



February 1776

As winter lingered, so did the growing certainty that the colonies stood at a crossroads. February brought clarity where January had brought anger. Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* continued to circulate rapidly, reaching farmers, craftsmen, and soldiers alike. Its arguments challenged long-held loyalties and made a radical idea seem reasonable: that a distant king had no rightful claim to rule a free people across an ocean.

The Second Continental Congress felt the shift. Though independence had not yet been declared, Congress acted as if reconciliation was no longer the goal. It expanded the Continental Navy and authorized more privateers, encouraging American ships to seize British supply vessels. These actions went beyond protest - they were the acts of a people preparing to stand on their own.

Meanwhile, British control of the seas and major ports tightened the pressure. Coastal towns lived with the constant threat of bombardment, while inland communities braced for shortages and disruption. Each British action meant to restore order instead hardened colonial resolve. The reality of war made neutrality impossible; individuals and colonies were forced to choose sides.

By the end of February 1776, independence was not yet official, but it was becoming inevitable. The colonies were learning to govern, fight, and think for themselves. What began as resistance was transforming into revolution - and the idea of an independent America was no longer a dream, but a gathering force.