

problems and plights of ordinary people, feeling what the characters felt, seeing such plight around them, and propelling legal and governmental change. By 1776, human rights became “self-evident” via the development of empathy for one’s fellow citizens. Such empathy formed the basis for a union of states, and American democracy.

Historian Danielle Allen, of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, has taken the study of the Declaration of Independence one important step further in *Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality*. It’s a thorough reading of the declaration, though the central passage again is the classic one on self-evident truths. But Allen, going through the original copies, argues that the period at the end of that passage was not there in the original document: It was inserted later. Her case is backed up by the grammar of what follows. Here is the passage as a whole, with the original punctuation:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness; that, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

Allen argues that, with the period, the self-evident truths end with life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, what I’ve described above as coming from the well-being system, but lacking the idea of citizens establishing and working through a government on the basis of empathy for the well-being of all. The passage ending with life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is about freedom, but what follows is about equality, with the central role of the government to secure it.

The grammar—the succession of *that* clauses and the plural (“to effect