

# The Colonies Resist 11



**elp from the Other Colonies** Parliament was right about one thing: the Intolerable Acts did make the people of Boston and the rest of Massachusetts suffer. But Parliament didn't figure on the other colonies coming to their aid.

Pennsylvania sent barrels of flour to the people of Massachusetts. New York sent them sheep. From South Carolina came sacks of rice; from Connecticut, money; from Virginia, corn and wheat.

Virginia's leaders went further. They set aside a day of fasting and prayer for the people of Boston. They also declared that the Intolerable Acts were a threat to liberty in all the colonies. If the king and Parliament could do these things to Massachusetts, what would stop them from doing the same to other colonies?

Then the Virginians took a bold step. They called for delegates from all the colonies to meet and discuss what to do next. This would be the second time delegates met to resist an act of Parliament. The first time was the Stamp Act Congress, and it had been successful. This time, though, the British government seemed determined not to back down.

## The First Continental Congress

With Committees of Correspondence spreading the word, 56 colonial leaders assembled in Philadelphia in September 1774. They represented 12 of the 13 British colonies in North America. You can tell how important the colonists thought this meeting was by the

people they chose to represent them. George Washington, Patrick Henry, and young Thomas Jefferson were there from Virginia. Sam Adams and his cousin John came from Massachusetts. New York sent John Jay, who later would serve on the Supreme Court of the United States. John Adams wrote in his diary, "There is in the Congress a collection of the greatest men upon this continent."

This meeting later became known as the First Continental Congress. The delegates talked together about their common problems.

They expressed their anger at the British government. They issued a Declaration of Rights, saying that American colonists were entitled to

all the "rights of Englishmen." They pointed out all the acts of Parliament since the French and Indian War that had been taking these rights away. They also told King George III that the colonists were still loyal to him and asked him to consider their complaints.

The members of the First Continental Congress did two more things. They voted to stop all trade with the British—buy nothing from them and sell nothing to them—until Parliament repealed the Intolerable Acts. And they agreed to meet again in May 1775 if

**Who wasn't there?**  
**Only Georgia didn't send**  
**a delegation to the First**  
**Continental Congress.**





*George Washington represented Virginia at the Continental Congress.*

Parliament had still done nothing to restore their rights.

Talk about defiance! This was the most defiant act of the colonies yet. They had really thrown down a challenge to Great Britain.

But something else had happened, too—something that was hard to put your finger on. This “something” had no exact name. You couldn’t put an exact date on when it started. But it was as important as any of the resolutions passed by the Continental Congress. Maybe those shipments of flour and rice and money to Boston from the other colonies were the start of it. Maybe it began with the Stamp Act Congress. Or maybe it had slowly been happening all along, before anyone was even aware of it. That “something” was that the colonies were coming together as never before.

Before this, each colony had thought of itself as separate from the others. Their inhabitants thought of themselves as

Virginians or New Yorkers or Georgians. When they thought of an attachment to any other place, it was to Great Britain. Partly that was because each colony had more to do with the mother country than it did with the other colonies. And partly it was because colonists thought of themselves as British citizens, with all “the rights of Englishmen.”

By the end of the First Continental Congress, many colonists were thinking of themselves as part of one country, rather than as people living in 13 different colonies. They were becoming more aware of the things they had in common. They were becoming more aware that they needed each other. Patrick Henry, that shrewd Virginian, captured this new mood perfectly. Speaking to the Continental Congress, he said, “The distinctions [differences] between Virginians, Pennsylvanians, New Yorkers, and New Englanders, are no more. I am not a Virginian but an American.”



# Preparing for War 13



**May 10, 1775** Once again the leading men from every American colony gathered in Philadelphia for a Continental Congress. This time, though, was different. This time there had been fighting. This time men had died.

Most of the delegates to this Second Continental Congress weren't sure what to do next. They dreaded the thought of separating from Great Britain and their king. Couldn't Congress try again to patch up the quarrel with the mother country? At the same time, they could not ignore the fact that fighting had started. Shouldn't they take steps to prepare for more fighting, if it should come?

In the end the Second Continental Congress did both. Delegates wrote a **petition** to King George III. A petition is like a request. They told the king they were still loyal to him. There was no talk of

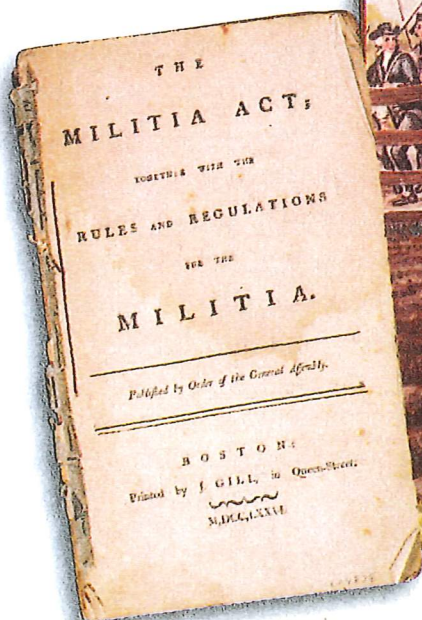
independence. They said they didn't want to break up the British Empire. They only asked the king to make his government change its bad policies and restore their rights.

At the same time the Congress took steps to prepare for more fighting. John Adams of Massachusetts took the lead. Local militias are fine for fighting here and there, he

## vocabulary

**petition** a formal written request signed by several people

*This handbook, shown below, was printed in 1776 and describes how the militia should be trained. A farmer, right, prepares to join the other members of his local militia.*





said. But we need to create a real American army—an “Army of the United Colonies.”

At that moment, members of the Massachusetts militia were camped outside Boston, near the British troops. Those militiamen, said Adams, were ready to be the first soldiers in the new army.

And to lead it? How fortunate the Congress was, Adams continued, to have the right man for the job in that very room! He was a man of “great talents and excellent character.” He was an experienced military leader from Virginia. As Adams continued to speak, all eyes turned to the tall man in military uniform standing in the back of the room. The man quickly turned and left the room. He wanted the delegates to be free to discuss him without his being present. The man was George Washington.

Adams was right. Washington was the perfect man to lead the Continental army, as it came to be called. He had gained his military experience in the French and Indian War. After that he returned to Mount Vernon, Virginia, to run his plantation. He was a member of the Virginia House of

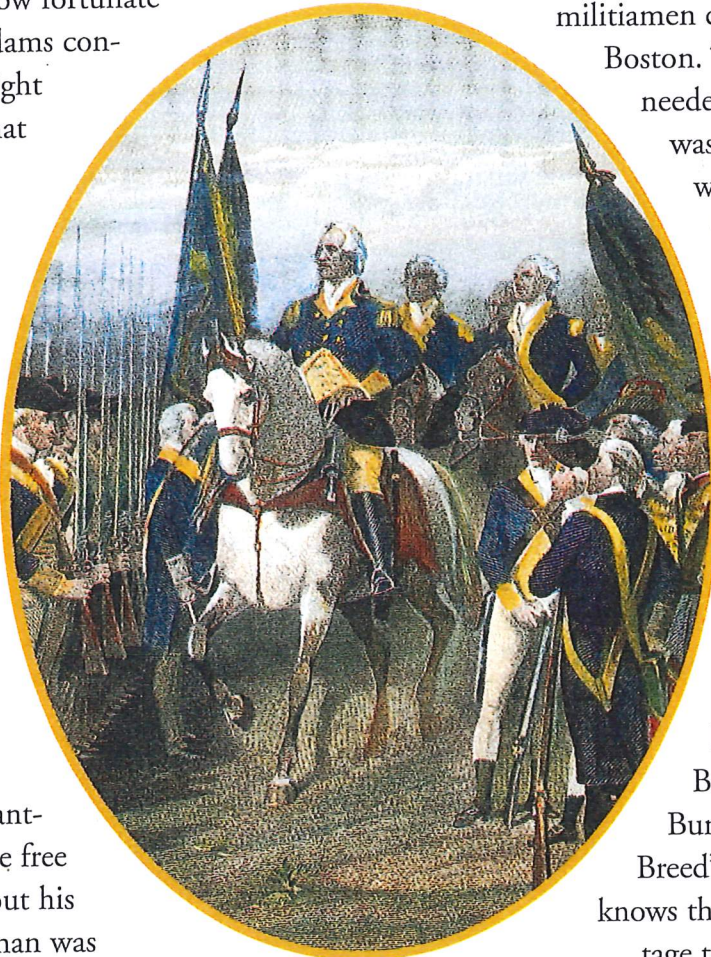
Burgesses and a supporter of the Patriot cause. And he was among the best-known men in the colonies. Everyone admired him for his devotion to duty, his cool head, and his strong will.

It was settled. Washington was to command the army. And the first members of that army would be the Massachusetts militiamen camped around Boston. They might be needed soon, for the news was that more soldiers were arriving from Great Britain.

Washington traveled to Massachusetts to take charge. Before he arrived, though, the militia fought an important battle near Boston.

There are two hills that overlook Boston. One was called Bunker Hill. The other Breed’s Hill. Every general knows that it’s a great advantage to control hills. From their tops you can fire down at the enemy below—especially if you have

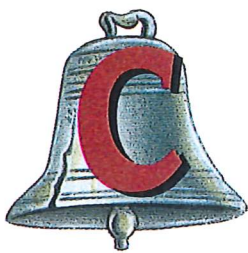
cannons. And the enemy has to fight its way uphill to defeat you. The British understood that, too, of course. But they were not very worried about those untrained Massachusetts militiamen nearby, and they did not bother to guard the hills. On the night of June 16, 1775,



*On July 3, 1775, George Washington took command of the Continental army.*



# 14 The Great Declaration



**Coming to a Decision** By the start of 1776, the argument with Great Britain had gone on for more than ten years. The fighting had gone on for almost one. And still, many colonists weren't sure they really wanted to strike out on the path of independence.

This gives you some idea about how difficult that decision was for many. A colony breaking away from a mother country—it had never been done before. Giving up a place in the world's greatest empire and all the advantages of being part of it—was that wise? Still, should the colonists do nothing to defend their rights and liberties? It was a very tough decision.

Tough, that is, until a 29-year-old-English immigrant wrote a pamphlet. After that the decision became very clear.

The immigrant's name was Thomas Paine, and he called his pamphlet *Common Sense*. Tom Paine had a great and rare skill. He could

write about important ideas in the everyday language of the

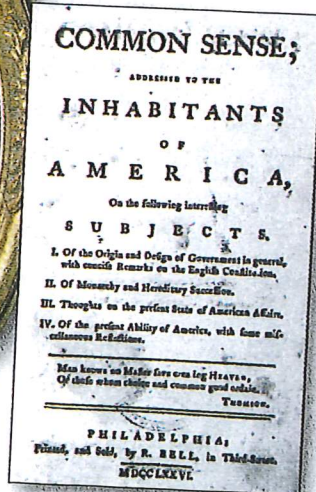
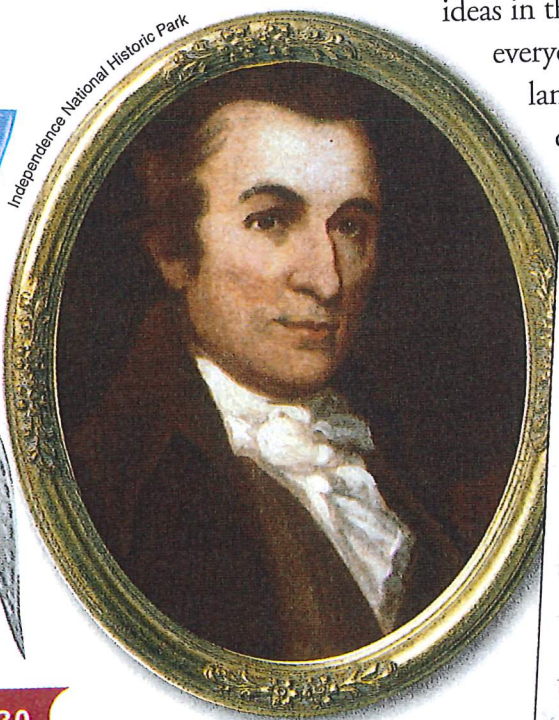
farmer, the worker, and the townspeople. If you could read at all, you could understand *Common Sense*. Probably half of all American colonists did read it. And after they did, they talked about it in their homes, on street corners, and in taverns and inns.

A lot of what Paine wrote was, just as he said, plain common sense. He got readers to think about his ideas not just by telling them what he thought but also by asking what *they* thought. Did it make any sense, Paine asked, for a huge continent like America to be ruled by a small island 3,000 miles away? Did it make sense for a people to be ruled by one man, just because he was born into a certain family? Wouldn't it be better to choose our rulers, rather than have one handed to us—someone who might be all wrong for the job but who got it only because his father had it before?

Americans should stop fooling themselves that monarchy—government headed by a king—would ever bring fair government to the people. It had never happened, and it never would. It was monarchy that was reducing the world to blood and ashes. Americans should abandon that form of government once and for all.

Thomas Paine's words rallied undecided colonists to the Patriot cause.

Independence National Historic Park





IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America.

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should lay forth their justifications of this declaration.

the same unalienable Rights; that among these we Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness from the award of the ground. — That whenever any form of Government is instituted, laying its foundation on such principles and establishing its powers, it declares that Government long established should not be changed for light and convenience, then it rights themselves by abolishing the forms to which they agree a change to which them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, they have the patient sufferers of these tortures, and such is now the magnitude which our Nation is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct or indirect.

He has refused his assent to laws, the most wholesome

[illegible]

*It was an act of courage to sign the Declaration of Independence.*



Paine said that it was just common sense for Americans to cut off all ties to Great Britain, to be independent and create a government of their own. Americans didn't need a king, he said. They could live in a land where "the law is king," not some person wearing a crown in a faraway land. The more they thought about it, the more Americans agreed. They didn't need the British Parliament and king to rule them. They had plenty of experience in choosing their own leaders and ruling themselves. Perhaps it really was time, then, to separate and go their own way.

## The Declaration of Independence

In June 1776, the Second Continental Congress took up the question of independence. They agreed that the time had come to separate from Great Britain. The Congress chose a committee to write a declaration,

or statement. The purpose of such a declaration was to explain to the world why the colonies were breaking away from Great Britain.

The committee chosen to write the declaration included John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and a young, tall, redheaded Virginian, Thomas Jefferson. Which one should do the main writing? Benjamin Franklin and George Washington were probably two most famous Americans alive. John Adams was one of the first leaders to speak out in favor of independence. But Thomas Jefferson already had a reputation as a fine writer and was chosen by Franklin and Adams to write the document.

What Jefferson produced became the most famous document in American history, and one of the most famous in the history of



the entire world. Of course Jefferson wanted the world to know all the bad things this king had done, all the rights he had taken away. So he listed each of them.

But Jefferson did more, much more. He explained why these acts of the king made it right for the colonists to break with Britain.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Jefferson continued by stating, "That to secure these rights, governments are instituted [created] . . ." In other words, the reason we have governments is to protect our rights.

What if a government doesn't protect those rights but actually takes them away? Then, said Jefferson, people have the right to create new governments for themselves. That's what the people of the 13 colonies were now doing.

On July 4, 1776, Congress adopted this Declaration of Independence. On that day the American colonies became independent states. Together, they made up the United States of America.

During the next month, in towns and cities across the land, crowds gathered to hear



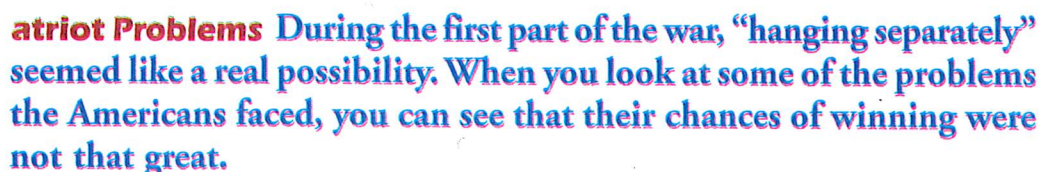
*Colonists celebrated the signing of the Declaration of Independence by raising Liberty Poles.*

the Declaration of Independence read aloud. Everywhere in the new United States of America, church bells rang out. Soldiers fired cannons and shot off guns. Citizens lit great bonfires in celebration.

Meanwhile back in Philadelphia the mood among some of the delegates to the Second Continental Congress was a little more serious. The 56 men who signed the Declaration knew that if the revolution failed, the king would probably put them to death. Benjamin Franklin summed up the need for all the new states to work together. "Gentlemen," he said, "we must all hang together, [or] else we shall all hang separately."



## 15



certain number of years and had time to train them for battle.

Also, Washington never knew how many soldiers he could count on at any one time. Some joined the Continental army for a three-year term. Most volunteered to serve for less than a year. And some signed up for only three months. Some would join the Continental army when the fighting got near their village or farm. Then they would leave it


once the British troops moved on. Soldiers would often return to their farms at planting time and harvesting time. Lots of men did serve at one time or another, it is true. But with all these comings and goings, can you imagine how difficult it was to train an army?

The British soldiers were well-trained fighters. Commanders could count on having their soldiers for a

TO ALL BRAVE, HEALTHY, ABLE BODIED, AND WELL  
DISPOSED YOUNG MEN,  
IN THIS NEIGHBOURHOOD, WHO HAVE ANY INCLINATION TO JOIN THE TROOPS,  
NOW RAISING UNDER  
**GENERAL WASHINGTON,**  
FOR THE DEFENCE OF THE  
**LIBERTIES AND INDEPENDENCE**  
OF THE UNITED STATES.

*Against the hostile designs of foreign enemies.*

# TAKE NOTICE,



THAT  
*Tuesday morning January, first and Saturday at Noon*  
in the presence of the 1st regiment of infantry, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Aaron Ogden, on the purpose of receiving the enrollment of  
the free volunteers at this time, to add, jointly liberal and generous, namely, a bonus of twenty dollars, an annel and fully sufficient  
trippe of good and wholesome provisions daily allowance of a large and ample ration of provisions, together with thirty dollars, a year in extra  
and eleven times as much, if they will, without any expense.  
Those who may favour this recruiting party with their attendance at above, will have an opportunity of hearing and seeing in a more particular  
manner, the great advantage which the free men have in this full time this opportunity of forming a low budget even in retaining the  
different part of this beautiful captain, in the honorable and truly respectable character of a father, after which, he may, if he pleases return  
home in his family, with his pocket full of money and his head covered with laurels.

GOD SAVE THE UNITED STATES!



Then, too, Great Britain was the wealthiest nation in the world. The British could supply their army with whatever it needed. The American army, though, was often short of cannons, gunpowder, food, and other supplies, including uniforms. All through the war, most American soldiers fought in their own clothes. Several times during the war, General Washington had to write Congress that if it didn't come up with money for supplies and pay soon, "the army must absolutely break up."

As for a navy, the British had the greatest in the world. They had 100 times as many warships as the Americans had.

Certainly none of that looked very good for the Americans.

Americans had a few things going for them, though. For one, they were fighting on their own land. Can you see why that was important? It meant that fresh troops and supplies were often available nearby, while the British had to ship everything—including troops—from 3,000 miles away. Also, it makes a difference when one side is fighting to defend its own homes, its families, and its freedom while the other side is just fighting for pay.

Another advantage the American side had was the huge size of the country. Even if the British won in one part of the country, American armies could always retreat to another, where the British could not get them. Tom Paine wrote that the American plan would be like a game of checkers: "We can move out of *one* square to let you come in," he said to the British, "in order that we may afterwards take two or three for one." Since we can keep moving around, he said, "we can always prevent a total defeat."

## Support from Women and Black Americans

The Patriot side could also count on important support from women. Women worked in army camps. They washed, cooked, nursed the wounded, and made gunpowder. There were even times when women went onto the battlefields, though they weren't supposed to. In one battle fought under a blazing sun, Mary Ludwig Hays brought her husband's cannon crew water from a nearby stream. She carried so many pitchers of water to the thirsty men that they came to call her Molly Pitcher.

According to legend, Molly's husband became ill during the battle. The other members of his cannon crew had been killed. Molly loaded and fired the cannon by herself

*According to legend, Molly Pitcher helped the Patriots at the Battle of Monmouth.*





until other soldiers arrived to take over. We don't know if that story is true, but it is certainly true that many American farm women knew how to handle a gun.

One of them was Deborah Sampson. Sampson dressed in men's clothing and joined the army. It was only when she became ill that doctors found out she was a woman. A number of other women served as messengers and spies.

But of course women didn't have to be on a battlefield to help the Patriot cause. They made their greatest contribution at home. In addition to doing the work they had always done, they also did the work of the men who had gone to fight. There were many women who kept the family farm going or the family business running.

About 5,000 blacks fought on the American side in the Revolutionary War. Most of them were free men from the northern states. They took part in almost every battle, starting with the very first at Bunker Hill. There were several black regiments from New England states.

But black Americans were divided over the Revolution, just as white Americans were. In fact, some southern states were even opposed to blacks joining the Continental army. They were always worrying about slave uprisings, and they did not like the idea of black people having guns—even blacks ready to fight for American independence!

In addition, black people knew that even if the United States succeeded in winning independence, that would not end slavery. It is hard to be enthusiastic about fighting for a country that wants to keep people like you in slavery.

The British knew that very well. Soon after fighting started, they offered freedom to any slave who would fight on Great Britain's side. Several thousand slaves risked their lives in running away so they could accept the offer. As fighting during the war reached slaveholding areas of the country, many slaves fled to the protection of the British. The British navy, in fact, carried several thousand of these escaped slaves to Canada, where they started free settlements.

*An officer of the Continental army, shown on the right, meets a group of black soldiers from the Rhode Island regiment.*



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**Change in Government** Suppose you are watching TV and you hear this news report: “Troops today took over the White House, and the President has resigned. Soldiers have also occupied Congress and sent the members home.”

Suppose the report continued, “General John Jones, in charge of the army, has announced that he will be the new President. Congress will no longer meet, and there will be no more elections. Laws will be made by a small group of people to be appointed by General Jones. Also, starting today, all newspapers and television stations must get permission from the government to report any news story. The police and the army will be free to search the homes of citizens without warning. And trial by jury will be suspended until further notice.”

How do you think you would feel? Scared? Upset? Angry? That’s not surprising. Most Americans would. That kind of thing may go on in other parts of the world but not here in the United States. Americans would never stand for it.

Now, why do you suppose that is? Would you be surprised to know that it has a lot to do with events that happened more than 200 years ago? It does. It’s because of what American colonists did when the British government threatened their liberties. It’s because of the ideas that Thomas Jefferson wrote about in the Declaration of Independence. It’s because of the blood that was shed to defend those liberties and those ideas in the American Revolution. It’s also because of

the Constitution of the United States, which you will soon be reading about.

One of the ideas Jefferson wrote about is that “all men are created equal.” Of course, Jefferson didn’t mean that every person has equal abilities. He certainly didn’t mean that all can run equally fast, or jump equally high, or that each person is as good in math or science or music as every other person. No, what Jefferson meant is simply that each person is born with the same **rights** as any other.

Jefferson then wrote that some of these rights are “unalienable.” That means that God has given them and that no one—not a king or anyone else—can take them away. He wrote that these unalienable rights include “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

Now, Thomas Jefferson didn’t make up those ideas the day he sat down to write the Declaration of Independence. He had been thinking about them for a long time. So had many other Americans. These ideas were truly revolutionary. They would forever change the way people thought about their government—not just American people but people all over the world.

## vocabulary

**right** something due to one by law, custom, or nature



After writing those things, Jefferson stated three important ideas about government. First, he wrote, the main purpose of government—the reason we have governments in the first place—is to protect the rights of the people. Second, he wrote that if a government fails to protect those rights, or—even worse—takes them away, the people have a right to get rid of that government and create another one. Wasn't that what the American Revolution was about?

The third thing Jefferson wrote about government is this: that governments get “their just powers from the consent of the governed.” In other words, the power of government comes from the people themselves—they are “the governed.” It is the people who decide what powers their government should have. If the people do not give their **consent** that the government can have this or that power, then the government does not have it.

Now, that is a powerful idea. It is one of the most important ideas in all of human history.

## Limited Government

In 1776, when Jefferson wrote the Declaration, the idea of *limited government*—the idea that people should have the right to limit the power of their government was not a brand-new idea. A few people in Europe had written books about it, and a few nations, including England, had taken steps toward limited government. For the most part, however, the idea had not been put into practice. Kings, conquerors, and tyrants of all kinds had been ruling governments for hundreds of years without asking ordinary people for their consent. The needs and wants of ordinary people simply were not important.

But in the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson said, Oh, yes they do count. And that's exactly what most

### vocabulary

**consent** approval or agreement [consent can also be given in a non-political situation]

### Three Important Ideas About Government

- People have rights
- People should be able to get rid of a government that does not protect their rights
- The power of the government comes from the people



Thomas Jefferson stated the relationship between government and the people very clearly.



Americans believed. After 1776, Americans were given a chance to take the idea of limited government to a whole new level. The Declaration of Independence announced that the American colonies were no longer a part of Great Britain. Each colony became an independent state, and each state had to create a new government for itself.

What followed was truly amazing. In every state, ordinary people discussed and debated what that new government should be like. How much power should the people give these governments? What is the best way to protect the rights of the people? Which of the old British ways should be preserved? How long should our representatives in government serve? Should our state have a governor? And if so, how long should he serve?

Back and forth the discussions went. Americans exchanged their ideas in newspapers. They debated them in the taverns and in each other's homes. The old colonial assemblies held special meetings to discuss what to do next.

James Madison, whom you will meet later, wrote, "It is the first instance, [since] the creation of the world . . . that free inhabitants have been seen **deliberating** on a form of government." He was right. The world had never seen anything like it.

Americans were well aware that they were doing something new—

*Americans didn't always agree. Debates about the new government often aroused strong feelings.*

something that had never been done before. By anybody. They knew that they were engaged in a great experiment. Many of them really didn't expect to get everything right the first time. But that was all right. The important thing was to start. If changes were needed, they could always make them later. After all, they were "the people."

### **vocabulary**

**deliberate** to think about and discuss issues before reaching a decision

