

# Jefferson changed 'subjects' to 'citizens' in Declaration of Independence

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"Subjects."

That's what Thomas Jefferson first wrote in an early draft of the Declaration of Independence to describe the people of the 13 colonies.

But in a moment when history took a sharp turn, Jefferson sought quite methodically to expunge the word, to wipe it out of existence and write over it. Many words were crossed out and replaced in the draft, but only one was obliterated.

Over the smudge, Jefferson then wrote the word "citizens."

No longer subjects to the crown, the colonists became something different: a people whose allegiance was to one another, not to a faraway monarch.

Scholars of the revolution have long speculated about the "citizens" smear -- wondering whether the erased word was "patriots" or "residents" -- but now the Library of Congress has determined that the change was far more dramatic.

Using a modified version of the kind of spectral imaging technology developed for the military and for monitoring agriculture, research scientists teased apart the mystery and reconstructed the word that Jefferson banished in 1776.

"Seldom can we re-create a moment in history in such a dramatic and living way," Library of Congress preservation director Dianne van der Reyden said at Friday's announcement of the discovery.

"It's almost like we can see him write 'subjects' and then quickly decide that's not what he wanted to say at all, that he didn't even want a record of it," she said. "Really, it sends chills down the spine."

The library deciphered the hidden "subjects" several months ago, the first major finding attributed to its new high-tech instruments. By studying the document at different wavelengths of light, including infrared and ultraviolet, researchers detected slightly different chemical signatures in the remnant ink of the erased word than in "citizens." Those differences allowed the team to bring the erased word back to life.

But the task was made more difficult by the way Jefferson sought to match the lines and curves of the underlying smudged letters with the new letters he wrote on top of them. It took research scientist Fenella France weeks to pull out each letter until the full word became apparent.

"It's quite amazing how he morphed 'subjects' into 'citizens,' " she said. "We did the reverse morphing back to 'subjects.' "

France said the possibility that the erased word was "subjects" came up during a talk she gave to library

donors and visitors about how to study historical documents without harming them. France had determined that a word existed beneath "citizens," and she asked the group for ideas. One woman called out "subjects," and library staff members immediately realized that she was on to something. The intensive work on the document soon began.

The erased word is on the third of the draft's four pages, in the section that addressed grievances against King George III and outlined his incitement of "treasonable insurrections." The sentence is not found in the later Declaration of Independence, but "citizens" is used elsewhere in that document and "subjects" is not.

Scholars previously determined that Jefferson had been writing his early version based on the first draft of Virginia's constitution, where the words "our fellow subjects" appear.

Finding Jefferson's erased word is the library's greatest accomplishment using its new technology, but several other projects are in progress. The imaging device, for instance, found thumb and fingerprints on the Gettysburg Address using infrared light, and library researchers are seeking to determine whether they are President Abraham Lincoln's.

Light outside the visible range has also brought to life details of Pierre L'Enfant's design for Washington and notes on papers of Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin.

Van der Reyden said the research and discoveries illustrate why it's so important to keep and protect original documents. The erased "subjects," she said, could have been detected only from Jefferson's original draft.

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