

## American Revolution

*Common Sense*, published 1776

*Common Sense*, Paine's pro-independence monograph published anonymously on 10 January 1776 spread quickly among literate colonists. About 120,000 copies are alleged to have been distributed throughout the colonies which themselves totaled only four million free inhabitants, making it the best-selling work in 18th-century America. It convinced many colonists, including George Washington, to seek redress in political independence from the Kingdom of Great Britain, and argued strongly against any compromise short of independence. The work was greatly influenced (including in its name – Paine had originally proposed the title *Plain Truth*) by the equally controversial pro-independence writer Benjamin Rush and was instrumental in bringing about the Declaration of Independence.

Loyalists attacked *Common Sense* with vigor. One such early attack, entitled *Plain Truth*, was written in 1776 by prominent loyalist Lt. Col. James Chalmers. An expatriate of Scotland, Chalmers attacked Paine's writing as "quackery." Chalmers would serve as commander of the First Battalion of Maryland Loyalists in the war.

Paine's strength lay in his ability to present complex ideas in clear and concise form, as opposed to the more philosophical approaches of his Enlightenment contemporaries in Europe, and it was Paine who proposed the name *United States of America* for the new nation. When the war arrived, Paine published a series of important pamphlets, *The Crisis*, credited with inspiring the early colonists during the ordeals faced in their long struggle with the British. The first *Crisis* paper, published on 23 December 1776, began with the famous words:

***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 their 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.***

Washington himself found it so uplifting that he ordered it to be read to all his troops on 25 December 1776, prior to commencing his crossing of the Delaware.

In 1778, Paine alluded to the then ongoing secret negotiations with France in his pamphlets, and there was a scandal which resulted in Paine being dropped from the Committee on Foreign Affairs. In 1781, however, he accompanied John Laurens during his mission to France. His services were eventually recognized by the state of New York by the granting of an estate at New Rochelle, New York, and he received considerable gifts of money from both Pennsylvania and – at Washington's suggestion – from Congress.