

Common Sense (By John Perez)

Common Sense was written by Thomas Paine and published in January of 1776. This document was one of many revolutionary pamphlets that was famous during that time. It advocated complete independence of Britain and it followed the natural rights philosophy of John Locke, justifying independence as the will of the people and revolution as a device for bring happiness. These words inspired the colonists and prepared them for the Declaration of Independence, although the thoughts were not original.

Benjamin Rush, the Philadelphia physician, encourage Paine, while Paine was writing the pamphlet. Rush read the manuscript, secured the criticism of Benjamin Franklin, suggested the Title, and arranged for its anonymous publication by Robert Bell of Philadelphia. Common Sense was an immediate success. Paine estimated that not less than one hundred thousand copies were run off, and he bragged that the pamphlet's popularity was beyond anything since the invention of printing. Everywhere it aroused discussion about monarchy, the origin of government, English constitution ideas, and independence.

Common Sense traces the origin of government to a human desire to restrain lawlessness. But government at its best is, like dress, "the badge of lost innocence." It can be diverted to corrupt purposes by the people who created it. Therefore, the simpler the government, the easier it is for the people to discover its weakness and make the necessary adjustments. In Britain "it is wholly owing to the people, and not to the constitution of the government, that the crown is not as oppressive as in Turkey. The monarchy, Paine asserted, had corrupted virtue, impoverished the nation, weakened the voice of Parliament, and poisoned people's minds. The royal brute of Britain had usurped the rightful place of law.

Paine argued that the political connection with England was both unnatural and harmful to Americans. Reconciliation would cause "more calamities" than it would bring benefits. The welfare of America, as well as its destiny, in Paine's view, demanded steps toward immediate independence.

OLIVE BRANCH PETITION (By Shane Knights)

The Olive Branch Petition was a document that declared the colonists' loyalty to the British king. This document was one of the last attempts to make peace prior to the revolution. The petition also states that the colonists wanted the Intorable Acts repeled. King George III rejected the petition and the colonists had no other choice but to revolt.

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE (By Shane Knights)

In 1776, the second Continental Congress chose Thomas Jefferson to draft the Declaration of Independence. When Jefferson was done with a rough copy, he gave it to his subcommittee, which included Benjamin Franklin and John Adams, for their approval. It only took seventeen days before the copy was presented to Congress with the entire subcommittee's approval. One by one, the representatives signed the document, and on July 4th, made it official. Even though independence was declared on July 4th, it took several days for the news to reach all the colonists. Although the revolution would last until 1783, the United States was free from British rule.

The Declaration of Independence is a document made up of three parts; Introduction and opening statements, wrongs done by the king, and colonists declare independence. The introduction and opening statements features this famous saying: "*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.*" This sentence was the topic for debate during the early and mid 1800s surrounding the slavery issue. The second part lists actions by the king that the colonists considered wrong. It is a long list that takes up most of the space in the Declaration of Independence. Part three is a small paragraph where the colonists actually declare independence.

Next to the Constitution, Thomas Jefferson's document was and still is the most influential document in American history.

Ch. 3--Thoughts on the Present State of the American Affairs - Thomas Paine

This section is the longest one in the pamphlet (book). The overarching theme is this: the American colonies tried diplomacy, England has commenced with hostile acts (first), therefore the colonies should use force to secure independence. As with the previous chapters, Paine asks the reader to suspend personal prejudices and examine the situation from a wider point of view.

A key premise presented is that since hostilities have been initiated, it is pointless to debate diplomacy of the past. Instead, the focus should be on total separation and how to make it a reality. Arguments put forth to seek a peaceful resolution are refuted on principles of geography, natural history, and (surprise-surprise) common sense.

For example, those that viewed the colonies as a child of Mother England do not extend the metaphor to what happens when the child grows up. It becomes independent, not locked into its mother for its entire life. Another example is of those that saw England as a protector. England is protecting its interests in the colonies, not its people.

Paine also notes that the colonies are not made up of strictly English settlers, but from many other countries as well. Paine states, "Not one third of the inhabitants...are of English descent." Additionally, ties to England would only attract more attacks from the many enemies England has acquired through its Empire. And as for those that further state loyalty to the English crown, Paine reminds them that William the Conqueror, the head of the monarchical line, is French. This, by extension, means that England should be a part of France.

Paine believes the colonies would thrive as an independent country because "Her trade will always be a protection, and her barrenness of gold and silver secure her from invaders." No easily gained loot makes other countries less likely to spend money on conquest. (Fortunately gold was not found right away)

Those who still refuse to get involved are viewed as confused or cowards by Paine. He especially is careful to note "It is the good fortune of many to live distant from the scene of sorrow; the evil is not sufficiently brought to *their* doors to make *them* feel the precariousness with which all American property is possessed." And further, if you want to make peace with those who would murder your friends / countrymen, "then you have the heart of a coward, and the spirit of a sycophant."

Paine even cites the distance and sizes of the colonies versus England as reasons for breaking away, with the colonies much larger. He indicates that "there is something absurd, in supposing a continent to be perpetually governed by and island." Additionally, if connections were renewed, getting feedback on information or grievances would take many months. In some extreme cases, an attack may not be able to be repelled in the colonies if England was unaware of it.

The notion that reconciling is beneficial is painted as "a dangerous doctrine" which the King could use for "reinstating himself in the government of the provinces..." Additionally, once the colonies "come of age" they will separate from England. By forming their own representative government, they will be more likely to avoid civil wars so often found in England's history. (Of course, we know America did have one of their own.)

The lack of a monarchy is further presented as a good thing, with Holland and Switzerland used as examples of thriving republics without war. Paine goes on to present a possible blueprint for forming the republic, noting that "the law is king" for America. Not an individual, but the document and the people it serves. Waiting could lead to the promotion of a king from the colonies like Massanello (basically a guy from Naples who led a rebellion against the Spaniards, and then put himself on a throne).

The key reminder in all of this is the need to remember the Constitution is the country's anchor. People can be replaced, and, in Paine's estimation, should be replaced. Again I ask you, the reader, are you motivated to learn more about your government yet? Reviewing the Constitution and its history will provide the framework of the country. Lack of attention to it is like building a nice house: if you don't check on the structure and maintain it once in a while, it will fall down.