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## 2010 Undergraduate Research Award Application

The convoluted path of research never goes according to plan, and nor should it. The best research follows questions occasionally to answers, but more often to even more questions. The research for my undergraduate honors history thesis, completed in December of 2009, began over a year prior. The path to a completed paper involved international travel, loaned books from across Georgia, countless bibliographic entries, and careful guidance from professors. Though research, as I see it, is never truly complete, I am very proud of the finished product, which would not have been possible without the resources of the University of Georgia Libraries.

My academic interest in the French Revolution and its impact on British politics and society began with my first English class in the fall of 2006. However, it was not until the spring of 2009 that I began to consider these issues from an academic historical perspective. I took two history classes which fed into each other perfectly: French Revolution and Empire with visiting professor Scott Gavorsky and Britain from 1780 to 1900 with Dr. Kirk Willis. As difficult as it is to pinpoint the start of the research process, for my thesis I believe it began in these courses. I wrote two papers this semester, looking at exportation of the French revolution from opposite perspectives. The British history paper focused on the London Corresponding Society and its so-called radicalism. For these papers, my research was comparatively shallow. I found some critical essays on *JSTOR* and *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* and relied heavily on books found through Galileo and through my professor's recommendations. Perhaps the most important book was Albert Goodwin's *Friends of Liberty*, through which I found some incredibly beneficial bibliographic entries. Using bibliographic entries has become one of my most fruitful

research tools as it provides sources that have merited inclusion in established historians' work and gives a more detailed picture of the professional body of research or knowledge on a topic.

In May of 2009, I was able to spend some time at Oxford University to research for my as yet uncompleted English thesis under the guidance of Dr. Roxanne Eberle. This experience deeply impacted my approach to the research process. As a non-circulating library, the Bodleian Libraries required a much more thoughtful method: I had to request books ahead of time and then use them as much as possible before returning them to the stacks. From this experience, I have learned to go prepare in advance before visiting the library. Rather than scouring the shelves for relevant material in or around the section where I find one relevant book, I make a list ahead of time based on databases like *Historical Abstracts* or *Web of Knowledge* and also through bibliographies, sometimes collected in advance through Google Book Search. In addition to learning new research methods, my time at Oxford also focused my academic interests into the sociability at the end of the eighteenth century and how it fed into the emerging publishing industry, especially influenced by Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite's *Romantic Sociability*. I wanted to learn more about how the new publishing methods, like pamphlets, worked with increasing literacy to encourage political democracy and expressions of popular political power. Dr. Eberle recommended I look at Alan Wharam's *Treason Trials, 1794*, which would provide the starting point for my history thesis the following fall.

These two previous experiences meant that when I met with Dr. Willis at the start of fall semester 2009, I had a rather thorough idea of what I wanted for my thesis. His guidance was invaluable in this process. He recommended some important biographies of William Pitt, including John Ehrman's. Through his recommendations, I read the Oxford *Dictionary of National Biography* entries on each of the important characters and followed those bibliographic

entries for further reading. More often than not, the author of the biographical entry would prove a valuable resource in his or her other works. Reading these biographies, though something of a daunting task, gave me a rich source of background information and molded my thesis into more of a story of the interactions between very different and fascinating characters rather than a report on historical facts.

Dr. Willis also recommended going directly to the source. I read the *Journal of the Commons* entries surrounding the 1794 Treason Trials. I used Jenny Graham's *The Nation, the Law, and the King, Reform Politics in England* and Cristoph Houswitschka's *Freedom-Treason-Revolution: Uncollected Sources of the Political and Legal Culture of the London Treason Trials* for collected primary source documents and commentaries. Autobiographies also proved immensely useful. Horne Tooke's account of the treason trials was especially amusing and Sir Eldon, previously Attorney General John Scott, wrote an anecdote book which gave insight into his unique perspective. I also used *Palmer's Index to the Times* to look for important newspaper announcements or editorials and to analyze these entries as indicative of popular sentiment.

The most important primary source was the transcripts of the Treason Trials themselves, which had been published in 2005 and 2007. As the UGA Libraries did not own these, I requested them through Inter-Library Loan. The ILL office was very helpful, especially when there was confusion between the two publication dates. At first, I only received the first five volumes as the latter three were published two years later. Not only did the ILL staff assist me in getting all eight volumes, but they also helped me renew them until I had completed my thesis. Without these transcripts, my thesis would not have been possible.

Dr. Willis also recommended that I speak to the Law Library staff, as my thesis focused on legal history. The conferences I had with the law librarians were incredibly helpful. I was able

to check out Lord Eldon's Anecdote Book from their system, which also gives me the opportunity to check books out in the future should I need to do so. They were also able to help me find transcripts of both Parliament and other trials online and in print. The online database *Making of Modern Law* was an incredibly helpful resource, both to learn more about the trials surrounding the 1794 Treason Trials and also to learn about the history of treason law in Great Britain before and after 1794. Learning about this historical context was a rather daunting task, which I would have been unable to accomplish without the assistance of the law librarians.

Working in the law library changed the focus of my thesis in challenging but beneficial ways. At the start of my project, I wanted to continue my research on the London Corresponding Society, their radicalism, and the government backlash. As I researched, however, and read the trial transcripts and Parliamentary commentary, I began to see a much more specific, and perhaps more historically relevant, picture. Rather than focusing on the London Corresponding Society, my thesis transitioned to focus solely on the 1794 Treason Trials and the changing definition of treason. The research I had done leading up to this transition, including the biographical work and the wide-ranging sociopolitical histories, were incredibly beneficial in giving a wide range to my work, even if I did not use them in the ways I had intended. My process of research is not one that I would have charted at the beginning, nor is it one that I consider concluded. This semester, as I work on my English thesis, I am using works and research I completed last semester and building on thoughts and analysis from my history thesis. I am interested in continuing the research in history, perhaps considering how new media, either pamphlet publishing or today's social media, transforms public political participation. Working on my undergraduate history thesis transformed my understanding of the research process and made me a better student and a better researcher.



This writing sample is excerpted from a longer paper on the 1794 Treason Trials, which includes more in-depth preliminary material, more information on the Hardy trial, and analyses of the Horne Tooke and Thelwall trials.

### **A New Definition of Treason: The 1794 Treason Trials**

#### **Abstract**

This paper examines the 1794 Treason Trials, specifically the Hardy trial, as a turning point in the British definition of treason and how this turning point sheds light on the transfer of state power from the king to the people. Without a written constitution, British state power relied on a carefully balanced relationship between the king, Parliament, and the people. The definition of treason, however, identified state power as residing solely in the person of the king; threats to the people or to Parliament were not legally considered attacks on the state. When the spread of radical ideology from the French Revolution made such attacks seem imminent, Prime Minister William Pitt and his attorney-general John Scott brought the reform leaders to trial for treason. Ultimately, the defense, led by Thomas Erskine, was able to prove that Hardy's attempts to reform Parliament in no way represented an attack on the person of the king and therefore did not qualify as treason. The acquittal of the defendants led to new legislation which redefined treason to include attacks or threats against Parliament, acknowledging that state power had shifted beyond the king. The research for this paper relied on a close reading of the transcripts of the treason trials, personal accounts from the defendants and the lawyers, and secondary source material. The paper seeks to demonstrate that the trials marked not only a shift to a new definition of treason, but also a recognition of a new definition of the state.

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