As late as January 1776, months before American independence was declared, many colonists still pledged their loyalty to the Crown. These loyalists comprised a large segment of the population, including important leaders. They considered the colonies an extension of Great Britain and generally discarded the idea of becoming a self-governing country.

To the loyalists, the thought of severing economic and political relations with their "mother country" Great Britain—a nation with which they had intimate cultural and ancestral ties—was unthinkable. Furthermore, the penalties for treason, such as hanging, were severe. Parliament's reactions to rebellious acts, including the Boston Tea Party, loomed heavy on the colonists' minds. Eventually, however, the exorbitant taxes, strict regulations, and decision to hire foreign soldiers to suppress colonial uprisings weakened the loyalists' allegiance to the Crown.

One person credited with influencing the colonists to seek independence from British rule was Thomas Paine, a one-time corset maker and tax collector who left England in 1774 for a better life in Philadelphia. The impoverished entrepreneur, who tried his hand at several vocations including writing, penned the pamphlet *Common Sense* in January 1776, about a year after his arrival in America.

Paine unleashed his anger directly at King George III. While colonial leaders had crafted gracious and humble petitions to persuade the king to relinquish control of the colonies, Paine bluntly called the king a "Royal Brute," unworthy of Americans' respect. He argued that the cause of American hostility toward the British government was not Parliament, but rather the monarchy, which he claimed was the true source of malice toward the colonists.

Paine claimed that the authority of all government officials, from governors to senators to judges, should originate from popular consent. He also argued that the concept of an island ruling a continent defied natural law. "We have it in our power to begin the world again," he insisted. *Common Sense* called for an end to the colonists' political wavering over British rule and promoted the idea of an American republic where free citizens, not a monarch, were in control. America, Paine concluded, had an obligation to the world to become an independent and democratic society.

Within months of its release, 150,000 copies of *Common Sense* circulated throughout the colonies. Although many colonists considered Paine's vision of a new American political system apart from Great Britain radical, it inspired Patriots to break from tradition and support independence. *Common Sense* put into words the thoughts of many Americans and became one of the most influential political diatribes ever written. Even members of the Continental Congress accepted Paine's call to action by urging states to form governments and write their own statements of independence.

In December 1776, Paine published another work, called *The American Crisis, No. 1*. Lines from this writing became the battle cry of the American Revolution: "These are the times that try men's souls … Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered."

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