

## 12.3 Thomas Paine and *Common Sense*

Like the delegates to the Continental Congress, most colonists were not sure that they wanted independence. They wanted Britain to pay attention to their complaints, but they were still loyal British citizens. And many were afraid that the colonies could not win a war against one of the most powerful armies in the world.

Then, in January 1776, Thomas Paine published a booklet called *Common Sense*. Paine had come to America from Britain in 1774. He had been in the colonies only a short while, but he was strongly in favor of independence. He argued that it was only natural for people to rule themselves instead of being ruled by a king. America, he said, had a chance to show the whole world a better form of government.

*Common Sense* had a powerful effect on the colonists. Paine wrote simply and strongly in words that everyone could understand. Many colonists still thought of Britain as the parent country, but Paine said that parents do not "make war upon their own families." The blood of the Patriots killed in Massachusetts, he wrote, "cried out" that it was time to separate from Britain. And he told the colonists that they were strong enough to defeat the British army.

Within a few months, 120,000 copies of *Common Sense* were printed, more than any other book in America up to that time. People everywhere read it. Soldiers in the Continental Army passed copies of the book among themselves. George Washington wrote that *Common Sense* was changing many people's minds. By the spring of 1776, most people were ready for the Continental Congress to vote for independence.

Thomas Paine's booklet *Common Sense* convinced many colonists to declare independence.

