SECTION 2

Declaring Independence

What You Will Learn...

Main Ideas

1. Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* led many colonists to support independence.
2. Colonists had to choose sides when independence was declared.
3. The Declaration of Independence did not address the rights of all colonists.

The Big Idea

The colonies formally declared their independence from Great Britain.

Key Terms and People

Common Sense, *p. 118*
Thomas Paine, *p. 118*
Declaration of Independence, *p. 119*
Thomas Jefferson, *p. 119*
Loyalists, *p. 119*

TAKING NOTES As you read, take notes on the Declaration of Independence. Write your notes in a graphic organizer like the one below.

Influence of *Common Sense* on Declaration	Main Ideas of Declaration	People Not Included

If YOU were there...

You live on a farm in New York in 1776. The conflicts with the British have torn your family apart. Your father is loyal to King George and wants to remain British. But your mother is a fierce Patriot, and your brother wants to join the Continental Army. Your father and others who feel the same way are moving to British-held Canada. Now you must decide what you will do.

Would you go to Canada or support the Patriots?

BUILDING BACKGROUND The outbreak of violence at Lexington, Concord, and Boston took some colonists by surprise. Many, like the father above, opposed independence from Britain. Those who supported freedom began to promote their cause in many ways.

Paine's *Common Sense*

"[There] is something very absurd in supporting a continent to be perpetually [forever] governed by an island." This plainspoken argument against British rule over America appeared in ***Common Sense***, a 47-page pamphlet that was distributed in Philadelphia in January 1776. *Common Sense* was published anonymously—that is, without the author's name. The author, **Thomas Paine**, argued that citizens, not kings and queens, should make laws. At a time when monarchs ruled much of the world, this was a bold idea.

News of the work spread throughout the colonies, eventually selling some 500,000 copies. Paine reached a wide audience by writing as a common person speaking to common people. *Common Sense* changed the way many colonists viewed their king. It made a strong case for economic freedom and for the right to military self-defense. It cried out against tyranny—that is, the abuse of government power. Thomas Paine's words rang out in his time, and they have echoed throughout American history.

READING CHECK **Supporting a Point of View** Would you have agreed with Thomas Paine? Explain.

Independence Is Declared

Many colonial leaders agreed with Paine. In June 1776 the Second Continental Congress formed a committee to write a document declaring the colonies' independence. A committee also created a seal for the new country with the Latin motto "*E pluribus unum*" or "out of many, one." This motto recognized the new union of states.

A New Philosophy of Government

The **Declaration of Independence** formally announced the colonies' break from Great Britain. In doing so, it expressed three main ideas. First, **Thomas Jefferson**, the document's main author, argued that all people possess unalienable rights, including the rights of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Next, Jefferson asserted that King George III had violated the colonists' rights by taxing them without their consent. Jefferson accused the king of passing unfair laws and interfering with colonial governments. He also believed that stationing a large British army within the colonies was a burden.

Third, Jefferson stated that the colonies had the right to break from Britain. Influenced by the Enlightenment ideal of the social contract, he maintained that governments and rulers must protect the rights of citizens. In exchange, the people agree to be governed. Jefferson argued that King George III had broken the social contract.

On July 4, 1776, the Continental Congress approved the Declaration of Independence. This act broke all ties to the British crown. The United States of America was born.

Choosing Sides

The signing of the Declaration made the rebellion a full-scale revolt against Britain. Those who supported it would be considered traitors. Colonists who chose to side with the British were known as **Loyalists**—often called Tories.

THE IMPACT TODAY

The Continental Congress voted for independence on July 2. However, because the Declaration was not approved until July 4, the fourth is celebrated today as Independence Day.

Primary Source

POINTS OF VIEW

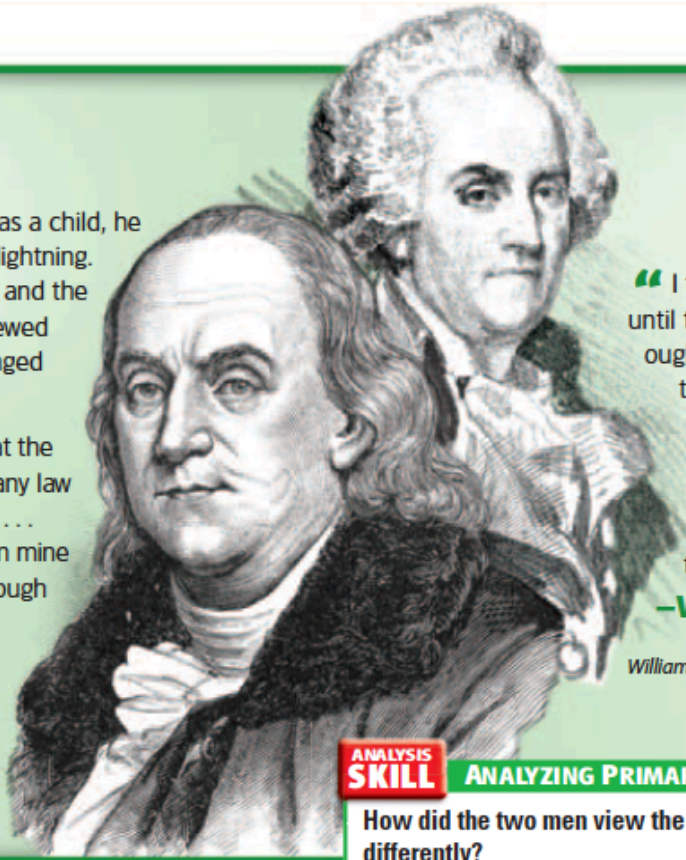
Choosing Sides

When Ben Franklin's son William was a child, he helped his father experiment with lightning. But by the time William had grown and the Revolution started, the two men viewed the conflict differently. They exchanged letters on the subject.

"I am indeed of the opinion, that the parliament has no right to make any law whatever, binding on the colonies . . . I know your sentiments differ from mine on these subjects. You are a thorough government man, which I do not wonder at, nor do I aim at converting you. I only wish you to act uprightly and steadily."

—Benjamin Franklin,

quoted in *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin Vol. III*



"I think that all laws until they are repealed ought to be obeyed and that it is the duty of those who are entrusted with the executive part of government to see that they are so."

—William Franklin,

quoted in *Benjamin and William Franklin* by Sheila L. Skemp

ANALYSIS SKILL **ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES**

How did the two men view the British government differently?

Signing the Declaration of Independence

Historians estimate that 40 to 45 percent of Americans were Patriots, while 20 to 30 percent were Loyalists. The rest were neutral.

Because of persecution by Patriots, more than 50,000 Loyalists fled the colonies during the Revolution. Most went to Canada, where Britain allowed them more self-rule after the Revolution. In doing so, they abandoned their homes and property. Divided allegiances tore apart families and friendships—even Benjamin Franklin became separated from his Loyalist son William.

Native Americans were at first encouraged by both sides to remain neutral. By the summer of 1776, however, both Patriots and the British were aggressively recruiting Indian fighters. Most sided with the British. In northern New York, four of the six Iroquois nations fought for the British. However, the Oneida and Tuscarora helped the Patriots, even delivering food to the soldiers at Valley Forge.

READING CHECK **Drawing Conclusions** Why would Native Americans have lost out no matter who won the war?

Unfinished Business

Today we recognize that the Declaration of Independence excluded many colonists. While it declared that "all men are created equal," the document failed to mention women, enslaved Africans, or Native Americans. The rights of these minorities would be subject to the rule of the majority.

Women

Although many women were Patriots, the Declaration did not address their rights. At least one delegate's wife, Abigail Adams, tried to influence her husband, John, to include women's rights in the Declaration. In a failed effort, she expressed her concerns:

> "Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands . . . If particular care and attention is not paid to the Ladies we are and will not hold ourselves bound by Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation."
>
> —Abigail Adams, quoted in *Notable American Women*

1. John Adams
2. Roger Sherman
3. Robert Livingston
4. Thomas Jefferson
5. Benjamin Franklin
6. Charles Thomson
7. John Hancock

The Declaration of Independence was adopted on July 4, 1776. This painting shows 47 of the 56 signers of the document. The man sitting on the right is John Hancock, who was the president of the Second Continental Congress. He is accepting the Declaration from the committee that wrote it.

How realistic do you think this painting is?

African and Native Americans

The Declaration did not recognize the rights of enslaved Africans, either. The authors had compared life under British rule to living as an enslaved people. The obvious question arose: Why did any form of slavery exist in a land that valued personal freedom? Even Thomas Jefferson, the main author of the Declaration, was a slaveholder.

In July 1776 slavery was legal in all the colonies. By the 1780s the New England colonies were taking steps to end slavery. Even so, the conflict over slavery continued long after the Revolutionary War.

The Declaration of Independence also did not address the rights of Native Americans to life, liberty, or property. Despite the Proclamation of 1763, American colonists had been quietly settling on lands that belonged to Native Americans. This tendency to disregard the rights of Native Americans would develop into a pattern after the colonists won their independence from Great Britain.

READING CHECK **Finding Main Ideas** What groups were unrepresented in the Declaration of Independence?

SUMMARY AND PREVIEW In 1776 the colonists declared their independence. To achieve their goal, however, they would have to win a war against the British army. In the next section you will learn about some of the battles of the Revolutionary War. For a time, it seemed as if the British would defeat the colonists.

Section 2 Assessment

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Online Quiz
KEYWORD: SC7 HP4

Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and People

1. **a. Identify** Who was **Thomas Paine**?
   b. Make Inferences Why do you think Thomas Paine originally published ***Common Sense*** anonymously?
   c. Elaborate Do you think that most colonists would have supported independence from Britain without Thomas Paine's publication of *Common Sense*? Explain.
2. **a. Identify** What two sides emerged in response to the **Declaration of Independence**? What did each side favor?
   b. Explain What arguments did the authors of the Declaration of Independence give for declaring the colonies free from British control?
   c. Predict How might some groups use the Declaration of Independence in the future to gain rights?
3. **a. Identify** Who urged her husband to "remember the ladies"?
   b. Making Inferences Why did the authors of the Declaration of Independence fail to address the rights of women, Native Americans, and African Americans in the document?

Critical Thinking

4. **Analyzing** Review your notes on the Declaration of Independence. Then copy the graphic organizer below and use it to identify three results of the Declaration of Independence.

FOCUS ON SPEAKING

5. **Gathering Ideas about the Declaration of Independence** You are living at the time of the American Revolution. What is new and surprising about the colonists' actions? In one or two minutes, what is the most important thing you can say about the colonies' declaring independence?