

Thomas Paine: Author of American Independence

A Senior Honors Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for Graduation in the College Honors Program

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May 2, 2012

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## Abstract

My paper will argue that for his efforts and writings in 1776, Thomas Paine should be considered one of the primary author of American Independence. It will illustrate how the writings of Thomas Paine helped propel America towards Revolution and independence. In an age where monarchs held power, Paine believed that the authority should lie in the hands of the people. Looking at the opinions of politicians in the Continental Congress, common colonial-Americans, as well as colonial representatives, it will illustrate that there was a deep connection with the King up until January 1776. Colonial-Americans would not have dared to defy the King, and instead, wanted reconciliation instead of revolution, even after the fighting broke out. After illustrating colonial-America's desire for resolution, it will look at Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, and examine the ideals in his pamphlet, and how they pushed the country toward independence. Further, the paper will explore the notion that Thomas Paine influenced the writing the *Declaration of Independence*, looking primarily at the slavery clause that Thomas Jefferson omitted from the final copy. Finally, the paper will explore the impact Paine's *American Crisis* had on soldiers and citizens during the war, and how his pamphlet reignited the desire for American Independence

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## Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the help and guidance from several individuals, who in one way or another, assisted in the completion of my paper. Everyone mentioned below provided valuable help to the completion of my project, and for that, I am truly grateful. I would first like to thank my Mom, Dad, Brothers, and Sisters for loving and supporting me not only through this paper, but all through my college career here at Brockport. I would like to thank Dr. Torre for working with me to make revisions so I could produce a thesis to the best of my ability. I would like to thank my friends who pushed me to go to the library to get the paper done. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank God for all he has blessed me with in life, and for giving me this opportunity to expand my knowledge on a subject I love.

When people think of the author of American Independence, they automatically think of Thomas Jefferson. However, Thomas Paine was the writer who most challenged the colonists' dependence on the King, while promoting a republican government. My paper will first argue that colonial-Americans remained loyal to the King, up until January 1776. Powerful political figures as well as common men had long political, economic, and cultural ties with England. Second, my paper will contend that *Common Sense* awoke the population and propelled them toward independence, as it changed the opinions of colonial-Americans. It inspired the common man to refute his patriarchal view of the King, and encouraged political leaders to take action, as Paine illustrated the benefits of democracies against the fallacies of monarchies. Next, his belief in liberty and equality influenced the *Declaration of Independence*. Finally, it will examine how Paine's *American Crisis*, which used powerful and elegant writing, provided inspiration to the country, and the cause of American independence.

## I

The Proclamation Act of 1763 created an atmosphere of unrest among colonial-Americans. However, despite the tension, the subjects were not eager to defy the King and seek independence. In fact, as late as January 1776, few colonial-Americans, including those who would become the leaders of the revolution wanted a rebellion. Instead, they simply wanted redress for what they believed were unjust provisions placed upon them by the British. In doing so, they hoped to reconcile their differences with their mother country. Even the political leaders that we today recognize as the founding fathers were not eager for independence.

Many prominent American leaders, known for their role in the fight for independence remained loyal to Britain, even in the years that led up the *Declaration of Independence*. As

author Harvey J Kaye asserts “neither the Americans who would remain loyal to Britain, nor those who would lead the patriot cause, had initially envisioned revolution.”<sup>1</sup> Francis Hopkinson from Pennsylvania signed the *Declaration of Independence* and was known for his spirit towards the cause of an independent America. He wrote music and stories that captured the heart of the revolution. However, in 1766, he wrote “Are we not one nation and one people? We in America are in all respects Englishmen, notwithstanding that the Atlantic rolls in waves between us and the throne to which we all owe our allegiance.”<sup>2</sup> Other future signers of the Declaration had the same reluctance toward independence. In November 29 1775, 5 months before being selected on the committee to draft the *Declaration of Independence*, Thomas Jefferson wrote a letter to John Randolph. In this letter he wrote, “Believe me, dear Sir, there is not in the British Empire a man who more cordially loves a union with Great Britain that I do...We want neither inducement nor power, to declare and assert a separation. It is will alone which is wanting, and that is growing apace under the fostering hand of our King.”<sup>3</sup> John Adams, who believed the independence movement came about through his writings and effort, had his doubts regarding independence one year before. On March 23, 1775, in a letter to Horatio Gates, he writes “No such Matter-Independency is a Hobgoblin, of so frightful, that it would throw a delicate Person into Fits to look it in the face.”<sup>4</sup> These leaders did not want independence, and to speak of it was considered treason. Instead, they wanted reconciliation and redress with their mother country. Political leaders were not the only ones which had a devotion to the King, as the common colonial-American also displayed loyalty to the King.

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<sup>1</sup>Harvey Kaye, *Thomas Paine and the Promise of America*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 16.

<sup>2</sup>Francis Hopkinson quote in Liah Greenfield, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 410.

<sup>3</sup>*Letter from Thomas Jefferson to John Randolph*. Philadelphia Pennsylvania, November 1775. (Retrieved at [American Achieves Documents of the American Revolution, 1774-1776](http://dig.lib.niu.edu/amarch/) <http://dig.lib.niu.edu/amarch/> Series 4, Volume 3, Page 1706.

<sup>4</sup>John Hazelton, *The Declaration of Independence: It's History*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1970), 13.

Common colonial-Americans had patriarchal love for their King, and widespread English patriotism emerged from the end of the French and Indian war. These subjects were willing to lay down their lives in defense of not only their mother country, but their King as well. In his book, *The King's Three Faces: The Rise and Fall of Royal America*, Brendan McConville cites a letter to King George III in which the man, under the initials C.P., states his allegiance and loyalty to the King, and his devotion to family, country, and King. Quoting C.P., he writes “He forcefully declared that he was ready to ‘lose my life in...defense of your royal person and family and also of my country’.”<sup>5</sup> In fact, colonial-Americans had a history of loyalty and devotion to not only the country, but to the King as well. McConville writes that all through the 18<sup>th</sup> century royal celebrations were held for the King.<sup>6</sup> Love and devotion to the king were also evident in the daily lives of colonial-Americans. When students went to school to learn the alphabet, they learned “K” was for “Our King, the good, no man of blood”. In taverns, mugs were engraved with the initials “GR” standing for George Rex.<sup>7</sup> Although tensions increased, there was no hatred for King George III. Instead, colonial-Americans had grievances against Parliament, as they had an idealistic view of the monarchy. McConville cites a writer from New Haven Connecticut who in 1774 wrote “This is a dispute between the parliament of Great Britain, and the Colonies. We have no controversy with the King; not in the least, dispute his regal authority over us.”<sup>8</sup> Colonial-Americans looked to King George III to “save” them from the injustices placed upon them by the British Parliament viewing him as their savior. “This attachment took on a momentous meaning as colonists turned to their King political salvation,”

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<sup>5</sup>Brendan McConville, *The King's Three Faces: The Rise and Fall of Royal America, 1688-1776*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 250.

<sup>6</sup> McConville *The King's Three Faces*, 66. McConville writes how populations outside of Boston and New York had begun to celebrate royal holidays

<sup>7</sup> McConville *The King's Three Faces* 70, 127. McConville uses illustrations of artifacts from the time period.

<sup>8</sup> McConville *The King's Three Faces*, 255.

McConville concludes. “As counterintuitive as it may seem, the love of the King and country reached a zenith at the split second before imperial collapse.”<sup>9</sup> These ideals of loyalty to the King extended beyond individual colonial-Americans, but to the state and their representatives as well.

The colonial representatives, which spoke on behalf of their constituents, also did not push for independence. Instead, the residents of the colonies approved orders for continued loyalty to Great Britain. Late December 1775, residents met in Portsmouth New Hampshire to discuss their position on the war and also choose their delegates for the Provincial Congress. Selecting Samuel Cutts, Samuel Sherburne, and Pierce Long, the town meeting attendees unanimously approved these instructions to their delegates “...We particularly recommend that you strictly guard against every measure that may have a tendency to cause disunion. We should therefore prefer the Government of the Congress till God, in his providence, shall afford us quieter times.”<sup>10</sup> In Pennsylvania, November 9th, 1775, the Assembly gave strict orders to the Delegates, instructing them not to seek independence. Signed by John Morton, the paper reads

“We therefore, in general, direct that you, or any four of you, meet in Congress the Delegates of the several Colonies now assembled in this City, and any such Delegates as may meet in Congress next year; that you consult together on the present critical and alarming state of public affairs; that you exert your utmost endeavors to agree upon and recommend such measures as you shall judge to afford the best prospect of obtaining redress of American grievances, and restoring that union and harmony between Great Britain and the Colonies, so essential to the welfare and happiness of both Countries. Though the oppressive measures of the British Parliament and Administration have compelled us to resist their violence by force of arms, yet we strictly enjoin you, that you, in behalf of this Colony, dissent from and utterly reject any propositions, should such be made, that may cause or lead to a separation from our Mother Country, or a change of the form of this Government.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> McConville *The King's Three Faces*, 251.

<sup>10</sup> Hazelton, *The Declaration of Independence Its History*, 13. In his second chapter, Hazelton discusses that even though war had broken out, people had not overcome the idea of being subjects.

<sup>11</sup> *Instructions to the Delegates from, the Province, in Congress. They are to dissent from and utterly reject any proposition that may cause or lead to a separation from the Mother Country.* Pennsylvania, 1775. (Retrieved at [American Archives Documents of the American Revolution, 1774-1776](http://dig.lib.niu.edu/amarch/) <http://dig.lib.niu.edu/amarch/> Series 4, Volume 3, Page 1792)



Pennsylvania, like the other colonies, wanted to defend itself from the fighting that had broken out, yet they did not seek independence from their oppressors. Lastly, in New York, a Mr. Archer had supposedly propagated a resolve in which a report stated that “unless American grievances were redressed by the first of March, these Colonies should be independent of Great Britain”. On August 4<sup>th</sup>, 1775, 36 members of the New York committee responded to this report. They resolved that “the author of such report is guilty of a malicious attempt to represent the Continental Congress as intending to cast off the connexion and dependence of the Colonies on Great Britain, and thereby to widen the unhappy breach already subsisting between them.”<sup>12</sup>

Even Massachusetts, which had a major part in the American Revolution, had its concerns regarding independence. Memorable events such as Boston Massacre, Boston Tea Party, and the Battles of Lexington and Concord all helped spark the American Revolution. While the rest of the thirteen colonies were hesitant in seeking independence, the residents of Massachusetts were most eager for separation. The colony of Massachusetts had been subject to the most fighting before the Declaration was signed, suffered under the Intolerable Acts, and some of the most crucial people in the movement of Independence resided in the colony. Yet, the independence movement in Massachusetts was not as fervent as we might think. In 1768, the legislature in Massachusetts officially stated “We cannot justly be suspected of the most distant thought of an independency of Great Britain...It is far from the truth that we apprehend the Colonies would refuse it is offered to them, and would even deem it the greatest misfortune to be obliged to accept it.”<sup>13</sup> Further, when delivering an oration to commemorate the second

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<sup>12</sup> *New-York Committee: Resolve that Mr. Archer, author of the report, (See August 3,) is guilty of a malicious attempt to represent the Continental Congress as intending to cast off the connection and dependence of the Colonies on Great Britain.* New York, 1775. (Retrieved at [American Archives Documents of the American Revolution, 1774-1776](http://dig.lib.niu.edu/amarch/), <http://dig.lib.niu.edu/amarch/> Series 4, Volume 3, Page 20)

<sup>13</sup>William Woodward, *Tom Paine : America's godfather, 1737-1809*, (New York: E. P. Dutton & company, 1945), 64.

anniversary of the Boston Massacre, Joseph Warren, an American doctor who played a leading role in American Patriot organizations and president of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress stated “An independence of Great Britain is not our aim. No, our wish is that Britain and the Colonies may, like the oak and ivy grow and increase in strength together.”<sup>14</sup> More so, on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1773, in celebration of King George III’s birthday, John Rowe wrote that a ceremony in Massachusetts drew “such a Quantity or Rather Multitude of People as spectators I never saw before – they behaved very well.”<sup>15</sup> Turmoil increased in Massachusetts, but it was due to feelings against parliament, not the King. In the next few years, despite tensions rising all throughout New England, the people did not want independence.

Still after the Intolerable Act put a stranglehold on Massachusetts and the rest of the northern colonies, not all residents of New England were eager for independence. In March, 1775, Jonathon Trumbull, governor of Connecticut wrote a letter to the Earl of Dartmouth on the condition and the suffering of Massachusetts. In the pamphlet, he wrote “We consider the interests of the two Countries as inseparable, and are shocked at the idea of any disunion between them. We wish for nothing so much as a speedy and happy settlement upon constitutional grounds, and cannot apprehend why it might not be effected if proper steps were taken. It is certainly an object of that importance as to merit the attention of every wise and good man, and the accomplishment of it would add lustre to the first character upon earth.”<sup>16</sup> Also, he wrote “The good people of this Colony, my Lord, are unfeignedly loyal, and firmly attached to His Majesty’s person, family, and Government.” When speaking of the Intolerable Acts

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<sup>14</sup> Boston Massacre Oration. Delivered at Boston, 5 March 1772. By Joseph Warren. (Retrieved at America’s Homepage: Historic Documents of the United States. Produced and Maintained by Steven Thomas [http://ahp.gatech.edu/boston\\_mass\\_orat\\_1772.html](http://ahp.gatech.edu/boston_mass_orat_1772.html) . )

<sup>15</sup> John Rowe diary, June 4, 1773, MS, MHS. Retrieved from McConville, *The King’s Three Faces*, 260.

<sup>16</sup> *Letter from Governor Trumbull to the Earl of Dartmouth laying before him the condition and suffering of the Colony, and of Massachusetts, and asking his serious attention to the distresses of the People in all the Colonies*. New Haven Connecticut, 1775. (Retrieved from American Archives Documents of the American Revolution, 1774-1776 <http://dig.lib.niu.edu/amarch/> Series 4, Volume 2, Page 1)

Trumbull states “It is with particular concern and anxiety that we see the unhappy situation of our fellow-subjects in the Town of *Boston*, in the Province of the *Massachusetts-Bay*, where we behold many thousands of *His Majesty's virtuous and loyal subjects* reduced to the utmost distress by the operation of the Port Act...”<sup>17</sup> According to Trumbull, even the residents in Massachusetts were loyal to the King. While it is true that many of the people who wished for independence lived in New England, before Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*, many of the residents remained loyal to the King.

By 1772, Britain had already enacted numerous acts on the colonies, including the Sugar Act (1764), Quartering Act (1765), the Stamp Act (1765), among many others. Prominent political members in the colonies demanded something be done. One of these members, Samuel Adams, wrote a list of grievances against Great Britain. Samuel Adams was a leading figure in politics in Massachusetts, as he wrote the Circular Letter in 1768, which led to an increase in British soldiers in Boston. Further, in 1773, he was one of the leaders that helped organize the Boston Tea Party. Yet less than one year earlier, on November 20, 1772, Adams wrote *The Rights of the Colonists*. Adams’ used language that would be similar to that used in the *Declaration of Independence*. The report of the Committee of Correspondence begins stating “Among the natural rights of the Americans are these: First, a right to life; Secondly, to liberty; Thirdly, to property; together with the right to support and defend them in the best manner they can. These are evident branches of, rather than deductions from, the duty of self-preservation, commonly called the first law of nature.”<sup>18</sup> However, the *Rights of the Colonists* still spoke of America’s devotion to Great Britain, as there is an entire section titled “*The Rights of the*

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<sup>17</sup>Letter from Governor Trumbull to the Earl of Dartmouth. New-Haven, Connecticut, 1777.

<sup>18</sup>Samuel Adams, *The Rights of the Americans The Report of the Committee of Correspondence to the Boston Town Meeting*, Nov. 20, 1772. (Retrieved From Old South Leaflets no. 173 (Boston: Directors of the Old South Work, 1906) 7: 417-428. [http://www.constitution.org/bcp/right\\_col.htm](http://www.constitution.org/bcp/right_col.htm).)

*Colonists as Subjects*". The section reads "A commonwealth or state is a body politic, or civil society of men, united together to promote their mutual safety and prosperity by means of their union."<sup>19</sup> Samuel Adams expressed his ideals on a perfect union, as he hoped to reconcile the differences between the Britain and colonial-America, re-strengthening the ties between parent and subject country. Adams wrote that while colonial-Americans had grievances with Britain and parliament, they still view themselves as subjects to the King. *The Rights of the Colonists as Subjects* was released in Massachusetts, after the Boston Massacre had taken place. Even though the British killed seven people that date, the leaders in Massachusetts still did not seek independence. Although the document lists grievances against Great Britain, it illustrated that colonial-Americans wanted to reconcile with Great Britain in 1772.

Two years later, the First Continental Congress met in September and October. These members of Congress were either elected by the people, by the colonial legislatures, or by the committees of correspondence of the respective colonies. Many of the members of this Congress eventually signed the *Declaration of Independence*. After meeting over a month, on October 14 1774, they passed the *Declaration of Rights*, which served as a grievance letter to Great Britain. Also known as the *Declaration of Colonial Rights*, the Americans stated their objection to the Intolerable Acts and included a list of rights they believed they should be granted. However, the language of the *Declaration* was that of loyalty, as the Congress requested, but did not demand the repeal of the acts of Parliament that involved affairs in the colonies.<sup>20</sup> Further, the delegates showed no inclinations toward independence, as Major John Sullivan, author of the draft wrote "To these grievous acts and measures, Americans cannot submit, but in hopes that their fellow-

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<sup>19</sup>Samuel Adams, *The Rights of the Americans*, November 1772.

<sup>20</sup> James Sullivan, *Declaration and Resolves on Colonial Rights of the First Continental Congress*, October 1774. (Retrieved from [Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789](http://www.constitution.org/bcp/colright.htm) (Washington, 1904), I, 63-73. <http://www.constitution.org/bcp/colright.htm>.) In this section, Sullivan writes that the Americans "hope" for a redress of their injustices

subjects in Great Britain will, on a revision of them, restore us to that state in which both countries found happiness and prosperity, we have for the present only resolved to pursue the following peaceable measure.”<sup>21</sup> Colonial-Americans still viewed themselves as subjects of Great Britain and hoped to remain that way as well. They did not wish to take up arms, but still wanted reconciliation.

Later that month on October 26, 1774, the Continental Congress wrote a petition to King George III. In the petition, the members of Congress carefully wrote their devotion to the King, and assert their issues which they have are related to the actions of Parliament. John Dickinson wrote that colonial-Americans would be "Recommending ourselves by every testimony of devotion to your Majesty and of veneration to the state from which we derive our origin, had it not been for the actions of Parliament.”<sup>22</sup> There was no built up resentment towards King George III. Instead, colonial-Americans showed loyalty to the King, as they wrote “Most Gracious Sovereign: We, your Majesty's faithful subjects of the Colonies of New-Hampshire, Massachusetts Bay, Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations, Connecticut, New-York, New-Jersey, Pennsylvania, the Counties of New-Castle, Kent, and Sussex, on Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina, in behalf of ourselves and the inhabitants of those Colonies who have deputed us to represent them in General Congress, by this our humble Petition, beg leave to lay our Grievances before the Throne.”<sup>23</sup> Not only were colonial-Americans loyal to the King, but they admired him as well. They referred to King George as “Most Excellent Majesty” and “Most Gracious Sovereign”. They begged for something to be done, they did not demand. The Americans felt as they were inferior to the King and his rules, as

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<sup>21</sup> Sullivan, *Declaration and Resolves on Colonial Rights*, 1774.

<sup>22</sup>First Continental Congress, *The Petition of the Grand American Continental Congress to King's Most Excellent Majesty*, 1774. (Retrieved from .Massachusetts Historical Society .<http://www.masshist.org/>.)

<sup>23</sup>First Continental Congress, *The Petition of the Grand American Continental Congress to King's Most Excellent Majesty*, 1774.

they had grown accustomed to being subjects. In 1774, the Americans did not want to defy the King; instead, their issues regarded Parliament. At the end of the article, the Continental Congress wrote, “Your Royal Authority over us and our connection with Great Britain we shall carefully and zealously endeavor to support and maintain.”<sup>24</sup> In 1774, the Colonies wanted peace with Great Britain, and there was little thought of independence.

The *Declaration of Colonial Rights*, and the petition to King George III came after the Coercive or Intolerable Acts had taken a stranglehold on Massachusetts. The Continental Congress had an opportunity to react against King George III, but instead, attempted reconciliation. The colonial-Americans and the leaders sought peaceful resolutions through polite suggestions. The Coercive Acts would not be the last act passed by Parliament and the King in an attempt to control the Colonies, but the colonial-Americans reacted differently when another act came to the attention in 1776. However, before this occurred, more attempts at peace and reconciliation took place, even after the fighting broke out and blood was shed.

In 1775, fighting broke out between America and England. On April 19<sup>th</sup>, the infamous battles of Lexington and Concord took place. Five days earlier General Gage and the British made plans to capture John Hancock and Samuel Adams, and then move to Concord to seize ammunition. However, the townsmen caught wind of this plan, and spread the word. The militias gathered, and the “shot heard around the world” sparked the battles that left 49 Americans killed, with another 73 injured. However, just because blood was shed and the conflict had started, the America did not seek independence. They did not want to fight against their mother country; they only wanted the same rights as their fellow subjects back in England. The Continental Congress had given no order to raise an army, and the fighting which took place

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<sup>24</sup>First Continental Congress, *The Petition of the Grand American Continental Congress to King's Most Excellent Majesty*, 1774.

was among militia men. However, the militia men that fought were not trying to defy the King or country, as though it may seem. Instead, they were merely trying to protect themselves. In fact, members of Rhode Island's militia, which rushed to Boston following Lexington and Concord, did so, "In his Majesty's Service".<sup>25</sup> Also, if we look back at the instructions given to the state representatives in New Hampshire, New York, and Pennsylvania, we can see loyalty to the King and country still existed after the fighting had broken out; illustrating independence was still not the goal. In May 1775, after the battles had taken place, George Washington, commander of the army had his doubts regarding independence. In a talk with Jonathan Boucher he stated "If you ever hear of my joining any such measures, you have my leave to set me down for everything wicked."<sup>26</sup> Washington was not the only one who did not want independence, as the Second Continental Congress wrote another petition to the King in July.

If we look at the records and proceedings of the second Continental Congress, it is clear that many of the Americans, including many prominent leaders, still wanted to remain loyal to the mother country. On July 6, 1775, the Congress issued a *Declaration of Taking up Arms*, which addressed the Colonial grievances. In this famous doctrine, also known as the *Olive Branch Petition*, the second Continental Congress stated that "We are reduced to the alternative of choosing an unconditional submission to the tyranny of irritated ministers, or resistance by force. The latter is our choice."<sup>27</sup> Although they defied English law and resisted by force, they did not seek independence. Instead, like a rebellious child, they fought to receive what they wanted. They fought for reconciliation. Toward the end of the same declaration, John Dickerson wrote "Lest this declaration should disquiet the minds of our friends and fell subjects

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<sup>25</sup> Richard Ketchum, *Decisive Day : The Battle for Bunker Hill*, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1974), 60.

<sup>26</sup> Ellis Stevens, *Sources of the Constitution of the United States considered in relation to colonial and English history*, (New York: Macmillan and Co, 1894), 36.

<sup>27</sup>Continental Congress, *Declaration of Causes for Taking Up Arms*. July 1775. (Retrieved at [Library of Congress](http://www.loc.gov). <http://www.loc.gov>.)

in any part of the Empire, we assure them that we mean not to dissolve that union which has so long and so happily subsided between us, and which we sincerely wish to see restored... With an humble confidence in the mercies of the supreme and impartial Judge and Ruler of the Universe, we most devoutly implore his divine goodness to protect us happily through this great conflict, to dispose our adversaries to reconciliation on reasonable terms, and thereby to relieve the Empire from the calamities of civil war.”<sup>28</sup> Independence was still not the aim of the colonies, as they wanted to preserve the relationship that the colonies had with Britain for over 150 years.

Through the testimony of many prominent leaders as well as the actions taken by each state Congress and the Continental Congress, we can see that independence was not on the agenda for colonial-Americans.

Loyalty to Britain was not the only thing deterring colonial-Americans from claiming independence. There were concerns throughout the colonies based on the economic stability of America apart from Great Britain.<sup>29</sup> One example of concern can be found in Thomas Paine’s Philadelphia. At the time, Philadelphia had a heterogeneous population of over 30,000, making it the largest city in America, and the capital of the new world. Philadelphia was the financial and commercial center for the colonies, and much of the economic success of America depended on the city. Economically speaking, the most important figure of this region was the merchant. Triangular trade and commerce dominated the lives of Philadelphians. As early as 1744, Governor Thomas stated the importance of commerce in the city writing “The entire city in some way or other depends upon the merchant, and if he cannot trade to advantage, it will soon be very sensibly felt by the whole.”<sup>30</sup> Since the Americans were only allowed to trade with Great

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<sup>28</sup>Continental Congress, *Declaration of Causes for Taking up Arms* July 1775.

<sup>29</sup>Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976. Foner writes how that through the merchant system, the colonies were dependent on trade with England.

<sup>30</sup> Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America*, 21.



Britain, a war of Independence would disrupt trading. The trade that occurred reinforced the relation that the colonies had with England, as “Consumption of British good also integrated the empire economically and culturally, even as commercial ambitions created real social disruptions.”<sup>31</sup> Economics also played a major role in terms of politics. The leaders of Philadelphia’s political sphere were the wealthiest merchants at the time. These merchants dominated the city’s economic and political life. In 1775, the richest ten percent of Philadelphia’s population owned over half of the wealth in the city.

Finally, there were governmental concerns throughout the colonies. Although a Continental Congress had been established, the Americans ran their government based off the decisions of the King and parliament. Independence would bring about the need to establish a whole new government. The Americans had been under monarchial rule for over 150 years. As McConville writes the colonist had “intense attachment to George III that grew from the complex intersection of historical and constitutional thinking with the provincial cult of monarchy”.<sup>32</sup> Democracies and Republics were considered radical and few people ever imagined having a country run by the people. People needed a spark to change their mindset, and that inspiration came from Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*.

## II

The revolution was not inevitable: Thomas Paine changed the opinion of the colonial-Americans. The colonial-Americans had issues with Parliament, but remained loyal to the King, who they viewed as a paternal figure. Ironically, it took an English immigrant to change the mind of the Americans, and set forth a series of events which changed the world. Already nearly 40

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<sup>31</sup> McConville, *The King’s Three Faces*, 120.

<sup>32</sup> McConville, *The King’s Three Faces*, 251.

years old, Thomas Paine came to America in 1774, and used his friendship with Benjamin Franklin to help him establish a name for himself in the colonies. Paine used a letter of introduction from Franklin, who at the time was one of the most distinguished Americans, and was hired as an editor of the *Pennsylvania Magazine*.<sup>33</sup> At the time, Philadelphia was the center of attention in America, and being an editor in the city helped Paine establish a name for himself, as he wrote pieces such as “*Thoughts on Defensive War*”, and “*Liberty Tree*”. Although Paine had arrived in America from Britain just two years before writing *Common Sense*, he already had become accustomed to the events occurring in the colonies, and had no illusions that Parliament would redress the grievances against the colonies. Therefore, he began a campaign for a separation from Great Britain, which led to his writing of *Common Sense*.

*Common Sense* changed the way colonial-Americans viewed the King. Thomas Paine turned the notion of independence from a radical idea, to a respected one, and helped push the ideology of liberation to the forefront. Paine did this by rebutting all the concerns people had with regards to independence. First, Thomas Paine sought to combat paternal loyalty to the King who was a father figure among colonial-Americans. Paine not only challenged the parental view of King George III but the whole country of England as well. Instead of believing colonial-Americans should forgive the King and England because they represented both the symbolical father and the mother country, Paine believed they should be at blame as he wrote “But Britain is the parent country, say some. Then the more shame upon her conduct. Even brutes do not devour their young, nor savages make war upon their families.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Woodward, *Tom Paine*, 58.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, 1776. (Retrieved at Google Books, 2008. [http://books.google.com/books?id=wVt7VxvFyegC&printsec=frontcover&dq=thomas+paine+common+sense&hl=en&sa=X&ei=MtR5T\\_X6OKHy0gHowLi6DQ&ved=0CDgQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=thomas%20paine%20common%20sense&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=wVt7VxvFyegC&printsec=frontcover&dq=thomas+paine+common+sense&hl=en&sa=X&ei=MtR5T_X6OKHy0gHowLi6DQ&ved=0CDgQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=thomas%20paine%20common%20sense&f=false). Reformatted by Forgotten Books. 2008)

Second, Paine challenged the monarchial belief that had existed in the colonies for decades, as he did not believe that the colonial-Americans should view themselves as subjects. With the notion that all men are part of the human race, and therefore, should be treated equal, he wrote, “How a race of men came into the world so exalted above the rest, and distinguished like some new species, is worth inquiring into and whether they are the means of happiness or of misery to mankind.”<sup>35</sup> Paine especially despised the idea that the King’s right to rule was hereditary. To him, claiming to have a natural right to rule was an insult to the institution, and the fact that people allowed it to happen was a sign of degradation. He wrote “ For all men being originally equals, no one by birth could have a right to set up his own family in perpetual preference to all others for ever, and tho' himself might deserve some decent degree of honours of his contemporaries, yet his descendants might be far too unworthy to inherit them.”<sup>36</sup>

Paine’s final anti-monarchial argument came from his confidence in Republics, as he believed that men had not only the right, but the natural ability to govern themselves. As Eric Foner asserts, “Paine took an extremely optimistic view of human nature, or at least the possibility of human perfectibility.”<sup>37</sup> Paine despised Thomas Hobbes’ absolutist view on government, as he believed that people had that people had the natural rights to govern themselves without an absolute monarch. In *Common Sense* he wrote “Let the crown at the conclusion of the ceremony be demolished, and scattered among the people whose right it is.”<sup>38</sup> Paine wanted to an independent America, but not at the expense of having another monarchy in the colonies. Thomas Paine once wrote that the independence of America, were it to have been

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<sup>35</sup> Paine, *Common Sense*, 1776.

<sup>36</sup> Paine, *Common Sense*, 1776.

<sup>37</sup> Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America*, 22.

<sup>38</sup> Paine, *Common Sense*, 1776.

followed by a system of government modeled after the English Government, would not have interested him with the unabated ardor it did.

In terms of economics, Paine went against the mercantilist notion that America could only function with a connection to Great Britain. In *Common Sense* he wrote “We may as well assert that because a child has thrived upon milk that is never to have meat or that the first twenty years of our life is to become a precedent for the next twenty.” *Common Sense*, Paine outlined his vision of economic success, an American empire which pursued a policy of free trade with all nations, not just Great Britain. He wrote “Our corn will fetch its price in any market in Europe, and our imported goods must be paid for, buy them where we will.”<sup>39</sup> Paine was anti-mercantilist, and did not believe government should have strong role in regards to trade. “Our plan is commerce, and that well attend to,” Paine wrote, “will secure us the peace and friendship of all Europe to have America a Free Port.”<sup>40</sup>

To win support of the wealthy merchants who dominated the politics of the city, Paine needed to illustrate that they would be better off economically if they were to separate from Great Britain. As Foner states, in writing *Common Sense*, Paine sought to illustrate that “the war for Independence would destroy old economic patterns and social relations and would create new financial institutions and opportunities for economic innovation.”<sup>41</sup>

Paine’s economic argument was also related to his republican argument. Paine thought that Monarchies were more likely to go to war than Republics. Since England was run by a King, Paine believed that England would always be at war, which in turn would ruin trade in America. “It is the true interest of America to steer clear of European contentions,” Paine wrote, “which she never can do, while by her dependence on Britain, she is made the makeweight in the

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<sup>39</sup> Paine, *Common Sense*, 1776.

<sup>40</sup> Paine, *Common Sense*, 1776.

<sup>41</sup> Foner, *Tom Paine*, 20.

scale of British politics.”<sup>42</sup> Paine argued that monarchies were more susceptible for war, which in turn, would disrupt trade. Republics, he argued, were more peaceful, and less war, in turn would lead to more trade to better the economy.

The effects of Thomas Paine’s pamphlet immediately spread throughout the colonies. According to numerous sources, more than 150,000 copies were distributed throughout America after only the first few months. Although the pamphlet was wildly popular in the colonies, Paine remained anonymous for months after it was published. People throughout the colonies believed that Benjamin Franklin or John Adams had written the pamphlet. John Adams stated “It has been very generally propagated throughout the continent that I wrote the pamphlet *Common Sense*. I could not have written in so manly and striking a style.”<sup>43</sup> Paine did not seek fame for his writing; instead, he wanted to spread his message throughout the colonies for a cause he believed in. He cared more for principle than personal glory. In February 14<sup>th</sup> 1776, with the author of *Common Sense* still anonymous, Paine added a postscript to the third edition of *Common Sense* in which he states “Who the Author of this Production is, is wholly unnecessary to the public, as the object for attention is the doctrine itself, not the man. Yet it may not be unnecessary to say, that he is unconnected with any party, and under no sort of influence, public or private, but the influence of reason and principle.”<sup>44</sup> The fact that Paine wanted to remain anonymous must be taken into account when we look at Paine’s influence with the *Declaration of Independence*.

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<sup>42</sup> Paine, *Common Sense*, 1776.

<sup>43</sup> Joseph Lewis, *Thomas Paine: Author of the Declaration of Independence*, (New York: Free Thought Press Assn., 1947), 48. In this section in his book, Lewis is making the argument that people thought that individuals such as Benjamin Franklin and John Adams wrote *Common Sense*. Despite its widespread popularity, he states that it was generally unknown that Paine was the author

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, 1776.

Others before Paine had written with regards to independence, especially citizens in Boston. However, their ideas often fell on deaf ears. Thomas Paine brought revolutionary ideas to the masses, and changed their perception of King George III from a savior, to a villain. “In the eighteenth century learning and literature were pompous.” William Woodward writes, “They were speckled with quotations from Greek and Latin authors.”<sup>45</sup> This language, used to prove scholarship instead of arguing a point, would have been familiar only to the upper educated class of the time. However, Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* used a style of writing which appealed to the masses. For *Common Sense* to be successful in convincing people to fight for independence people needed to understand its message; they needed to comprehend Paine’s argument. Paine’s message was written in a simplistic style that appealed to common experiences of colonial-Americans, so that anyone could grasp the nature of politics and government discussed in his pamphlet

Paine’s *Common Sense* stirred political debates throughout homes, taverns, workshops, and fields all throughout the colonies. According to Harvey J. Kaye, a professor at the University of Wisconsin, “Whether it (*Common Sense*) changed people’s minds or freed them to speak their minds, it pushed them – not all of them, but vast numbers of them - to revolution.”<sup>46</sup> It quickly changed the minds of many prominent members in America as well. Those which had been anti-Independence now spoke in favor of a separation. As *Common Sense* became a phenomenon in the colonies, the ideas expressed in the pamphlet became embedded in the minds of colonial-Americans. The petitions for redress and reconciliation were abandoned, and replaced with cries for independence.

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<sup>45</sup> Woodward, *Tom Paine*.

<sup>46</sup>Harvey Kaye, *Thomas Paine and the Promise of America*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 50.

Even the leaders which had previously been against the notion of independence were persuaded by Paine's writing. George Washington wrote, "By private letters, which I have lately received from Virginia, I find *Common Sense* is working a powerful change in the minds of many men."<sup>47</sup> Further, he stated "The sound doctrines and unanswerable reasoning contained in the pamphlet *Common Sense* will not leave numbers at a loss to decide upon the propriety of separation."<sup>48</sup> Contrast these statements to the one earlier regarding his disdain for independence we can see the powerful impact Paine's writing had. Further, members of Continental Congress bought copies of *Common Sense* for friends and families, in hopes of spreading its message. January 24, 1776, in the same month Thomas Paine published *Common Sense*, General Charles Lee wrote George Washington on his thoughts of *Common Sense* and the idea for independence: "It will, if I mistake not, in concurrence with the transcendent folly and wickedness of the Ministry, give the coup-de-grace to Great Britain. In short I own myself convinced, by the arguments, of the necessity of separation."<sup>49</sup>

The fervor for independence spread not only amongst the political leaders, but the citizens as well. In an extract of a letter from Petersburg Virginia dated April 12, 1776, it is written "In my way through Virginia, I found the inhabitants warm for independence... Indeed I hear nothing praised but *COMMON SENSE* and INDEPENDENCE."<sup>50</sup> In an extract of a letter from Maryland, the Pennsylvania Evening Post wrote on February 13, 1776, "If you know the

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<sup>47</sup> George Washington , "The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources," *October, 1775-April, 1776*, Vol. 4, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1931) 455.

<sup>48</sup> George Washington , "The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources," *October, 1775-April, 1776*, Vol. 4, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1931) 297.

<sup>49</sup> "Correspondence of the American Revolution: Being Letters of Eminent men to George Washington," Vol. 1, ed. Jared Sparks (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1853).

<sup>50</sup> Essex Journal, Newburyport, Massachusetts, 10 May 1776. (Retrieved from [National Humanities Center: Praise for Thomas Paine's \*Common Sense\*, 1776 as Reported in American Newspapers](http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/makingrev/rebellion/text7/commonsensenevpraise.pdf) <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/makingrev/rebellion/text7/commonsensenevpraise.pdf> . The website provides access to historical American newspapers courtesy of American Antiquarian Society.)

author of COMMON SENSE, tell him he has done wonders and worked miracles, made TORIES WHIGS, and washed Blackamores white. He has made a great number of converts here. His style is plain and nervous; his facts are true; his reasoning just and conclusive. I hear of three only in my county who disapprove of the piece, and two are the echo of one.”<sup>51</sup> Common Sense united citizens, and encouraged them not to seek reconciliation when England decreed the Prohibitory Act against them.

When the King issued the Coercive or Intolerable Act, the colonies responded with requests designed for resolution. In late December, 1775, Parliament passed the Prohibitory Act. This act removed the colonies from the protection of the crown, banned trade with them, and allowed for American ships to be confiscated. Although signed in December 1775, the Americans would not have received this message until January or February at the earliest, as the news had to travel across the Atlantic. By this time, *Common Sense* changed the minds of colonial-Americans. When Britain passed the Coercive Acts and fighting had broken out, the colonies sought reconciliation. However, when they passed the Prohibitory Act, colonial-Americans reacted with, the *Declaration of Independence*. This *Declaration*, with its ideas of democracies having helped shaped the world, was influenced by Thomas Paine.

Thomas Paine either influenced the *Declaration of Independence* or wrote it himself. The first thing that must be considered is that *the Declaration of Independence* is not the original copy, nor is there a single version. In his book *The Declaration of Independence: The Evolution of the Text*, Julian Boyd writes “there is evidence in the Rough Draft itself, the significance of which apparently has been hitherto overlooked, pointing to the fact that the Rough Draft was

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<sup>51</sup>The Pennsylvania Evening Post, 13 Feb. 1776. (Retrieved from National Humanities Center: Praise for Thomas Paine’s Common Sense, 1776 as reported in American newspapers <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/makingrev/rebellion/text7/commonsensenevspraise.pdf> .)



copied by Jefferson from another and earlier document of documents.”<sup>52</sup> In June 1776, a committee of five men, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Robert Sherman, Thomas Jefferson, and Robert Livingston, were appointed by the Continental Congress to draw up a *Declaration of Independence*. While it was decided that Jefferson’s signature would be on the Declaration, he did not work on the paper alone. Years later, Jefferson wrote “Before I reported it to the committee I communicated it separately to Dr. Franklin and Mr. Adams requesting their corrections.” However, what is not general knowledge is that both Jefferson and Adams supposedly wrote copies of the *Declaration of Independence*. There are scholars who believe that Adam’s copy was actually written by Thomas Paine, and these words ended up being transcribed by Jefferson. If one were to look at the similarities between Adam’s copy and Jefferson’s copy, one could see there are extremely similar in writing. Some scholars have created the notion that Paine had influence writing the Declaration and have strong evidence to support the claim.<sup>53</sup>

Although the committee consisted of these five men, Thomas Paine was not without influence. In 1776, Paine wrote *A Dialogue*, Paine writes an account of a conversation between the ghost of General Montgomery, who has just arrived from the Elysian Fields; and an American Delegate. In this, the Delegate asks “Will not a *Declaration of Independence* lessen the number of our friends, and increase the rage of our enemies in Britain?” General Montgomery responds stating “Your friends (as you call them) are too few, too divided, and too interested to help you...The decree is finally gone forth. Britain and American are now distinct

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<sup>52</sup>Julian Boyd, *The Declaration of Independence: The Evolution of the Text*, (Charlottesville: International Center for Jefferson Studies at Monticello in Association with the Library of Congress, 1999).

<sup>53</sup> Lewis, *Thomas Paine*. Throughout his book, Lewis looks at historical data, as well as the writing styles and similarities between Adams’ copy of the *Declaration* and Paine’s earlier writings.

empires.”<sup>54</sup> We must look at the last two sentences carefully and realize that Thomas Paine was speaking about the *Declaration of Independence* when he wrote *The Decree is finally gone forth*. Unless Paine had written, or at least had influence in the writing, he would not have known the writing of the Declaration was in progress.<sup>55</sup> Also, one must take in consideration the date Paine wrote “A Dialogue”, as it occurred in the second week of June. This would mean it came out after June 10<sup>th</sup>, when Continental Congress appointed an independence committee, yet before the Declaration became known to the public in early July.

Further evidence to support the claim that Paine wrote the *Declaration of Independence* can be found in the original text of the *Declaration of Independence*, and the slavery clause that would become omitted in the final draft. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the abolition movement was miniscule, almost non-existent in the colonies. Yet, in one of the original drafts of the *Declaration of Independence*, there is a slavery clause, which denounced the practice. In these paragraphs, the essay expressed the injustices that King George III allowed to occur, as it stated “He has waged cruel War against human Nature itself, violating its most Sacred Rights of Life and Liberty in the Persons of a distant People who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into Slavery in another Hemisphere, or to incur miserable Death in their Transportation thither. This piratical Warfare, the opprobrium of Infidel Powers, is the Warfare of the CHRISTIAN King of Great Britain.”<sup>56</sup>

Thomas Jefferson was a well-known slave owner during his life. In contrast, Thomas Paine was one the few people that were against slavery at this time. In fact, Paine was one of the

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<sup>54</sup>Thomas Paine,. *A Dialogue*, June 1776. (Retrieved from [The Online Library of Liberty](http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=343&chapter=17044&layout=html&Itemid=27) The Writings of Thomas Paine, Vol. I (1774-1779) [http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com\\_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=343&chapter=17044&layout=html&Itemid=27](http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=343&chapter=17044&layout=html&Itemid=27).)

<sup>55</sup> Lewis, Thomas Paine. Author Joseph Lewis makes this argument in his book, stating that no one without inside knowledge on the events could have described the details on what was occurring.

<sup>56</sup> John Adams *John Adams' Copy of the Declaration of Independence*, ante 28 June 1776. (Retrieved from [The Massachusetts Historical Society](http://www.masshist.org/adams/apmanuscripts/JADofI1lg.html) <http://www.masshist.org/adams/apmanuscripts/JADofI1lg.html>.)

country's first abolitionists. In 1775, Paine wrote an article to the *Pennsylvania Journal* titled *An essay on African Slavery in America*. In this, Paine stated "That some desperate wretches should be willing to steal and enslave men by violence and murder for gain is rather lamentable than strange."<sup>57</sup> Later in his writing, Paine's argument goes more in depth as he stated "But to go to nations with whom there is no war, who have no way provoked, without farther design of conquest, purely to catch inoffensive people, like wild beasts, for slaves, is an height of outrage against humanity and justice, that seems left by heathen nations to be practiced by pretended Christian. How shameful are all attempts to colour and excuse it!"<sup>58</sup> While this line further shows Paine's strong feelings against slavery, it is also important because he is stating that slavery goes against the beliefs of Christianity. If we look back at the slavery clause as found in the *Declaration of Independence*, we can see criticism directed at the *Christian King*, for allowing slavery to endure. These parallels between religion and slavery help illustrate that Paine must have had influence in writing the *Declaration of Independence*. In fact, other writings from Paine further illustrate his feelings toward slavery. In September 1804, Louisiana was being considered for statehood. With his strong sentiments against slavery, Paine wrote a letter to the French Inhabitants of Louisiana, in which he states "You are arriving at freedom by the easiest means that any people ever enjoyed it; without contest, without expense, and even without any contrivance of your own. And you already so far mistake principles, that under the name of

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<sup>57</sup>Thomas Paine *African Slavery in America*. Originally Published March 8, 1775 when it appeared in the *Pennsylvania Journal* and the *Weekly Advertiser*. (Retrieved from [The Online Library of Liberty The Writings of Thomas Paine, Vol. I \(1774-1779\)](http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=343&chapter=16993&layout=html&Itemid=27) [http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com\\_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=343&chapter=16993&layout=html&Itemid=27](http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=343&chapter=16993&layout=html&Itemid=27).)

<sup>58</sup> Paine *African Slavery in America*, March, 1775.

rights you ask for powers; power to import and enslave Africans; and to govern a territory that we have purchased.”<sup>59</sup>

Thomas Paine’s name is not on the *Declaration of Independence*, nor was he given credit for writing the *Declaration* for a number of reasons. First and foremost, Paine was not allowed to sign the *Declaration of Independence* simply because he was not a member of Congress. However, there are numerous reasons why Paine has not received any credit for his influence in the Declaration. First off, as we saw earlier, Paine had no interest in fame or glory, his dedication was to the cause. He remained anonymous even when *Common Sense* had become a best seller. Paine would not have wanted the fame of helping to write the *Declaration of Independence*. Further, although Paine wrote inspirational works, he was an English immigrant who was considered a drunkard by his foes. Jefferson, on the other hand, was a respected southern gentleman. Finally, Jefferson and Paine had developed a friendship throughout the years, and Paine would not have wanted to betray that relationship. Although *the Declaration of Independence* was signed in July, the movement for separation had just begun, as the Americans now had to defeat the British in war.

After the *Declaration of Independence* was signed, American forces faced defeat after defeat at the mercy of the British. Although the infamous winter of 1776 played a role, the American troubles began as early as August and September. By September 15, 1776, the British occupied New York City. The cold weather in the months of November and December, along with the army's lack of supplies only created more problems. The soldiers faced a series of snowstorms as they retreated, their strength diminishing as the weather, lack of supplies, and

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<sup>59</sup> Thomas Paine *To the French Inhabitants of Louisiana*, September 22 1804. (Retrieved from [The Online Library of Liberty](http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=1082&chapter=17487&layout=html&Itemid=27) The Writings of Thomas Paine, Vol. III (1791-1804) [http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com\\_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=1082&chapter=17487&layout=html&Itemid=27](http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=1082&chapter=17487&layout=html&Itemid=27).)

expired enlistment periods took their toll on the army. In November 1776, Benedict Arnold, still fighting for the Americans, lost the Battle of Valcour Island, located on Lake Champlain, and in the same month, Cornwallis captured Fort Lee.

Paine's next work of inspiration came later in 1776. Although the *Crisis* consisted of 13 articles, the most influential article in the series was the first, as it boosted morale at a desperate time. In December of 1776, just five months after the signing of the *Declaration of Independence*, the cause of a free independent American nation seemed already to be a lost one. December 7, 1776, Cornwallis and Howe drove Washington and his troops out of New Jersey. On the same day, the British and Hessians captured Rhode Island, making it the third colony to fall in half a year. As renowned historian David Hackett Fisher states "Many on both sides thought that the rebellion was broken and that the American war was over".<sup>60</sup>

This military catastrophe that occurred in the colonies had begun since the Declaration was signed. By early November, Washington had been driven out of New York, and his men were in full scale retreat across New Jersey. Many of the soldiers that were not killed had abandoned the cause. When Washington's army had retreated from Newark, "Lieutenant James Monroe stood by the side of the road and counted the number of men as they passed by. He was shocked to discover that the army was reduced to three thousand men".<sup>61</sup> This number would only grow smaller, as hundreds of troops went home as their enlistments expired. The soldiers that remained had little food and clothing, and defeatism spread throughout the troops. This despondency had spread to Congress as well, as they abandoned Philadelphia expecting the British to soon take the city. Philadelphia, the political and economic capital of America was under martial law. The Americans desperately needed something to turn the tide of the war, a

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<sup>60</sup> David Fisher, *Washington's Crossing*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 137.

<sup>61</sup> Fisher, *Washington's Crossing*, 129.

victory to reignite enthusiasm for the independence movement. Washington planned to attack the Hessians which would become the Battle of Trenton. Washington wrote to his cousin, explaining the importance of this battle, “If this fails, I think the game will be pretty well up.”<sup>62</sup>

Washington’s soldiers were sick, starving, freezing, and all around, defeated. An army officer reported that “despair was seen in almost every countenance.”<sup>63</sup> If they were to win this battle, they needed a spark to boost their morale. Thomas Paine had a deep connection with the soldiers. Serving as a war correspondent, he stayed with the troops and shared their defeats from New York to Pennsylvania.<sup>64</sup> Sharing in the soldier’s experience, he marched with them when they retreated across New Jersey. Paine stayed true to the cause, as he believed that the ideals of democracy and republics were inevitable. However he worried that the military defeats might deter people from the cause. To boost the morale of not only the troops but for the independence movement as well, Thomas Paine resolved to write another pamphlet. Although the chaos that had been taking place in Philadelphia delayed Paine ten days to get his essay to print, on December 19<sup>th</sup>, 1776, his work appeared in the *Pennsylvanian Journal*. Four days later, this work was sold as a pamphlet and distributed among the American, including Washington’s troops. Paine titled his work *The American Crisis*, which became one of the most effect war pamphlets of all time.<sup>65</sup>

Using a language that was powerful, poetic, and comprehensible to the common man, Paine found the words to inspire Washington’s soldiers. James Cheetham wrote that *The Crisis* was “read in the camp to every corporal’s guard and in the army, and out of it had more than the

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<sup>62</sup> George Washington to Lund Washington (December 17, 1776), in *The American Revolution: Writings from the War of Independence* (New York: Library of America, 2001), 236.

<sup>63</sup> Edward Gifford *The American Revolution in Delaware Valley*, (Philadelphia: Society of the Sons of the Revolution), 1976.

<sup>64</sup> Fisher. *Washington's Crossing*, 138.

<sup>65</sup> Fisher. *Washington's Crossing*, 141.

intended effect. The convention of New York, reduced by dispersion, occasioned by alarm, to nine members, was rallied and reanimated. Militiamen who already tired and straggling from the army, returned. Hope succeeded to despair, cheerfulness to gloom, and firmness to irresolution.”<sup>66</sup> As Washington prepared his soldiers for battle, he had his military officers read to them Paine’s work. “These are the times that try men’s souls: The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain o cheap, we esteem to lightly – ‘Tis dearness only that gives everything its value.”<sup>67</sup> Paine’s inspiring words, struck a chord that inspired Washington’s men in the first major American victory. Paine wrote that although times were hard “no great deal is lost yet”, and insists that God will “not give up a people to military destruction.”<sup>68</sup> On December 25, Washington famously crossed the Delaware. This surprise attack allowed Washington’s troops to defeat the British Hessians and captured the city. As history writes “Without the pen of Paine, the sword of Washington would have been wielded in vain”.<sup>69</sup>

Thomas Paine’s first pamphlets of the *Crisis* turned the tide in the favor of the revolutionaries. The Americans had victories in Trenton, Princeton, and others which caused British retreat. These battles were still fought in the cold winter months so there must have been

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<sup>66</sup> James Cheetham, *Life of Thomas Paine* (New York, 1809), 56. Foner, *Complete writings of Thomas Paine* 1:49.

<sup>67</sup> Thomas Paine, *The American Crisis*, December 1776. Retrieved at Google Books, 2008.  
<http://books.google.com/books?id=OO8j54UCyjAC&printsec=frontcover&dq=The+American+crisis&hl=en&sa=X&ei=n6uNT-v7G8Xt0gGKqqXCDw&ved=0CDIQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=The%20American%20crisis&f=false>  
 Reformatted by *Forgotten Books* 2008. Collected and Edited by Moncure Daniel Conway.)

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Paine, *The American Crisis*, December 1776.

<sup>69</sup> Attributed to John Adams since at least its appearance in the *Annual Report of the Attorney General* (1957) by New York Department of Law; in *Religion and Political Thought* (2006) Michael Hoelzl and Graham Ward it quoted as a statement of 1805; conflicting attribution is made in *Thomas Paine and the Promise of America* (2006) by Harvey J Kaye, pg. 5, where it is attributed to Joel Barlow.

another factor which helped the American troops. That factor was morale, provided by Paine's *American Crisis*, which reaffirmed soldier's commitment to the cause.

The *American Crisis* did more than simply inspire Washington's troops, it inspired the country. All throughout the colonies, Paine's words spread, as thousands of copies were sold to people of all ages. Paine sold his copies for just two pennies, and encouraged printers everywhere to copy it freely so that its influence could spread. As Americans read Paine's words, they were inspired to join the cause once again. English spectator Nicholas Cresswell wrote that the population, which had been despondent in the months before, had become "liberty mad again."<sup>70</sup> American History writes that as Washington crossed the Delaware and was victorious in Trenton and Princeton, the American Revolution was revived. Yet this was not the case, as the great revival grew from defeat, not victory. Thomas Paine's *American Crisis* helped pick the country back up when they had been knocked down, and rejuvenated the cause for freedom.

In closing, few writers in history, if any, had the influence and success in a single year that Thomas Paine had in 1776. His pamphlet *Common Sense* transformed America's view of King George III from patriarch to tyrant. He spoke about the ideals of democracy and equality, which changed America's belief that they were destined to be controlled by a monarch. Paine took these views from *Common Sense* and used them to help influence, if not, have part in writing the *Declaration of Independence*. Finally, using elegant language in a time of despair, Paine's *American Crisis* provided hope to the soldiers, the citizens, and the cause, when all seemed lost in the winter of 1776. For these reasons, Thomas Paine is the true author of American Independence.

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<sup>70</sup> Troyer Steele Anderson, *The Command of the Howe Brothers during the American Revolution*, (New York: Oxford UP, 1936).



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