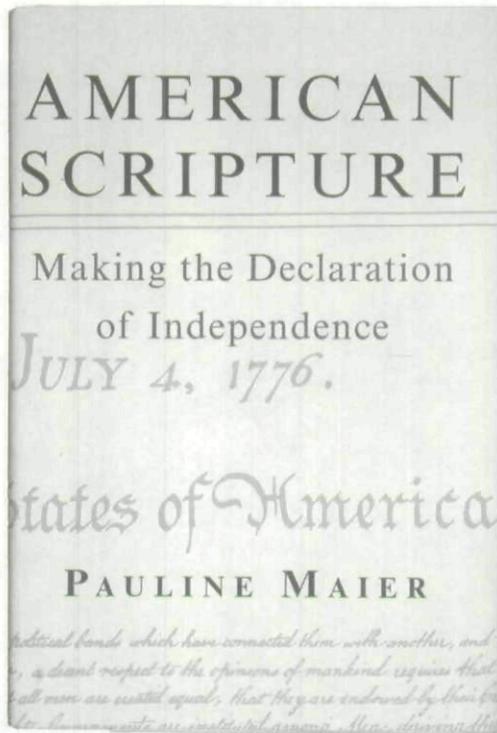


Fig. 2. Declaration calligraphy used as background for book dust jacket (Copyright © 1997 by Alfred A. Knopf and reprinted by permission).

Adams, Robert Livingston, and Roger Sherman—to determine the content. Writing responsibility fell to Jefferson, although some now consider his work more as that of a draftsman than an author.² During the first months of 1776, following the publication of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, many individual communities had expressed their solidarity with the idea of independence

2. Pauline Maier, *American Scripture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 48–98, 171. Maier expanded significantly upon the previously recognized notion of the Declaration's collective authorship. See Julian P. Boyd, *The Declaration of Independence: The Evolution of the Text as Shown in Facsimiles of Various Drafts* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1945), 1. The philosophy of collectivity as opposed to individuality is discussed in Garry Wills, *Inventing America* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1978). See also Joseph Ellis, *American Sphinx* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997) 56–58. The founders acting collectively is the thesis of Joseph Ellis, *Founding Brothers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000)



Fig. 3. Finale of Broadway revival of 1776 showing Declaration calligraphy rendered on scrim lighted for transparency effect (Copyright © 1998 by Tony Walton and reprinted by permission).

by passing their own resolutions and declarations. Jefferson sought to assemble what he himself referred to as 'sentiments of the day,' not to invent something never before expressed.³ When presented to Congress on June 28, Adams, Franklin, and the committee as a whole had made forty-seven alterations to Jefferson's composition.⁴ And, although Congress voted for independence on July 2, the entire body then spent another two days making thirty-nine additional alterations to the draft. Clearly, as others have claimed, the Declaration of Independence, like the govern-

3. Carl Becker, *The Declaration of Independence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), 27.

4. *Declaring Independence: Drafting the Document* (November 21, 1995) Library of Congress (Online). Available: <http://lcweb.loc.gov/exhibits/declara/declara3.html> (May 10, 2002). Maier, *American Scripture*, 99–105.

Charles Thomson, appear typographically, not as autographs. The primacy of typography and printing is indicated by the prominence of Dunlap's name, centered below Hancock's. The printer's integral role in generating the final text caused him to take responsibility even before the members of Congress. As these three names were the only ones attached to the document, an argument could easily be made for considering these men to be the signers of the Declaration. (Indeed, for the first month no one else signed, and for six months no other signer was publicly known.)

The Dunlap broadsides were immediately dispatched to the various colonies. In their plurality, the broadsides took the Declaration to the colonists and served as typescripts for the local printers and newspapers that subsequently reprinted it. The first newspaper publication was in the *Pennsylvania Evening Post* of July 6. In the weeks following, wherever the Declaration was being proclaimed—in New York, in Exeter, in Boston, and around the new nation—the speaker was reciting from either a Dunlap imprint or one of its typographic descendants.⁶ The definitive document, the one that actually performed the task of declaring independence, was a manifestation of typography and printing.

The Declaration was quickly disseminated in printed form. By July 18, twenty-four newspapers, from Annapolis to Salem, had used the Dunlap imprints as typescripts and republished the text.⁷ Yet on the following day, Congress ordered it newly inscribed, and in so doing, the context—the form by which the Declaration had become both tangible and public—was altered. The reason stemmed from a decision made on July 2. In the vote to adopt independence, New York's delegates, operating under year-old instructions not to impede reconciliation with Britain, had abstained.⁸ Only after that colony's Provincial Assembly released its

6. Whitfield Bell, Jr., *The Declaration of Independence: Four 1776 Versions* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1986).

7. *The Declaration of Independence* (May, 1996). The National Park Service (Online). Available: <http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/inde7.htm> (April 18, 2002).

8. Maier, *American Scripture*, 45.

delegates to endorse independence would Congress order the Declaration engrossed (i.e. transcribed in a large, formal hand) on parchment.⁹ 'Unanimous,' a word conspicuously missing from the printing, was added to the title (see figs 4, 5). The singularity of this document was emphasized by an additional change in the title that supported its unique form. 'A Declaration' in typography became *The Unanimous Declaration* in calligraphy. It took until August 2 for the calligraphy to be completed and presented for signing.¹⁰ Afterward, the document was rolled up and kept in the privacy of the papers of Congress.

The order of events reveals the chirographic Declaration to be more of an artist's conception of the typography that preceded it than a document in its own right. Although the scribe, who is thought to have been Timothy Matlack, used ink and quill rather than paint and brush, he just as surely composed a picture. As a hand-crafted image of the manufactured Dunlap printing, it is an interpretation of the declaration process, much like John Trumbull's painting *The Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776*. Both visualize the moment of independence by relying on the date in their titles; the parchment, no less than the painting, is out of sync with the image depicted. The painting, later enlarged in a commission for the Capitol, and now disseminated on the reverse of the two-dollar bill, actually shows not the events of July 4, but those of June 28—the Committee of Five presenting its draft¹¹ (fig. 6). Similarly, the calligraphy, while retaining the date of the

9. Most of the characteristics of calligraphy find their complement in parchment as its preferred substrate. Similarly, the availability of paper as an economical and plentiful substitute for parchment was a complement to typographic printing. The reproduction of the Declaration, however, often obscures the substrate, sometimes eliminating it altogether. (See figs. 2 and 3.) This essay focuses on the text—the visual elements that are consistently present in all reproductions—on its surface.

10. Maier, *American Scripture*, 151; Becker, *The Declaration of Independence*, 185

11. John Bidwell, 'American History in Image and Text,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 98 (1989): 266. Though the Trumbull image is often cited simply as 'The Declaration of Independence,' eliminating all or part of the date as is the case on the two-dollar Federal Reserve Note, the full title of the original canvas, from which the Capitol commission was modeled, includes the complete date. Yale University Art Gallery, which received the painting directly from Trumbull, uses the complete title as indicated in its earliest records. *Catalogue of Paintings by Colonel Trumbull* (New Haven, Conn.: Peck, 1835, 14).

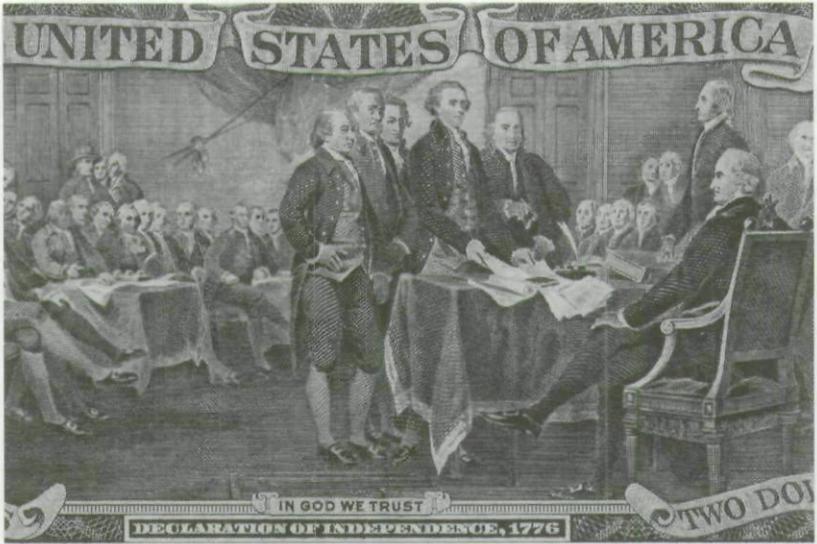


Fig. 6. Detail of two-dollar Federal Reserve Note, reverse. Engraving after painting by John Trumbull.

July 4 typography, illustrates New York's subsequent endorsement and the signing on August 2. Furthermore, the signing that would have occurred on July 4 could not be replicated a month later. Some representatives who were present on the fourth never signed, including Robert Livingston, one of the Committee of Five. Other representatives, who were not in Congress in July but arrived in August, were also allowed to sign. Never together at one time, the signers are not exactly the same group that adopted either the resolution or the Declaration.¹² Representations of the event of July 4 are equally illusive whether on canvas or parchment. The painting has always been understood as a recreation, in part because we know it was not painted on the date of its title. The calligraphy, penned weeks after the date in its title, was recreated as well.

If the calligraphy is a picture drawn from the typography, what, besides the text, does it illustrate? Does the typography say some-

12. Wills, *Inventing America*, 339

thing different? The Declaration was a collective effort in three interrelated aspects: authorship, audience, and content. Its authorship was a collaboration among many, the core of whom labored not as individuals on their own behalf but as representatives. The audience consisted of colonists spread across a vast distance, as well as governments of other nations. The content asserts a foundation for a collective form of government; it fuses the constituents into a union of equals.

Collectivity is the essence of a republic. Mirroring the collective process that brought the Declaration forth, the multiplicity of the Dunlap prints enabled the text to reach the colonists in whose names it had been composed. The Dunlap printing bridged the conceptual distance between the colonists and the Congress by collapsing the physical distance between scattered communities and Philadelphia and connecting the work of the representatives to their constituents. The identical prints supported the principles of equality contained in the content. With typographic printing there was no place where hierarchy could reside; there was no difference between the document in the hands of the people and the one in the hands of those in a position of power.

Consider the extent to which collectivity is embodied in the two forms of the Declaration document: the circulated, printed text and the subsequent uncirculated, handwritten text. Each represents the written word through a different alphabetical system: typography and calligraphy.¹³ And each system operates symbolically as well as functionally.

On the symbolic level, the collectivity of typography lies in both its production and its consumption. An assemblage of pre-existing letterforms, typography detaches the text from the hand of an individual author. Typography seamlessly blends the hands of many collaborators into an institutional whole and therefore is

13. Calligraphy is not specific to any particular style, but indicates a level of expertise. It is in this sense, as a formalized kind of handwriting, that I use the word. When discussing matters pertaining to both calligraphy and handwriting, I use the general term *chirography*. I use the term *engross* as the verb form of calligraphy.

consonant with the portrayal of a collectively authored text issued by a congress. The appearance of type also signals a manufacturing process that employs the collective effort of a variety of people beyond the author(s).¹⁴ Because it is a means for multiplying a text, the presence of type implies multiple audiences, each aware that it is not the sole receiver. Type is inherently plural and public.

Calligraphy, the mark of one person forming letters personally, is connected to an individual and consonant with a single author. The calligrapher repeats the physical task of the person who drafted the text, usually with the same kind of instrument—a pen. Because calligraphy, like all chirography, produces only a single document, it maintains individuality and uniqueness. Each reader perceives the limited scope of readership. In comparison to typography, calligraphy is inherently singular and private.¹⁵

The two text formations also function differently. Typography works for the audience. Typography idealizes and standardizes the letters of the alphabet in forms that are distinct from those of handwriting and that consistently fulfill readers' expectations. Because typographic letters are independent of the act of writing, their form need not be tailored to the hand movement of the writer, but rather to the eye movement of the reader. Consistency occurs on three levels. First, the structure of the typographic letterform is clearly recognizable regardless of the style of a particular font. Second, each letterform within a font is identical to its iterations throughout the document (as well as in other documents set in the same font). Third, and most important, each document as a whole is identical to all of the other imprints. Typography exists to make documents multiple, each one speaking to a different audience identically and, perhaps, simultaneously. Typography does this by not producing a single original; *all* the imprints are originals, all indistinguishable from one an-

14. Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (New York: Methuen, 1982), 122.

15. Manuscripts were not exclusively private. Manuscripts that circulated as an alternative to typographic printing can technically be considered public, but on a scale so minor as to be incomparable.

other.¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, drawing a distinction between mechanical and hand reproduction, argued that 'to ask for the "authentic" print makes no sense.' Though he was referring to photography, typographic originals are even more elusive. Unlike a photographic negative, the 'negative' of the Dunlap prints is not a single entity, but a collection of component parts—the type—the arrangement of which is not retained. The type is ultimately broken apart. Like the individuals who came together to craft the Declaration, the individual types disperse, free to assemble anew into future documents. The fact that prints are commonly referred to as 'copies' simply because they are multiple reveals a prejudice that conflates singularity with originality. The types that beget the prints are, of course, not specific to the text, only their arrangement is. The types are continuously recycled from one text to another and do not remain in formation. The only 'original,' then, would be the individual letters, but upon inspection we find that they, too, are multiple. Each of the alphabetic characters is the product of a mold or master. Typography's predictability among and within fonts, documents, and the entire realm of printing helps build legibility for all readers. These qualities make typography inherently democratic. It is the medium of the many.

Calligraphy privileges the author rather than the audience.¹⁷ By idealizing handwriting, not the alphabet itself, it only minimally addresses concerns of the reader. Calligraphy combines idiosyncratic letters that are unique to one another and to the scribe (even though scribes attempt to standardize their work, this ideal can never quite be achieved), and therefore not as legible to all readers. Moreover, the product of all calligraphers, like that of the author, is a document that is singular and original. Only one person can read it at any one time. Or, one person can read it to one audience; it cannot be shared with multiple audiences or with the author and readers simultaneously. Calligraphy, a kind of pro-

16. Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 224.

17. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 122.

fessional handwriting, primarily serves to enhance the hand of the author. It is inherently individual and hierarchical. It is the medium of the few.

Though the Declaration was created by multiple authors, produced in multiple, and intended for multiple audiences, the document held in the highest regard at the National Archives and in the national consciousness is not a Dunlap imprint. It is the handwritten, unique, and singular calligraphic inscription.

Rather than considering the typography and calligraphy as different versions of the same text, studying the two forms of the Declaration as different documents altogether will reveal that each was created for its own particular function. The two Declarations therefore have parallel existences. They do not, however, exist in equality because the handwritten document prevails. Though originals are normally valued over copies, here is the reverse: a copy has traded places with an original. Two questions arise. Why would Congress create the Declaration in one form first—typography—only to reproduce it within a month in a completely different form—calligraphy? In valorizing hand-made form over machine-made form, have the intentions of the Founders been followed?

In order to determine this, we will look at the evolution of the Declaration since 1776, but we begin by looking back to the publications of the Continental Congress that preceded it. In the two years before independence was declared, Congress communicated with its constituents by issuing a number of state papers. An investigation of how typography and calligraphy functioned in the creation of these documents will shed light on what Congress planned by commissioning the calligraphic version.

Congress valued the function of typography. From its inception, the First Continental Congress established a relationship with a printing firm, the Philadelphia partnership of William and Thomas Bradford. The papers issued by Congress were intended to establish opinions and to convince the people of their claims.

All papers were typeset, printed, and published.¹⁸ Only typographic printing functioned as a disseminating medium. But certain texts were first made in calligraphy before being committed to type. Of the fifteen documents that preceded the Declaration, three—the plan of Association, the Petition to the King, and the Olive Branch Petition—followed this course. The pivotal nature of these documents helps explain why they received special treatment. The Association first formalized a relationship among the colonies. The Petition to the King and the Olive Branch petition were both made for presentation to the king. After being adopted, each was engrossed and then ordered typeset and printed. Their production in calligraphy distinguishes these three documents from the majority that were formalized exclusively in type.

Regardless of whether calligraphy was a step in the process, the goal of Congress was always typography. Type was the final iteration because multiplication of the texts was the desired outcome. The documents were to be shared with the public on whose behalf Congress acted. As a work of the hand, calligraphy is usually preliminary to the manufacturing process of typography. When calligraphy was employed by Congress, it was intermediary. It functioned as an additional handwriting step, a penultimate fair copy that clarified the text prior to its finalization in type.¹⁹ Calligraphy was clearly ancillary to the validity of the documents, as most reached typography without first passing through that stage.

We know Congress was inconsistent in its use of calligraphy but not in its use of type; all the documents were ultimately typographic. The publication procedure of direct conversion to type and the alternate procedure that included transcription in calligraphy both relate to how Congress produced the Declaration. It is

18. Elizabeth Kegan, foreword to *A Decent Respect to the Opinions of Mankind*, James H. Hutson, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1975), iii.

19. Before the availability of movable type, calligraphy was the terminus of textual production. A fair copy was a manuscript rewritten in a clearly legible hand to be free from errors and incorporate any annotated editorial changes. The fair copy was the draft from which the final production was made.

useful to compare the Declaration to a primary example of each process.

The first major paper issued by the First Continental Congress, the Association, included a calligraphic step; later, the first paper to be written in the form of a 'declaration,' the Declaration on Taking up Arms, was rendered only in type. The Association serves as the earliest possible indication of how Congress would form its documents. As the text that coalesced the individual colonies into a group, it initiated an American union that the Declaration of Independence would later solidify. As such, the Declaration of Independence can be seen as the ultimate 'association.' It seals the bond created by the initial document. The Declaration on Taking up Arms, however, is equally related to the Declaration of Independence, both in its declaratory title and style, and also in its content. The form of title of the two documents is nearly identical: both begin 'A Declaration by the Representatives. . . .' Taking up arms is an action alluding to and prefacing revolution; it is a step towards asserting independence. The Declaration of Independence, with similarities in the content and the process of formalization of both of these paradigms of legislative process, is something of a hybrid. Its production begins by following the Declaration on Taking up Arms, but then doubles back to follow the Association.

Congressional documents were also signed differently. Some, like the Association, were signed by all the representatives; others, like the Declaration on Taking up Arms, were signed only by the president of Congress.²⁰ But there was consistency within the inconsistency. The documents that were autographed by all the members of Congress were the ones rendered in calligraphy. The chirographic modes were linked by tradition. The two worked hand in hand, as it were, to enhance significance. Calligraphy was a form that required signing by all to avoid the implication that the president had taken the monarch's role. Calligraphy, however,

20. In some cases the president would be attested to by the signature of the secretary of Congress.

was not the cause of their signing. It was the decision that all would join the president in signing a particularly significant text that mandated the production of calligraphy. The method of signing related to each document's function and was supported by the way it was written. The Association included the phrase, 'we do solemnly bind ourselves and our constituents.' Functioning as a contract signed by all, it bound the participants and thus their colonies into agreement. The Declaration on Taking up Arms, however, had no such function, contained no such language, and was signed by the president—John Hancock—alone. Like the Association, the Declaration of Independence in its final sentence states that the representatives 'pledge to each other' their unity.²¹ These phrases, echoing between the initial and culminating documents, in conjunction with each paper's grave and collectivizing content, suggest that the Association was the primary model for the Declaration of Independence. Both were indeed signed by all the representatives, but the sequence in which each was signed belies the correlation. As the pledge requires all to sign, a paradox arises: If the Declaration of Independence was written expressly to be signed by the representatives, how could the same representatives have published it and how could the printed Dunlap sheets have performed the text's declaratory function without their signing it?

In actuality, the Declaration of Independence had to be written to allow the possibility of its being signed while not demanding it. Compare the closing words of the Association and the Declaration of Independence: each was written anticipating signatories, yet only the Association made signing by the representatives unequivocal. 'The foregoing Association being determined upon by the Congress, was ordered to be subscribed by the several Members thereof; and thereupon we have hereunto set our respective names accordingly.'²² In contrast, the closing of the Dunlap Declaration specifically authorizes a single signature to

21. Maier, *American Scripture*, 151–53.

22. Hutson, *A Decent Respect*, 15.

represent all following the model not of the Association, but of the Declaration on Taking up Arms. It, too, was 'a declaration,' and thus shared a similarity with the Declaration of Independence in structure and function. The closing of the Declaration of Independence, immediately following the pledge, neutralizes the call for all to sign: 'Signed by Order *and in Behalf* of the Congress' (emphasis mine). By these words Congress indicated members would *not* all sign, but would be represented by Hancock. The words 'and in Behalf' do not appear in the Declaration on Taking up Arms. Their addition to the Declaration of Independence clarifies and emphasizes that a single signature was not only the wish of the Congress but also its representation. And while they are not needed on the calligraphic parchment, these words must have been on the draft from which Dunlap was working or else he would not have known to set them into type. The earlier declaration had been signed in the same manner as the Dunlap Declaration of Independence—only by Hancock—indicating that validation by the entire Congress was not required. Therefore, the retroactive signing of the calligraphic Declaration of Independence by all of the representatives was supplemental, not essential, to independence.²³

If the Declaration of Independence was complete with the Dunlap printing, why was it later engrossed and signed by all? If it was not necessary for all to sign for validation before publication, why did they sign afterward? After the July 2 vote, when the Declaration text was being revised, Congress was aware that unanimity had not been achieved. If the plan had been for all the members to sign the Declaration, it was now evident that this would be impossible. To attempt to gather signatures would reveal New York's abstention. Thus, as it took up editing, Congress chose not to excise the pledge, but instead added a closing that counteracted it. As if to speak to the pledge that was left intact in

23. Wills, *Inventing America*, 340.

anticipation of future signing by the representatives, the closing was made emphatically inclusive by the interjection of 'and in Behalf.'

As the production of calligraphy was dependent on signing by all, the calligraphy step was passed over when the signing was postponed. Only when signing by all became possible was calligraphy ordered. A benefit of eliminating the calligraphy step was that publication was expedited. This also meant that the calligraphy, when it did occur, was completed without urgency over a period of two weeks indicating that in contrast to the two days in which the Association was engrossed, this calligraphy was not time sensitive. Congress chose typography when New York's abstention stood to delay signing and, therefore, the engrossing, and abandoned that intermediary step without hesitation. Driven by the need to act, the Founders let typography prevail because it performed the essential function they sought.

When Congress sensed that the colonists were ready to accept the radical step of independence, acting on their behalf, its members voted to adopt independence and to declare it. This was achieved by broadcasting the text to the colonies and to the world. Just as earlier publications had sought to convince colonists of Congressional claims, the Dunlap Declaration appears to have convinced the members of New York's Provincial Assembly. Its July 9 endorsement of independence coincided with its receipt of a Dunlap imprint. In its resolution to 'join with the other colonies in supporting' independence, New York's assembly made reference to the Declaration's 'cogent and conclusive' argument and, underscoring the role of printing in persuading the public, the Assembly proceeded to order the Declaration and its resolution of it published 'with beat of drum,' printing 500 as handbills.²⁴ By expediting unanimity, the typographic printing created the condition that caused the commissioning of the calligraphy. It was

²⁴ John Hazelton, *The Declaration of Independence: Its History* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1906), 185-87.

not to be simply a different version of the printed document; it had to be a distinct document with a distinct purpose.

When unanimity allowed all to sign, Congress revisited the step that it had left out, preparing the proper environment for the signatures—calligraphy—but once signed, the Declaration was not disseminated in this form. Congress made no attempt to supersede what it had released on July fourth and fifth.²⁵ The Dunlap imprints had already established independence without exposing the absence of unanimity, a deficiency that would be made obvious by republication. There were now two documents, one public and one internal or private.

Congress could not republish what had already been released via the Dunlap printing because doing so would have contradicted it or made it null. The new document could not be made public; it could not re-declare. Nor did it need to. Knowing that independence had been established by its prior actions, Congress still wished to see the signing stage completed, and tradition dictated that this occur in calligraphy. In normal sequence, this document would have been the original, but coming as it did after publication, it could only be *an* original. It was the pledge and the commitment of all to that pledge. To fulfill it, Congress needed not a publication, but a single contract. The creation of a completely different form of document allowed unanimity to be incorporated into the title, but if Congress had considered breaking with tradition by signing a Dunlap imprint, it could not have changed the title to reflect unanimity.

While Congress had experience in the signing of typographic prints, it had only been subsequent to signing a calligraphic document. After the signed calligraphic Association had been set in type and printed, for example, all of the delegates autographed each of the 120 prints. Although the modularity of typography would have accommodated the title change seamlessly, to reset

25. Once published, the text enters a new domain—the public—from which it cannot be retracted. See David M. Henkin, *City Reading* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 59.

the title of the Dunlap in order to add signatures after publication would have made what was already in circulation seem disingenuous. In actuality, this possibility was precluded by the fact that Dunlap's type was no longer standing. The text would thus have had to be completely reset, thereby producing a new document.

A single extant Dunlap imprint on parchment indicates that at least the printer recognized that there might be a need for a more durable document. Whether he made this at the request of Congress or of his own volition, Dunlap had not acted soon enough. The parchment print was made from a fresh setting of type. This could mean that Congress, some time after its initial order (and presumably before July 19, when it decided to alter the title), requested that Dunlap run a print on parchment and that by then he had already broken up the type. If so, it would indicate that Congress may have considered signing a typographic parchment print that was identical to the disseminated paper prints before deciding on calligraphy. But a fresh setting of type would have defeated the purpose of signing type.

Furthermore, as there was no intention to republish, the setting of all new type to print a single sheet would have been absurd. Congress was not making the declaration anew despite the change in title. The date in calligraphy makes clear that what was signed was not the Declaration itself, but a copy of what had been created on July 4. The Founders were not attempting to antedate the Dunlap imprint. When they ultimately did sign, the Declaration was indeed unanimous, and the handmade form on which they signed prevented the appearance of a contradiction.

As no publication of independence could follow the Dunlap imprints, the process ended when calligraphy completed the missing segment of production. For the remainder of 1776, the public knew of the Declaration only through the Dunlap prints. That the calligraphy was more of a private record than a document for public consumption is clear from the way the Founders treated it. The calligraphic document, in keeping with the care afforded a contract or other important, signed paper, was retained

would be revealed. But the signed calligraphic document, one-of-a-kind, was not a vehicle that could be made public. As with the preceding calligraphic state papers, chirography could not be the terminal step if the signers were to be made known. So once again, Congress, which had reconvened in Baltimore after the British approached Philadelphia in December 1776, turned to typography, and had to use a different printer. A printing of January 18, 1777, by Mary Katherine Goddard, typeset from the parchment, was the first disclosure of who had signed it (fig. 7).²⁶ The names were rendered typographically, followed by a statement that this was a copy of the July 4 Declaration ordered by Congress, not an original print or new text. That statement, which anticipated and avoided future confusion over this, the third production of the text, was signed in autograph only by John Hancock and Charles Thomson, the same men who 'signed' typographically on the Dunlap imprint. The Goddard printing shows exactly how, if New York had not abstained, the Dunlap printing could well have included the typographic signatures of members of Congress along with those of Hancock and Thomson.

The Goddard Declarations were sent to each of the state legislatures with a covering letter from Hancock that stated the value of this specific document without deferring to the engrossed parchment. Unlike the Dunlap prints for which Hancock urged public proclamation 'in such a Manner, that the people may be universally informed of it,' here he asked that the new information be preserved as a record. Hancock wrote, 'As there is not a more distinguished event in the history of America than the Declaration of Independence . . . it is highly proper that the memory of that transaction, together with the causes that gave rise to it, should be preserved in the most careful manner that can be de-

26. Mary Katharine Goddard was one of a number of women who took control of presses when their husbands, sons, fathers, or brothers died or were temporarily unable to continue. She ran her brother William's printing office while he was establishing a private postal service as an alternative to the British Post and which evolved into the United States Post Office. Leona M. Hudak, *Early American Women Printers and Publishers 1639-1820* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1978), 318-20.

vised.²⁷ Printing, by multiplying the text, perpetuated it in a way that calligraphy could not achieve. The Goddard printing can be thought of, therefore, as the publication that Dunlap's might have been. Or we can think of Dunlap's as a first edition, the calligraphy as the revised manuscript, and Goddard's as the expanded second edition.

The calligraphy functioned as a fair copy for Goddard's typesetting just as it would have for Dunlap's had the traditional order of typesetting after engrossing been followed (in which case Goddard's work would have been unnecessary). It is important to note, however, that the typography is fairer than the calligraphy. Two corrections in the calligraphy consist of the insertion of missing letters or words (indicated here in italic) in two phrases: 'He has dissolved *Representative* Houses repeatedly. . .'; and 'Our repeated petitions have been answered *only* by repeated injury.' These omissions with their interlinear corrections are absent from both the Goddard and the Dunlap settings.²⁸ The technology of type, by allowing modular correction through the use of interchangeable parts, made possible the fairest of fair copies. Bracketed by the two typographic texts, the private function of the calligraphic copy is apparent.

With the Goddard prints acknowledging the signers, the Founders had finished their work on the Declaration. The calligraphic parchment was rolled up again and stored with the papers of Congress, where it remained for close to fifty years.

The late eighteenth century was a time of ambivalence toward typography. That ambivalence is evident in the displeasure John Adams expressed toward the influence of Thomas Paine's pamphlet, *Common Sense*. In a letter of April 12, 1776, he wrote, 'It is poor, and despicable. Yet this is a very meritorious production.'²⁹

27. Maier, *American Scripture*, 155; Bell, *The Declaration of Independence: Four 1776 Versions*. Hancock's use of the term 'transaction' to describe the signed Declaration supports its function as a contract.

28. Becker, *The Declaration of Independence*, 185, 188, 190.

29. *Papers of John Adams*, Robert J. Taylor, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977) 4:118; See also, Maier, *American Scripture*, 173.

His sentiment seemed to recognize the value of the print medium while attacking the power of words so reproduced. Paine had, after all, made more compelling to more people what Adams had been advocating to such an extent that in Boston it was thought at first that Adams was the author of *Common Sense*.³⁰ Adams considered that what Paine had written was already well covered by Congress. Paine, however, in one stroke of exquisite timing, combined effective writing with the power of the press to put a pamphlet before the people that capitalized on the Congressional papers that preceded it. Similarly, Adams thought the drafting of the Declaration a spectacular 'coup de théâtre' that had brought adulation to Jefferson that was rightly due to many.³¹ The text, of course, would have been known only through printing. Later, after freedom of the press had been institutionalized in the first amendment to the Constitution, John Adams as president would silence the press by signing the Sedition Act of 1798.³² The power of print was something with which to contend.

In this climate print culture coexisted with a rising appreciation of handwriting, a practice that came to define itself in part against the spread of typography. Handwriting was thought to reveal the presence of the author, just as the voice indicates the presence of the speaker; typography was opaque, concealing both the origin of the text and the demeanor of the writer.³³ As an indexical trace of the author, handwriting offered an authenticity that impersonal typography effaced. The technologizing of the word had, in effect, caused a backlash that would have lent support to the continued use of calligraphy in traditional legal and governmental documents. Even though Congress had recognized the function of typographic printing, its valorizing of chirography, exhibited

30. David McCullough, *John Adams* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 97.

31. Larzer Ziff, *Writing in the New Nation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 109.

32. Richard Rosenfeld, *American Aurora* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 190-91.

33. Printing may have been common by 1776, but there were negative associations to it in comparison to handwriting. The spread of printing in the eighteenth century had exacerbated the qualitative differences. Tamara Plakins Thornton, *Handwriting in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 31-35.

by the engrossing of Dunlap's printed text, could be attributed to a lingering prejudice against the typographic form. Positioned in contradistinction to the anonymity of print, script was a medium that purported to present the individual self honestly and directly. The hand of a scribe, of course, only symbolically presents the author, and so defeats the very authenticity for which script was valued. Furthermore, even when the self of the author was evident, it was a circumscribed self—handwriting styles were acquired along rigid social lines. The style in which one formed the letters was determined by one's place in society.³⁴ Handwriting perpetuated hierarchies not only among writers but also among readers.³⁵ As part of the control of literacy, reading instruction centered on the ability to read printed text not handwriting so that, when remade in calligraphy, the inclusive typographic Declaration became exclusionary. It acquired a level of hierarchy and privilege absent from Dunlap's printing while symbolizing individual, rather than collective, origin.

The uniformity and standardization of typographic letterforms by the mid-eighteenth century increased accessibility to readers that complemented the increased availability delivered by printing's mass production. American typographic form became more consistent than ever before—or since—due to the almost exclusive use of Caslon types, the same types used by Dunlap.³⁶ This near-monopoly was rightfully earned by the unprecedented legibility of Caslon's design that further extended reader access.³⁷ In addition to the regularity of the types, page formats also became

34. Thornton, *Handwriting in America*, 37–41.

35. Thornton, *Handwriting in America*, 4–6. Colonial reading instruction centered on the ability to read print rather than handwriting because it was driven by the desire for direct access to scripture in published form as opposed to reliance on oral interpretation. Even in late eighteenth-century New England, where nearly all men and women could read, a number could neither produce nor read handwriting. See also, Hugh Amory and David Hall, eds., *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, vol. 1 of *A History of the Book in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 118.

36. Hugh Amory, 'A Note on Statistics,' in *Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, 504.

37. Philip B. Meggs, *A History of Graphic Design* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1992), 119. Caslon types were imported from England, a practice initiated by Benjamin Franklin.

standardized through typography's modularity. Dunlap had clarified the grievances against the king by structuring them for emphasis. In his drafts, Jefferson had been attentive to the architecture of the prose, indenting the body of each grievance after its initial line. Dunlap preserved Jefferson's intention by translating this format into the established typographic convention of first-line indentation (fig. 8). The Declaration calligraphy, conversely, inhibits reading by devolving into a single, undifferentiated mass characteristic of pre-seventeenth-century practice.³⁸ The difficulty of reading the calligraphic Declaration contributes to its role as an image. When we are actually expected to read the Declaration, it is reproduced in typography, not calligraphy.

Alongside handwriting, an elocutionary movement emerged as another antidote to print culture. The spoken word, like the handwritten word, was also valued as a method of public revelation of the private self. Calling attention to evidence of elocutionary notation in the lone surviving Dunlap proof print, Jay Fliegelman argues that the Declaration was written to be recited, to shift emphasis away from reading.³⁹ But this does not diminish the fundamental role played by typographic printing. In practice, printing undergirds elocution. Oral performance of the Declaration was dependent on multiple texts—a print for each speaker—for the message to reach multiple audiences quickly. Only printing permitted concurrent transmission, whether visually or aurally. In addition to enabling orality, printing amplified delivery and by extending communication beyond vocal range, considerably expanded the text's reach. Furthermore, the ability to see on paper what had been heard in recital added authority to the transience of speech.⁴⁰ Wilfred Ritz makes a plausible case for the use

38. Ellen Lupton, *Period Styles: A History of Punctuation* (New York: The Cooper Union, 1988), 1. The calligrapher used dashes to indicate paragraphs, while punctuation and capitalization followed 'neither previous copies, nor reason, nor the custom of any age.' Becker, *The Declaration of Independence*, 185.

39. Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993), 6. The proof print is in the collection of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

40. Philip Davidson, *Propaganda and the American Revolution 1763-1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941), 209.

with the present suppression of these colonies; and such is the
 Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, a
 world. — He has refused his Assent to
 and pressing importance; unless suspended in their opera
 pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of pe
 to tyrants only. — He has called together legislative
 compliance with his measures. — He has dissolved
 along time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elect
 ing in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion,
 ting the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pa
 Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for
 and payment of their salaries. — He has erected a
 us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent

and to provide new Guards for their future secu
 them to alter their former Systems of Governn
 having in direct Object the Establishment of an ab
 HE has refused his Assent to Laws, the most
 HE has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws
 and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected
 HE has refused to pass other Laws for the Acc
 the Legislature, a Right inestimable to them, and
 HE has called together Legislative Bodies at Pl
 fatiguing them into Compliance with his Measur
 HE has dissolved Representative Houses repeat
 HE has refused for a long Time, after such Dil
 turned to the People at large for their exercise; th
 HE has endeavoured to prevent the Population o
 to encourage their Migrations hither, and raising

Fig. 8. Top: Detail of Declaration calligraphy showing lack of paragraph structure (reproduction derived from the facsimile engraving).
 Bottom: Detail of Declaration typography showing paragraph structure of Jefferson as interpreted by Dunlap.

of typographic proofs in the editing process by members of Congress. It would have been logical for Congress to order the draft typeset on July 2, he argues, so that when it commenced editing on the third, each member could be reading a typescript. This scenario inserts the role of typography into both the writing and production processes. The Declaration, therefore, was not only born but also conceived as a multiple.⁴¹

Issued as a paper broadside,⁴² the Dunlap Declaration was tailored equally to posting and proclaiming—reading and listening. Recitation alone, as a method of making public, might have met the requirement to ‘publish’ the Declaration, but Congress adopted the meaning that by the third quarter of the eighteenth century had evolved into making information public through printing.⁴³ However pronounced the handwriting and elocutionary movements may have been, they must have been insignificant to the revolution in printing against which they were poised. The explosive growth of the print medium, witnessed by both printers and public in the frequency with which political pamphlets were issued, was interfused with the growing interest in independence. This was exemplified by the one hundred thousand copies in twenty-seven editions of *Common Sense* printed in 1776.⁴⁴

Orality and chirography, with their direct connection to the human body, present a more natural form of expression than the

41. Wilfred J. Ritz, ‘From the Here of Jefferson’s Handwritten Draft of the Declaration of Independence to the There of the Printed Dunlap Broadside,’ *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History & Biography* 106 (1992): 503.

42. Usually printed on one side, broadsides were intended for posting or to be read and then discarded. They were a communication medium that functioned between the range of the human voice and the scope of the printed pamphlet. Clifford K. Shipton, Foreword to *Some Early Massachusetts Broadside*s (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1964).

43. To ‘publish’ could mean simply to make public not necessarily to print, but by the second half of the eighteenth century the growing authority of printing began to be recognized. The OED indicates that ‘publish’ in the sense of ‘making public exclusively by means of print’ first appeared in 1771. (Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence*, 26).

44. Russell Martin, ‘A Note on Book Prices,’ *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, 521. To achieve this extent of dissemination today a book would have to sell nine million copies in its first year. *Common Sense* is estimated by some to have eventually sold some three hundred thousand copies, equivalent to 10 percent of the country’s population and equal to twenty-eight million copies today. See Howard Fast, *The Selected Work of Tom Paine* (New York: Random House, 1945), 40.

industrial manufacture of typographic printing. If this quality seems to align with Jeffersonian values, the alignment is more of surface than substance. As one who promoted the relationship between forms and ideas, would Jefferson not have appreciated the relationship between typography and democracy? Jefferson equated Roman architecture with the ideals of a republic and understood that Georgian architecture functioned as 'billboards of colonial dependence.' Agrarianism for him was not an unmediated state in which rationalism was absent. It took the form of a uniform grid imposed on the land to create a rational political order in support of the notion that all men are created equal.⁴⁵ Rationalism was thus imposed on the land the way linear, modular typography imposes rationalism on the hand. An opponent of strong central government, Jefferson would likely have valued both the function and symbolism of a grid of identical Dunlap prints spreading across the land. Within typography's mission of equal accessibility through standardization, an important component was to convey an understanding to the reader that others were being identically informed.⁴⁶ The uniformity created by print helped lead to the concept of a uniform citizenry.⁴⁷

Michael Warner has compared the printedness of the Constitution to the writtenness of the Declaration, arguing that the printing was required for the Constitution because it invoked 'the people' directly, not through representatives, and so must be printed for communication back to them.⁴⁸ While true enough for the Constitution, this comparison relies for its contrast with the Declaration on privileging the calligraphy while ignoring the printedness of the preceding Dunlap edition. Warner's analysis

45. Spiro Kostof, *America by Design* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 16-17, 22, 293, and Kostof, *A History of Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 618, 623-30.

46. Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), xiii.

47. Robert K. Logan, *The Alphabet Effect* (New York: William Morrow, 1986), 225.

48. Michael Warner, 'Textuality and Legitimacy in the Printed Constitution,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 97 (1987): 59-84. See also Hugh Amory, 'Reinventing the Colonial Book,' in *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, 32-33.

depends on and serves to perpetuate the continued suppression of the earliest form of the Declaration as the 'earliest *printed* form.' The calligraphic veil of originality obscures the published, public Dunlap, causing the Declaration to be interpreted as a personal statement distinct from the typographically public Constitution. In fact, it is the primacy of print in the Declaration that, rather than distinguishing it from the Constitution, makes it more of a precedent.

Some have argued—John Adams among them—that Independence occurred two days before the Declaration, on July 2, when Congress adopted Lee's resolution.⁴⁹ This view relegates the Declaration text to a press release, a mere announcement of the prior decision. But independence without declaration is meaningless. History has shown that the significance is in the publication date. If the resolution was the decision, the Declaration was its enactment. In addition to inaugurating an independent republic, the Declaration performed a constitutional function by ending the prior regime.⁵⁰ Congress understood the symbiosis between the resolution and the Declaration considering them in tandem. Postponing action on Lee's June 7 resolution, Congress mandated 'that in the mean time (*sic*) a committee be appointed to prepare a Declaration' (fig. 9). Independence does not become effective in private vote; it relies on public declaration. Since the representatives were not acting on their own behalf, but on behalf of their constituents, it was precisely the circularity of the publication that returned the text to the people, completing in effect what the resolution made in principle.

In his analysis of how declarations of independence must function, Jacques Derrida asks if the Declaration itself is performative or constative. He argues that it is precisely the undecideability of whether independence is stated or produced by the Declaration's utterance that is required in order to produce the proper effect. Certainly, then, the adoption of independence without its decla-

49. Ellis, *Founding Brothers*, 247.

50. Maier, *American Scripture*, 162.

Resolved ~~That~~ 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.

Resolved that it is the opinion of this Court that the first resolution be postponed to this day three weeks and that in the mean time a committee be appointed to prepare a Declaration to the effect of the said first resolution.

+ least any time sh^d be lost in case the Congress adjourn to this resolution.

Resolved by the Congress
Sept. 17, 1776
Resolved for Congress
to be inserted

Fig. 9. Top: June 7 Resolution of Richard Henry Lee in his hand. Bottom: Reverse of resolution showing its postponement with the intention to 'prepare a Declaration.' Courtesy, National Archives.

ration cannot achieve the effect. And the issue of who signs becomes less important than the authority by which they sign, in what Derrida calls 'a fabulous retroactivity,' that creates the ability to act independently at the same instant in which signing authorizes it.⁵¹ That 'fabulous retroactivity' in which Hancock took part was not available to those who signed later. The representatives who signed a document dated a month earlier could strive only for ordinary retroactivity, if it could be retroactive at all.

When the representatives signed, they were already 'outside time'—creating a kind of 'overnight antiquity' or symbol of something already past.⁵² By accommodating the signers, the calligraphy made explicit the legitimacy to which Hancock's 'signature' on the Dunlap print referred. But by right the signer is the people. Thus, the people declared by relay through their chosen representatives, and Jefferson wrote on behalf of the representatives, and then Hancock signed for all.⁵³ The Declaration was complete with a single signature; signing by the representatives was supplementary.

The signing of certain documents by all the representatives added another level of legitimacy that was needed because a body like Congress had no precedent. The signatures indicated that Congress was not a narrow faction, but represented all of the colonists, thus making the document more convincing.⁵⁴ Functional legitimacy of the content of the signatures was complemented by the symbolic legitimacy of calligraphic form. Both the signing and the signing medium—calligraphy—also showed respect for the king, especially in the case of documents addressed to him. The Founders did not know what a republic should look like. All their references were from British monarchy. Congress faced the difficulty of how to retain republican simplicity while

51. Jacques Derrida, 'Declarations of Independence,' *New Political Science* 15 (1986): 9–10.

52. Wills, *Inventing America*, 341.

53. Derrida, 'Declarations of Independence,' 9–12.

54. Maier, *American Scripture*, 152.

establishing its own credibility in the eyes of the people.⁵⁵ Lack of established symbols of republican legitimacy could be compensated for by monarchical form. Congress worked both sides of the equation, sometimes employing the function of typography alone and sometimes reinforcing it with the symbolism of calligraphy.

But to produce such a document after publication was inherently different than before. It could serve to contractualize and legitimize but not to declare. Moving directly from edited manuscript to typographic printing was a perfect marriage of form and content that bypassed the private engrossing in favor of public-oriented mass production. Calligraphy that occurs after the fact of printing is out of synchrony with its message. Within the publication process, calligraphy, though not essential, is useful as the fair copy from which to set type. Outside of that chronology, calligraphy is no longer capable of providing authenticating function, but it can still provide legitimating form.

Congress took as its mission the framing of a 'final revolution,' and by instituting government of the people placed its actions beyond challenge. Much of the Declaration justified independence by legalistically faulting the king for his disrespect of English law. The revolutionaries, who would traditionally have been outlaws or traitors, were, therefore, operating not outside existing law but in defense of it.⁵⁶ By representing the king as the outlaw, the Declaration could be cloaked in the visual authority of the unworthy ruler, assuming his mantle as a sign of legitimacy. In the transition to republicanism, abstract symbols could simply be appropriated wholesale. Placing lighted candles in windows in honor of the king's birthday was inverted to celebrate the country's birthday. As the Town House in Boston became the State

55. Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 18. What the founding leaders were to call themselves also had symbolic resonance and was the subject of debate. Adams wanted President Washington to be referred to as 'His Highness' or 'His Majesty,' the idea of which Jefferson found 'superlatively ridiculous.' Ellis, *Founding Brothers*, 168.

56. David Ray Papke, *Heretics in the Temple* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 3; see also Becker, *Declaration of Independence*, 203.

House, printed broadsides emanating from it recast the standard closing epigrams from an individual head to a collective body. 'God save the King' became 'God save the United States' or 'God save the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.' But specific symbols of royal authority could not be subsumed. When the Declaration was initially proclaimed, crowd reaction led to attacks against symbols of royalty. In New York a statue of the king was pulled down; in Boston the royal symbols of the lion and unicorn were stripped from the Town House; and in Philadelphia the king's arms were taken from the Court House and thrown into a bonfire.⁵⁷

A notion of authority, therefore, appears in the Declaration's calligraphic context that would not have been tolerated in the text. By emulating visually what was rejected verbally, Congress seemed to have been caught between two revolutions—one political and one technological. To produce their momentous words, the Founders relied on the democratic form of typography and printing, but to legitimize them, they fell back on the autocratic form of calligraphy on parchment—the hierarchically restricted communication symbolic of church and crown.⁵⁸ The Dunlap typography and printing, by preceding the calligraphic form, overturned the meaning of all such documents.

Even if we were to see the content of the Declaration not as the product of collective authorship and philosophy but as a product

57. McCullough, *John Adams*, 137.

58. Control of the written word has been an important component of autocratic power. Scriptorial authority, divided by emperors and bishops when the Roman Empire collapsed, became concentrated in the medieval monastery where it evolved until the development of movable type. Monastic scriptoria, through their dedication to preserving scripture and other learning, became the major producers of writing for almost a thousand years. The iconic power of calligraphic form was incubated by the church and developed into something both decorative and communicative. Calligraphy also became a feature of shifting political power and the visual language of a long tradition of monarchical rule. Calligraphy's authority was unchallenged in religious or secular domains until confronted by type. Both the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment, movements that might otherwise have been transient, were sustained by the ability to disseminate and preserve achievements from generation to generation through typographic printing. While this is not to say that type and printing determined these movements, until typography put texts in the hands of the many, the many were subject to the few. Johanna Drucker, *The Alphabetic Labyrinth* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 72–75. Meggs, 40. See also Stanley Morison, *Politics and Script* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972).

of Enlightenment thought, the result of the individual genius of Locke and Jefferson, an essential component of its evolution remains its printing from movable type.⁵⁹ The founders knew that printing encouraged democratic knowledge; the Dunlap Declaration demonstrates their understanding that the press had superseded the pen both technologically and ideologically.

During the Revolutionary War and the formative years of the republic, the Declaration of Independence, both as a text and as a document, was largely ignored. It was not until after the War of 1812, when challenges to the nation were settled, that interest in the country's beginnings was aroused. What would eventually become a proliferation of unofficial printings of the Declaration text began to be offered for sale in 1817. Enterprising printers published the text in a variety of configurations, either by setting it in type or by making an engraving. An essential feature of all the financially successful prints was the inclusion of facsimile autographs of the signers. This was perhaps driven by an emerging fascination with signature collecting.⁶⁰ Elaborate embellishments often surrounded the text as the prints were intended for framing to be hung like pictures. In one case, engravings of Trumbull's painting of Congress and the members' facsimile autographs bracket a unique rendition of the text, uniting on the same plane the pictorial nature of the handwritten signatures and the painting (fig. 10). Beside their inappropriate decorative elements, these texts also contained inaccuracies. Secretary of State John Quincy Adams decided to authorize a print of absolute accuracy and commissioned William J. Stone to engrave an official facsimile. The

59. 'The printing industry was the principle natural ally of libertarian, heterodox, and ecumenical philosophers,' enabling them to make a permanent impression on the European mind. Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 418-20.

60. Bidwell, 'American History in Image and Text,' 247-54. Autograph collecting, which had begun in Europe in the late eighteenth century, emerged in America in the early nineteenth century. See Thornton, *Handwriting in America*, 86-88. Autographs were a component that supported pictorial quality and represented presence, similar to the way photographs would function later.

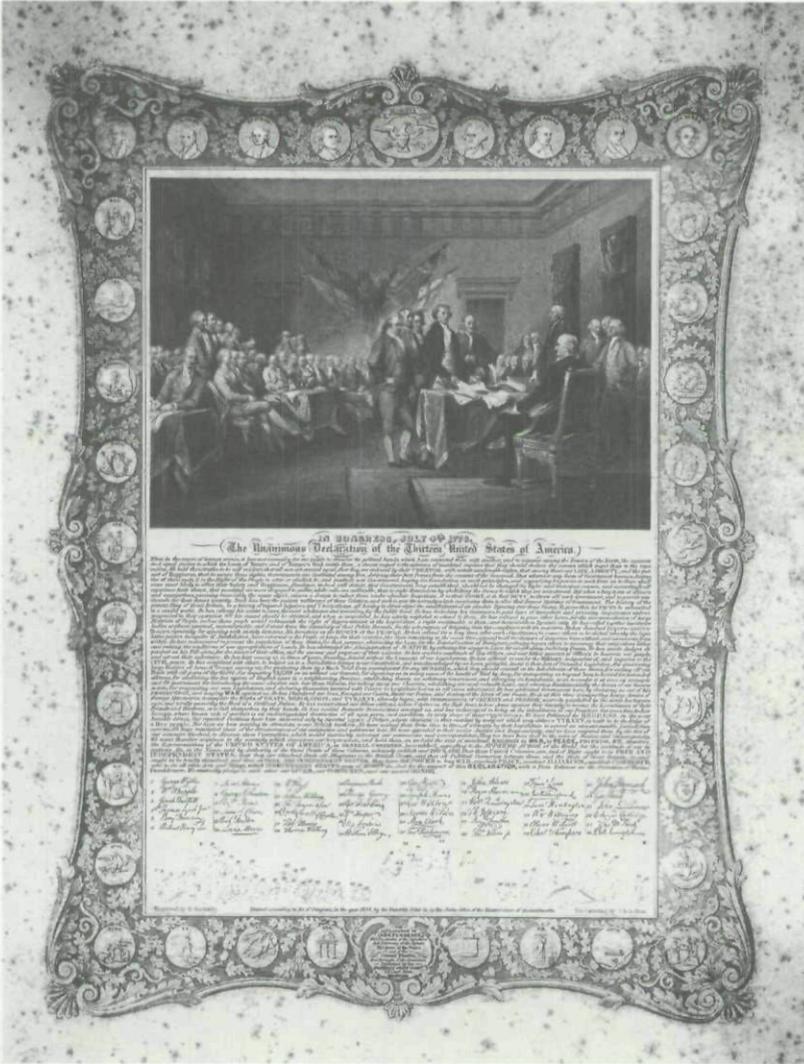


Fig. 10. Nineteenth-century unofficial engraving of the Declaration text including facsimile signatures and the Trumbull painting. American Antiquarian Society.

document he chose to replicate was the calligraphic parchment, not the typographic broadside. Adams's choice is not surprising. Anyone looking back to papers issued half a century before and finding two documents bearing the same date would have assumed that the calligraphy preceded the typography. And the presence of autograph signatures, especially with their newfound attraction, would have prejudiced one against the documents that had been 'signed' only in type. Also, by this time even John Quincy's father had come to insist that the calligraphy had been signed on the fourth.⁶¹ Acting officially, John Quincy Adams institutionalized the calligraphy as the original.

The parchment's inscription already had begun to fade, and it was thought that the availability of facsimiles would eliminate its future exposure and deterioration.⁶² Unfortunately, engraving would entail yet one more exposure, and it would be a harsh one. A wet-transfer process necessitated pressing a damp cloth onto the parchment to absorb some of the ink for imposition onto the engraving plate. By giving up some of its own life, the calligraphy moved farther from the condition that its facsimile would represent. The image on the parchment thereafter declined, contributing further to its aura as a viewable, but not readable, relic. The engraved facsimile became a substitute for the calligraphy and conflated with it. The calligraphy itself was returned to concealment, while its rejuvenated image circulated and became familiar.

Stone, by multiplying the calligraphy, achieved for the Declaration image what Dunlap had achieved for the text. Engraving put form before content, continuing the privileging of medium over message that engrossing had set in motion. The prints struck from the Stone engraving constitute the 'calligraphy' from which all publicized images of the Declaration have been derived (see

61. This was true also of Jefferson and Franklin. Wills, *Inventing America*, 339; Maier, *American Scripture*, 183; McCullough, *John Adams*, 138.

62. Bidwell, 'American History in Image and Text,' 269.

figs. 1-4, 8). With the advent of photomechanical reproduction, the production of this secondary work of art was extended infinitely. Because of the actual calligraphy's faded condition, photographic processes have only perpetuated an exact image of the facsimile.

Engraving, a reproductive technology that emerged concurrently with movable type, is a medium of images, not words. To be sure, words are composed of letterforms, which are themselves images, but once each has been created, subsequent iterations need not be original works. Typography enables the finite number of forms to be infinite in quantity. Typography realizes the potential of the alphabet's reduction of verbal reproduction to its essence—twenty-six elemental codes operating at the level of sign—whereas engraving preserves the idiosyncratic image of form. This is the unique form that can rise—or descend—to the level of icon.⁶³ Each engraving plate, like the image it imitates, is a hand-made work rather than an assembly of pre-manufactured components, as is typography. The engraver, following the reversed image transferred onto the plate, gouges material from the surface using a burin. The hand of the engraver is thus overlaid on that of the scribe to create a plate that is itself a singular original, albeit a secondary one. Rather perversely, engraved facsimiles enable one-of-a-kind chirographic documents to masquerade in multiple, even though singularity is their essence. What results is more of a handcrafted likeness. And here, because they substitute for the actual calligraphy, engraved prints function technically as forgeries.⁶⁴

To reproduce lettering by the hand process of engraving in an age of typography is to satisfy a desire for something more visual

63. William M. Ivins, Jr. *Prints and Visual Communication* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1969), 159. For the relative importance of the ability to print images versus type, see p. 2.

64. 'The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity.... The whole sphere of authenticity is outside . . . reproducibility. Confronted with its manual reproduction, which was usually branded as a forgery, the original preserved all its authority. . . .' Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' 220.

than verbal. Only where form is more important than content are words printed by engraving rather than type. The facsimile engraving voyeuristically exposed the seductive form of the calligraphic document, providing a peek behind the public Dunlap broadside to the privacy of the contract. John Quincy Adams exposed what the Founders chose not to.⁶⁵

The actual calligraphy continued its private life in obscurity for the next hundred years,⁶⁶ while the pictorial presence of the facsimile displaced the existence of the Dunlap prints. The nineteenth-century engraved prints, unlike the typographic prints, referred to an original. In the twentieth century, after photo-mechanical reproduction of the engraving became ubiquitous, the focus shifted back to the singularity of the eighteenth-century calligraphy, eliciting pilgrimages to its one true site—the location of central government and power. In 1924, after generations had become acclimated to the engraving's enhanced image, the fading calligraphic parchment was brought out of obscurity and mounted in an elaborate wall display at the Library of Congress. Its current site in the purpose-built Rotunda in the National Archives brings the Declaration together with the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, both also rendered in calligraphy, in a kind of holy trinity, with the Declaration at the apex. The latter documents, which are displayed in the less-exalted but more accessible position of the table-top vitrine, encourage reading, while the calligraphic Declaration is sealed behind darkly tinted bullet-proof glass, set back beyond both reach and readability (fig 11). Its value can be only as an icon—an image—not as a text.

The displacement of the Dunlap prints, begun first by the facsimiles, culminated in the enshrinement of the purported original, elevated to sacred status. The display's unsubtle allusions to Roman Catholic ceremonial forms of altar and tabernacle sur-

65. The Founders reproduced the Declaration only through typographic printing. Even when they wished to communicate the names of those who adopted it, they did so by printing their names, not their signatures.

66. An exception was made for the 1876 Centennial, when the Declaration traveled to Philadelphia.



Fig. 11. The Charters of Freedom exhibit in the Rotunda of the National Archives. Declaration calligraphy is in the vertical encasement at upper right. The Constitution and Bill of Rights are in the vitrine table. (Copyright © 1997 by Thomas Starr.)

round the document with sacred iconography.⁶⁷ Pauline Maier has traced the attachment of quasireligious connotations to the text to the partisan politics of the 1820s.⁶⁸ In formal terms, however, references to sacred iconography have been present since

67. The Roman Catholic cult of relics, by localizing the holy, 'carefully maintained tension between distance and proximity.' Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints* (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 86, 88.) Completing the chancel analogy, at night the documents descend into a crypt-like vault. See *The Declaration of Independence: A History* on NARA website. The Founders had accommodated the people by delivering the Declaration to them; the calligraphy display does the opposite. It accommodates only those who can make the pilgrimage to be in its presence. In some respects the Catholic Church is more democratic because worshippers reach the body and blood of Christ in their neighborhood church just as they do in Rome.

68. Maier, *American Scripture*, xii, xiv, 170.

August 1776. The physically attached shrines at the Library of Congress and the National Archives can be seen as three-dimensional extensions of scriptural visual language that was embodied in two-dimensional calligraphy. Calligraphy is itself a shrine. This association with ecclesiasticism is one that the typographic Dunlap imprints resist.

The form in which the Declaration—or any occurrence—is represented is hardly inconsequential. Few are present to bear direct witness. What the many who are not present think about and act upon is the symbolic representation of what transpired rather than the event itself.⁶⁹ Context, too, is a text. Where the calligraphy signifies an immutable creed handed down from above through god-like ancients, the typography signifies a living work of the people who are still at liberty to interpret it because it is theirs.⁷⁰ Where calligraphy signifies a passive relationship to the text that undermines the people's responsibility, typography signifies an active involvement with the content that supports participatory democracy. Where calligraphy consigns the document to history, typography connects it to the present.

When amending the Declaration draft, Congress added its commitment to print. The final paragraph reads: 'We therefore . . . do, in the name and by the 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*' (Bold emphasis mine). Only the words shown in roman type were written by Jefferson. Italics indicate additions made by Congress; underline indicates words of Richard Henry Lee, from his June 7 resolution.⁷¹ (See fig. 9.) Congress understood that the essence of declaring was in publication. The phrase makes publishing pri-

69. Ivins, *Prints and Visual Communication*, 180.

70. Maier, *American Scripture*, 175–215.

71. Maier, *American Scripture*, 41, 241; Becker, *Declaration of Independence*, 170, n. 1. Maier attributes the word 'declare' to Congress because it is absent from a copy of the draft that Jefferson made for Lee, but Becker sees that as simply a copying error and attributes the word to Jefferson since it is included in Jefferson's rough draft. Many of the words in the phrase cited are included in the inscription at the Jefferson Memorial, and thus perpetuated the erroneous impression that they belong to Jefferson. (Maier, 211).

mary, as if to say 'by publishing we declare.' The image of Jefferson as the lone author has colluded with the image of calligraphy as the unique original to create the critical mass of myth. In reality, the text belonged to many; the context belonged to printing. Indeed, the printing of the Declaration was the nation's first utterance.

Two-and-a-quarter centuries later, the diffusion of the Declaration, sustained by the multiple locations of the twenty-five extant Dunlap prints,⁷² keeps the text from being concentrated in any one location. Only the illusion of the calligraphic parchment at the National Archives causes it to appear to be centered in Washington. But that illusion continues to fade. The parchment may well have been inscribed for permanency, but it is the typographic prints that remain clearly legible.⁷³ Always more readable than calligraphy, the clarity of typography, the rational idealization of written communication, synchronizes with the Declaration's content. Typography broke with the past's long trajectory of calligraphic form in the same way that the Declaration's content broke with governmental form. Whereas the image of the calligraphy appeals, as all images do, to emotions, the text—like typography—is an appeal to reason.⁷⁴

WASHINGTON, July 5, 2001: the Declaration of Independence was removed from public viewing as part of a two-year, \$100 million renovation of its display at the National Archives. The priceless original parchment will be reinstalled in a new state-of-the-art, gold-framed encasement that utilizes the latest preservation technologies.⁷⁵

72. *The Declaration of Independence: A History*.

73. The Library of Congress assembled twenty-one of the twenty-five extant Dunlap prints in Washington in 1975. Photographs made at that time reveal that all remained highly legible in contrast to the parchment calligraphy. Frederick R. Goff, *The John Dunlap Broadside* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1976), 20–61.

74. Ivins, *Prints and Visual Communication*, 59. As a visitor to the National Archives display 'descended from the altar-like structure holding the documents, she brushed tears from her eyes.' 'Thousands Swarm to Archives for Last Taste of History,' *The Washington Post* (July 5, 2001), A6.

75. 'Thousands Swarm to Archives,' July 5, 2001; *The Charters of Freedom Re-encasement*, June 12, 2001 National Archives and Records Administration (Online). Available: http://www.archives.gov/national_archives_experience/first_steps/charters_re_encasement.html (March 1, 2002).

As I write, the National Archives is in the final phase of a monumentally high-tech undertaking to preserve what remains of the Declaration calligraphy and the parchment to which it clings. It is reconstructing the exhibit for accessibility, preservation, and security for the first time since the documents were installed in 1952. No matter how 'accessible' the new display becomes, the most recent available photograph made directly from the calligraphy demonstrates that what lies behind the murky glass is unreadable; the parchment has become virtually blank (fig. 12).⁷⁶ The calligraphy is already so faded that to perceive the Declaration here depends on having already seen the facsimile. If the calligraphy was once difficult for all to read, it is now impossible for any to read.

When the calligraphic parchment is reinstated in the prominence of the Rotunda, elsewhere in the privacy of the National Archives vault there will remain a far more compelling artifact. Kept from public view is the Rough Journal of the Continental Congress. The July 4, 1776 entry reads, 'The Declaration being again read was agreed to as follows.' The rest of page ninety-four is blank. Has it, too, faded, or was this page intentionally left blank? Could the Founders have been alluding to the scene in *Tristram Shandy* in which the author, incorporating a blank page to open his text, asked his readers to picture what he had stirred in their imaginations?⁷⁷ Congress, conversely, used blankness to securely close its text. Traces of wax from what was once wafered

76. A photograph published in 1906 shows that most of the text is still readable, though most signatures were already virtually invisible. (Hazelton, *Declaration of Independence: Its History*, facing 218.) Deterioration was thought to have been virtually halted when the document was sealed in a helium atmosphere in 1952 as part of the National Archives installation. Nevertheless, deterioration detected within that encasement necessitated the current efforts to stabilize the document. The project includes a rethinking of the nightly transit into the subterranean vault, movement which causes vibrations that will eventually destroy the parchment and what is left of the brittle ink on its surface. *The New York Times*, (February 7, 1999), New England edition, 25. The new encasement will be argon-filled and framed with 24k gold-plated titanium. 'New Homes for the "Charters of Freedom,"' *The New York Times*, (September 12, 2000), New England edition, D1. See also, 'Tales from the Vault,' Common-place (online). Available: <http://www.common-place.org/vol-02/no-04/tales> (July 2, 2002).

77. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 128; Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy* [1760-67] (New York: Random House, 1941), 426-27.

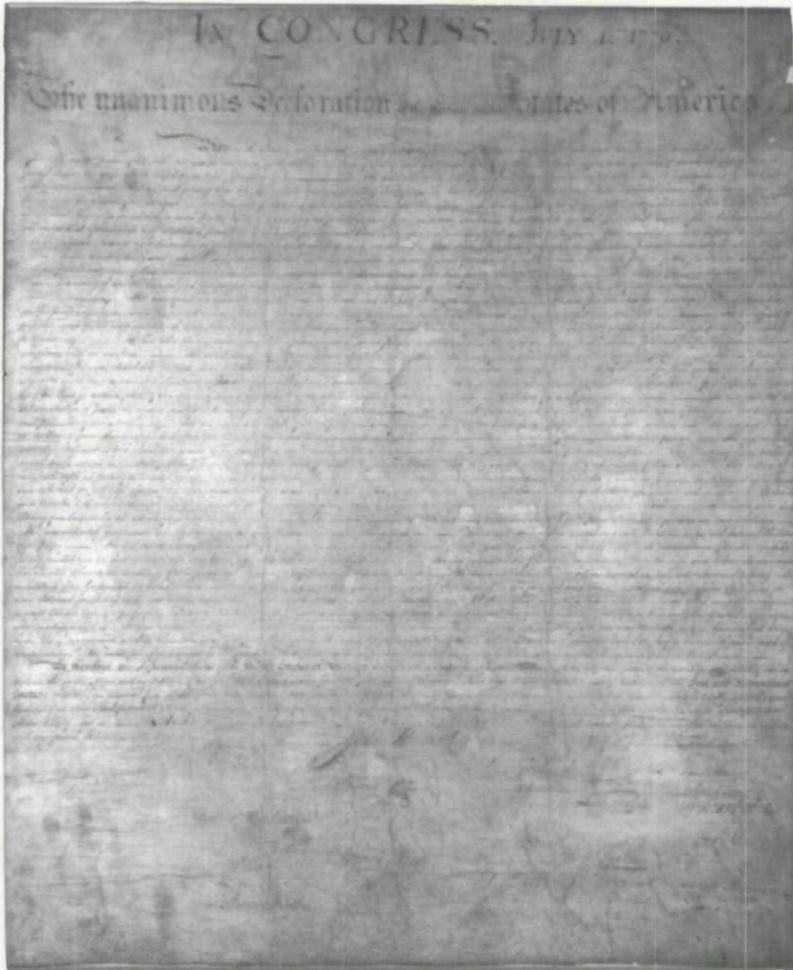


Fig. 12. Most recent available photograph of the calligraphic parchment, ca. 1986. Courtesy, National Archives.

in place assure that it intended no conceit. A Dunlap print was originally attached (fig. 13). Photographic evidence confirms the position of the public typography in contradistinction to the private handwriting of the journal.⁷⁸ The value Congress placed on

78. Hazelton, *Declaration of Independence: Its History*, facing 170.

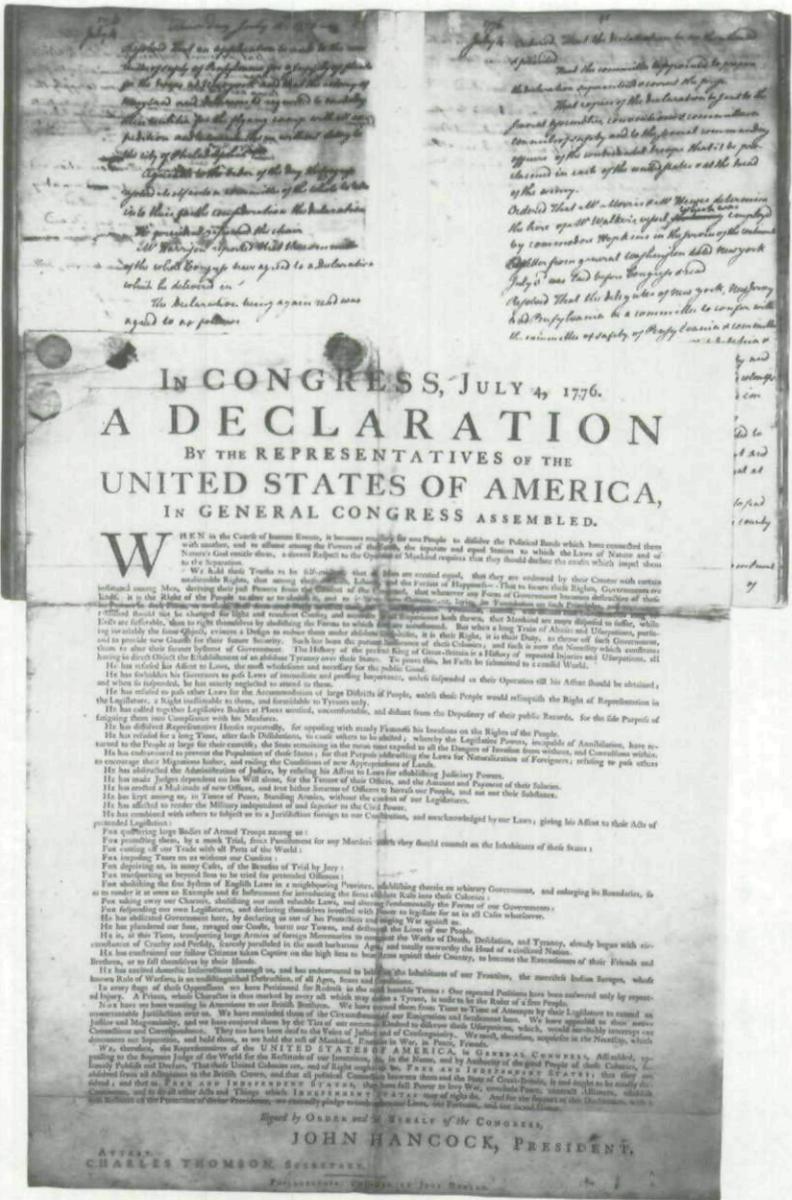


Fig. 13. Rough Journal of Congress, July 4, 1776, 94-95. Courtesy, National Archives.

typography's uniformity and multiplicity is unmistakable. Originality and plurality are equals in the typographic Declaration.

Misconstrued as the 'first *printing* of the Declaration,' it is the typographic printing that was the (first) Declaration. Calligraphy anachronistically and conflictingly portrays the gestation of a sovereign people. The focus on calligraphy, by displacing the discursive medium through which the Declaration became and became known, subverts the revolution of movable type. It is the mass production of the text that is the context of democracy.

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