

THEME ONE EXCERPTS

2. Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*

As the crisis deepened, a pamphlet appeared that would speed the move toward independence. Published in Philadelphia on January 9, 1776, Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* soon appeared in bookstalls all over the colonies. In scathing language, Paine denied the very legitimacy of monarchy. "Of more worth is one honest man to society," he scoffed, "than all the crowned ruffians that ever lived." It was Paine's unsparing rejection of monarchy that made his pamphlet seem so radical. From that it was a logical step to call openly for Americans to act in defense of their liberties. "O ye that love mankind," he declared. "Ye that dare oppose not only the tyranny, but also the tyrant, stand forth!" . . .

Paine's ringing challenge had the desired effect. "The public sentiment which a few weeks before shuddered at the tremendous obstacles, with which independence was envisioned," declared Edmund Randolph of Virginia in amazement, now "overleaped every barrier."

The pamphlet's astounding popularity—it went through 25 editions in 1776 and sold more copies than any printed piece in colonial history—stemmed not only from its argument but also from its style. Shunning the elaborate, legalistic language of most pamphlets written by lawyers and clergymen, Paine wrote for the common people who read little more than the Bible . . . It was language that could be understood on the docks, in the taverns, on the streets, and in the farmyards. [Even those who could not read might hear the pamphlet read aloud.]

Nash et al., 195.

3. Declaring Independence

[The two sides had begun fighting in 1775, and the conflict continued in 1776.] It was almost anticlimactic when Richard Henry Lee introduced a congressional resolution on June 7 calling for independence. After two days of debate, the Congress ordered a committee chaired by Jefferson to begin drafting such a document.

Though it would become revered as the new nation's birth certificate, the Declaration of Independence was not a highly original statement. It drew heavily on the Congress's earlier justifications of American resistance, and its theory of government had already been set forth in scores of pamphlets over the previous decade. The ringing phrases 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" were familiar in the writing of many American pamphleteers.

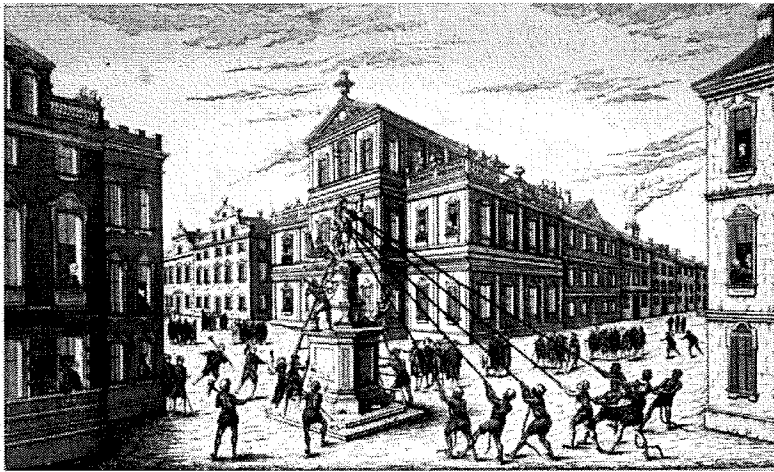
Nash et al., 195–96.

THEME ONE PRIMARY SOURCE

THE DESTRUCTION OF A ROYAL STATUE IN NEW YORK

Questions to Consider

1. Does the artist appear to be sympathetic toward the people trying to pull down the statue? Why?
2. The artist who made this drawing probably did not witness the event he is describing. Does that mean that this drawing is of no value to historians of the American Revolution?

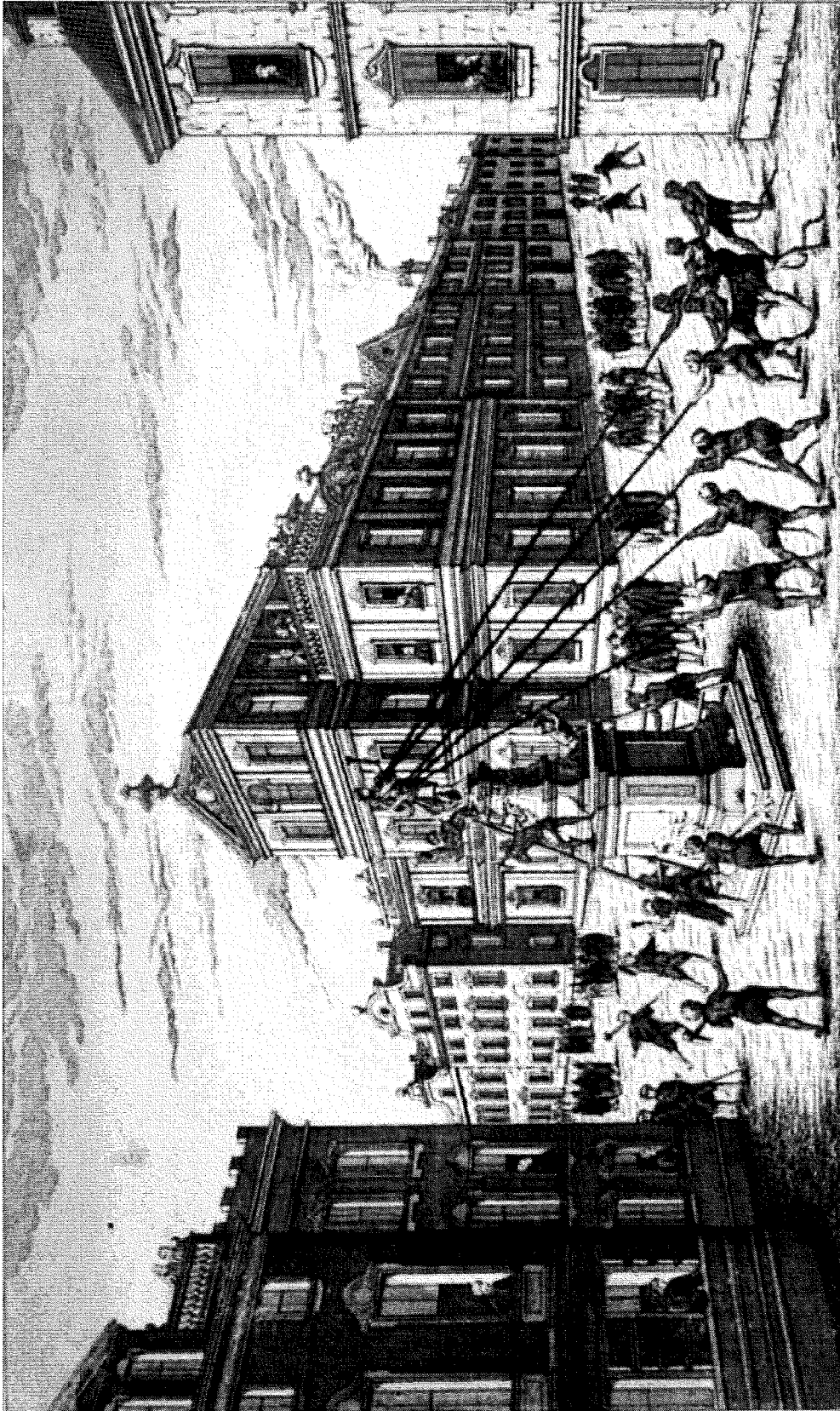


Item 1012
Chez Basset, LE DESTRUCTION DE LAS STATUE ROYALE A NOUVELLE YORCK/DIE
ZERSTORUNG DER KONIGLICHEN BILD SAULE ZU NEU YORCK
(ca. late-1770s). Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

See Appendix for larger image – pg. 47

Creator:	French artist Chez Basset
Context:	The American Revolution interested many Europeans, in part because it might affect the balance of power in Europe.
Audience:	French readers
Purpose:	To show colonial unrest toward Great Britain
Historical Significance: The outbreak of the American Revolution was accompanied by the destruction of British symbols of authority. This French print depicts patriots pulling down a statue of King George the III in New York City in 1776. Because the British had just defeated the French in a bitter war (fought in Europe and North America), Great Britain's troubles with its colonies cheered France, which decided to aid the young United States.	

APPENDIX 1-3



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