

# Ideas Help Start a Revolution

## MAIN IDEA

Tensions increased throughout the colonies until the Continental Congress declared independence on July 4, 1776.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The Declaration of Independence continues to inspire and challenge people everywhere.

## Terms & Names

- Second Continental Congress
- Olive Branch Petition
- Common Sense
- Thomas Jefferson
- Declaration of Independence
- Patriots
- Loyalists

## One American's Story

William Franklin, son of the famous American writer, scientist, statesman, and diplomat Benjamin Franklin, was royal governor of New Jersey. Despite his father's patriotic sympathies, William remained stubbornly loyal to King George. In a letter written on August 2, 1775, to Lord Dartmouth, he stated his position and that of others who resisted revolutionary views.

### A PERSONAL VOICE WILLIAM FRANKLIN

"There is indeed a dread in the minds of many here that some of the leaders of the people are aiming to establish a republic. Rather than submit . . . we have thousands who will risk the loss of their lives in defense of the old Constitution. [They] are ready to declare themselves whenever they see a chance of its being of any avail."

—quoted in *A Little Revenge: Benjamin Franklin and His Son*

Because of William's stand on colonial issues, communication between him and his father virtually ceased. The break between William Franklin and his father exemplified the chasm that now divided American from American.



William Franklin

### VIDEO

**PATRIOT FATHER, LOYALIST SON**  
The Divided House of Benjamin and William Franklin



## The Colonies Hover Between Peace and War

In May of 1775, colonial leaders convened a second Continental Congress in Philadelphia to debate their next move. Beyond their meeting hall, however, events continued moving quickly, as minutemen and British soldiers clashed in a bloody battle outside Boston, and an increasingly furious King George readied his country for war.

**THE SECOND CONTINENTAL CONGRESS** The loyalties that divided colonists sparked endless debates at the **Second Continental Congress**. John Adams of Massachusetts suggested a sweeping, radical plan—that each colony set up its own government and that the Congress declare the colonies independent.

Furthermore, he argued, the Congress should consider the militiamen besieging Boston to be the Continental Army and name a general to lead them. Moderate John Dickinson of Pennsylvania strongly disagreed with Adams's call for revolt. In private, he confronted Adams.

**PERSONAL VOICE** JOHN DICKINSON

**"What is the reason, Mr. Adams, that you New England men oppose our measures of reconciliation? . . . If you don't concur with us in our pacific system, I and a number of us will break off from you in New England, and we will carry on the opposition by ourselves in our own way."**

—quoted in *Patriots: The Men Who Started the American Revolution*

The debates raged on into June, but one stubborn fact remained: colonial militiamen were still encamped around Boston. The Congress agreed to recognize them as the Continental Army and appointed as its commander a 43-year-old veteran of the French and Indian War, George Washington. The Congress, acting like an independent government, also authorized the printing of paper money to pay the troops and organized a committee to deal with foreign nations. These actions came just in time. **A**

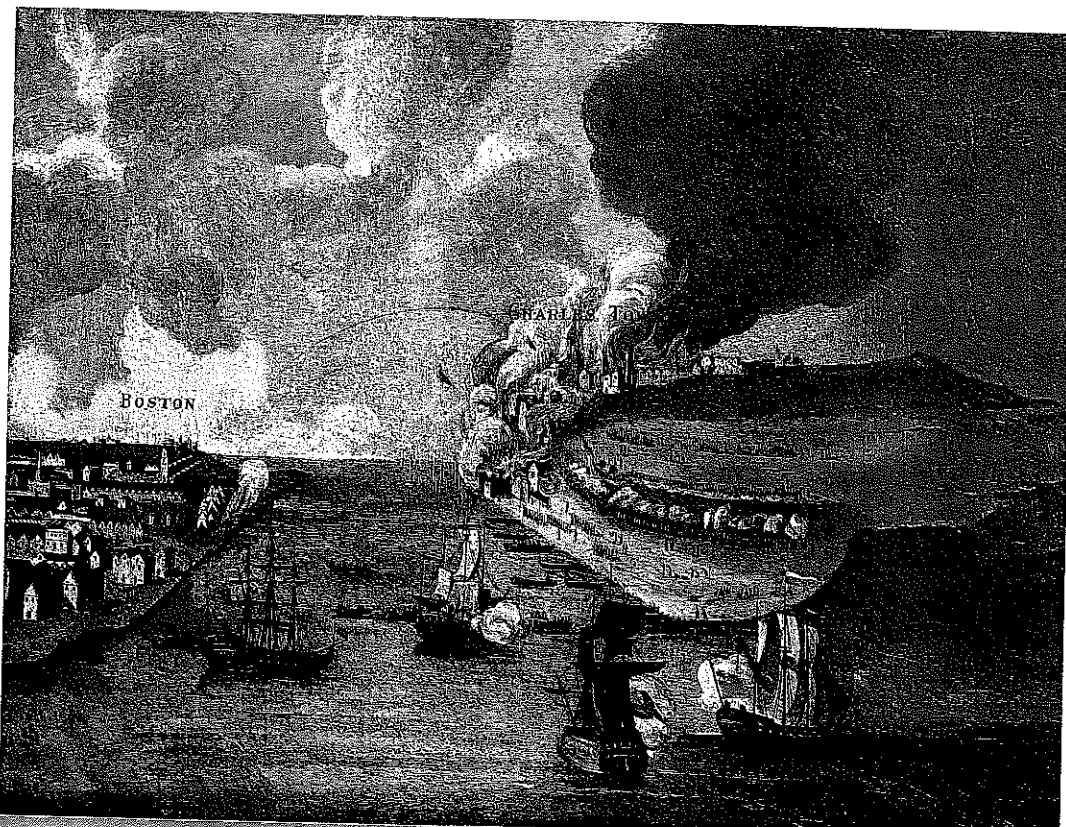
**THE BATTLE OF BUNKER HILL** Cooped up in Boston, British General Thomas Gage decided to strike at militiamen who had dug in on Breed's Hill, north of the city and near Bunker Hill. On the steamy summer morning of June 17, 1775, Gage sent out nearly 2,400 British troops. The British, sweating in wool uniforms and heavy packs, began marching up Breed's Hill in their customary broad lines. The colonists held their fire until the last minute, then began to shoot down the advancing redcoats. The surviving British troops made a second attack, and then a third. The third assault succeeded, but only because the militiamen ran low on ammunition.

This painting shows "Bunker's Hill" before the battle, as shells from Boston set nearby Charles Town ablaze. At the battle, the British demonstrated a maneuver they used throughout the war: they massed together, were visible for miles, and failed to take advantage of ground cover.

**MAIN IDEA**

**Evaluating Leadership**

**A** Do you think that the Continental Congress was responsible in the actions that it took?



By the time the smoke cleared, the colonists had lost 450 men, while the British had suffered over 1,000 casualties. The misnamed Battle of Bunker Hill would prove to be the deadliest battle of the war.

**THE OLIVE BRANCH PETITION** By July, the Second Continental Congress was readying the colonies for war while still hoping for peace. Most of the delegates, like most colonists, felt deep loyalty to George III and blamed the bloodshed on the king's ministers. On July 8, 1775, the Congress sent the king the so-called **Olive Branch Petition**, urging a return to "the former harmony" between Britain and the colonies. **B**

King George flatly rejected the petition. Furthermore, he issued a proclamation stating that the colonies were in rebellion and urged Parliament to order a naval blockade of the American coast.

#### MAIN IDEA

#### Evaluating

**B** Do you think that the Olive Branch Petition was too little too late?

## The Patriots Declare Independence

In the months after the Olive Branch Petition, a thin document containing the powerful words of an angry citizen began to circulate and change public opinion.

**COMMON SENSE** In *Common Sense*, an anonymous 50-page pamphlet, the colonist Thomas Paine attacked King George III. Paine explained that his own revolt against the king had begun with Lexington and Concord.

#### A PERSONAL VOICE THOMAS PAINE

"No man was a warmer wisher for a reconciliation than myself, before the fatal nineteenth of April, 1775, but the moment the event of that day was made known, I rejected the hardened, sullen tempered Pharaoh of England for ever . . . the wretch, that with the pretended title of Father of his people can unfeelingly hear of their slaughter, and composedly sleep with their blood upon his soul."

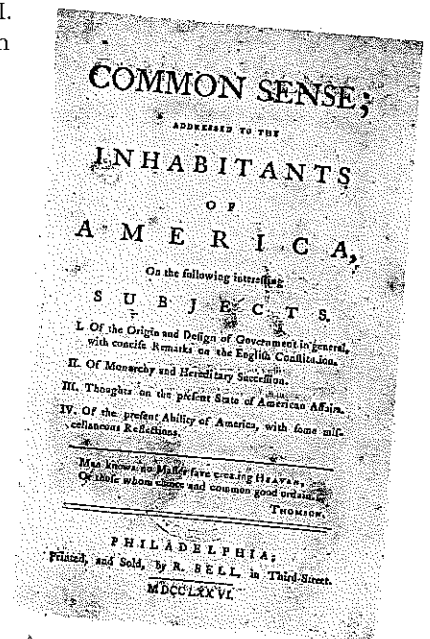
—*Common Sense*

Paine declared that the time had come for colonists to proclaim an independent republic. He argued that independence, which was the American "destiny," would allow America to trade freely with other nations for guns and ammunition and win foreign aid from British enemies. Finally, Paine stated, independence would give Americans the chance to create a better society—one free from tyranny, with equal social and economic opportunities for all.

*Common Sense* sold nearly 500,000 copies and was widely applauded. In April 1776, George Washington wrote, "I find *Common Sense* is working a powerful change in the minds of many men." **C**

**DECLARING INDEPENDENCE** By early summer 1776, events pushed the wavering Continental Congress toward a decision. North Carolina had declared itself independent, and a majority of Virginians told their delegates that they favored independence. At last, the Congress urged each colony to form its own government. On June 7, Virginia delegate Richard Henry Lee moved that "these United Colonies are, and of a right ought to be, free and independent States."

While talks on this fateful motion were under way, the Congress appointed a committee to prepare a formal declaration explaining the reasons for the colonies' actions. Virginia lawyer **Thomas Jefferson**, known for his broad knowledge and skillfully crafted prose, was chosen to express the committee's points.



▲ Thomas Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense* helped to overcome many colonists' doubts about separating from Britain.

#### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Issues

**C** Why do you think that *Common Sense* was so effective?

## DIFFICULT DECISIONS

### RECONCILIATION OR INDEPENDENCE?

Many American colonists in 1775 were not convinced that independence from Britain was a good idea. They felt deep loyalty to the king and were accustomed to British rule and the order that it had created.

Many others believed in Thomas Paine's ideas and wanted to be rid of tyranny as well as free to pursue their own economic gain and political ideals.

1. Consider the points of view of different groups of colonists, including slaves, in 1775. What factors do you think would have most strongly influenced each group's preference for independence or reconciliation? Explain your answer.

2. Imagine that the delegates at the Second Continental Congress had voted for reconciliation. What events do you think would have followed—both in the short run and in the long run? Give reasons to support your answer.

Jefferson's masterful **Declaration of Independence** drew on the concepts of the English philosopher John Locke, who maintained that people enjoy "natural rights" to life, liberty, and property. Jefferson described these rights as "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

In keeping with Locke's ideas, Jefferson then declared that governments derive "their just powers from the consent of the governed"—that is, from the people. This right of consent gave the people the right "to alter or to abolish" any government that threatened their unalienable rights and to install a government that would uphold these principles. On the basis of this reasoning, the American colonies declared their independence from Britain, listing in the Declaration the numerous ways in which the British king had violated the "unalienable rights" of the Americans. **D**

The Declaration states flatly that "all men are created equal." When this phrase was written, it expressed the common belief that free citizens were political equals. It did not claim that all people had the same abilities or ought to have equal wealth. It was not meant to embrace women, Native Americans, and African-American slaves—a large number of Americans. However, Jefferson's words presented ideals that would later help these groups challenge traditional attitudes.

In his first draft, Jefferson included an eloquent attack on the cruelty and injustice of the slave trade. However, South Carolina and Georgia, the two colonies most dependent on slavery, objected. In order to gain the votes of those two states, Jefferson dropped the offending passage.

On July 2, 1776, the delegates voted unanimously that the American colonies were free, and on July 4, 1776, they adopted the Declaration of Independence. While delegates created a formal copy of the Declaration, the document was read to a crowd in front of the Pennsylvania State House—

now called Independence Hall. A rush of pride and anxiety ran through the **Patriots**—the supporters of independence—when they heard the closing vow: "We mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our Sacred Honor."

## Americans Choose Sides

Americans now faced a difficult, bitter choice: revolution or loyalty to the Crown. This issue divided communities, friends, and even families throughout the colonies.

**LOYALISTS AND PATRIOTS** The exact number of **Loyalists**—those who opposed independence and remained loyal to the Crown—is unknown. Many with Loyalist sympathies changed sides as the war progressed.

Some Loyalists felt a special tie to the king because they had served as judges, councilors, or governors. Most Loyalists, however, were ordinary people of modest means. They included some people who lived far from the cities and knew little of the events that turned other colonists into revolutionaries. Other people remained loyal because they thought that the British were going to win the war and they wanted to avoid being punished as rebels. Still others were Loyalists because they thought that the crown would protect their rights more effectively than the new colonial governments would. **E**

Patriots drew their numbers from people who saw economic opportunity in an independent America. The Patriot cause embraced farmers, artisans, merchants,

### MAIN IDEA

#### Summarizing

**D** What reasons did Thomas Jefferson give to justify revolt by the colonies?

### MAIN IDEA

#### Contrasting

**E** How did the thinking of the Loyalists differ from that of the Patriots?