

Common Sense

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Author: Thomas Paine

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Annotation: John Adams called him "the first man of the Revolution." Teddy Roosevelt called him a "filthy little atheist." His name was Thomas Paine. The author of "Common Sense," "The Rights of Man," and "The Age of Reason," Paine was probably the most widely read political pamphleteer of the eighteenth century. An active participant in the American and French Revolutions, and an early proponent of the antislavery, women's rights, animal protection, and free public education, Paine was also the person who proposed that his adopted country be called the United States. Born in 1737, the son of a poor Quaker corsetmaker, Paine was apprenticed to his father at the age of 12. Later he ran away to become a ship's hand and pirate, taught school, served as a tax collector, and became involved with groups secretly opposed to Britain's King. At the age of 37, he left England, carrying letters of introduction from Benjamin Franklin. Eighteen months later, in January 1776, he published *Common Sense*, which sold 150,000 copies. With its arguments against monarchy and its doctrine that governmental authority derives from the people, Paine's pamphlet converted thousands of colonists to the cause of revolution. "Monarchy and succession have laid the world in blood and ashes," he exclaimed. Later, George Washington read Paine's stirring words from "The American Crisis"--"these are the times that try men's souls"--to his troops at Valley Forge.

An enthusiastic supporter of the French Revolution, Paine arrived in France in 1791, was elected to the National Convention, and helped draft France's 1793 constitution. Later he was condemned to death for opposing the revolutionary leader Robespierre and narrowly escaped execution on the guillotine. Paine was not one to mince words. He attacked George Washington for ignoring his pleas for help when he was confined in a French prison. He also attacked organized churches, even though he believed in God. "All national institutions of churches," he wrote in "The Age of Reason," "whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolise power and profit." When

he died in 1809, no church cemetery would accept his body. His remains were shipped to England and were eventually lost.

Paine was strongly opposed to despotism and injustice and strongly supportive of freedom and social justice. "Where liberty is, there is my country," Benjamin Franklin supposedly said to Paine. "Where liberty is not, there is my country," Paine replied.

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In the following pages I offer nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense....

I have heard it asserted by some, that as America has flourished under her former connection with Great-Britain, the same connection is necessary towards her future happiness, and will always have the same effect. Nothing can be more fallacious than this kind of argument. We may as well assert that because a child has thrived upon milk, that is never to have meat, or that the first twenty years of our lives is to become a precedent for the next twenty. But even this is admitting more than is true; for I answer...that America would have flourished as much, and probably much more, had no European power taken any notice of her. The commerce by which she hath enriched herself are the necessaries of life, and will always have a market while eating is the custom of Europe.

But she has protected us, say some.... We have boasted the protection of Great Britain, without considering, that her motive was interest not attachment....

This new World hath been the asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty from every part of Europe....

As Europe is our market for trade, we ought to form no partial connection with any part of it. It is the true interest of America to steer clear of European contentions, which she never can do, while, by her dependence on Britain, she is made the make-weight in the scale of British politics.

Europe is too thickly planted with Kingdoms to be long at peace, and whenever a war breaks out between England and any foreign power, the trade of America goes to ruin, because of her connection with Britain....

There is something absurd, in supposing a Continent to be perpetually governed by an island....

No man was a warmer wisher for a reconciliation than myself, before the fatal nineteenth of April, 1775 [the day of the battles of Lexington and Concord], but the moment the event of that day was made known, I rejected the hardened, sullen-tempered Pharaoh of England for ever; and disdain the wretch, that with the pretended title of FATHER OF HIS PEOPLE can unfeelingly hear of their slaughter, and composedly sleep with their blood upon his soul....

Where, say some, is the king of America? I'll tell you, Friend, he reigns above, and doth not make havoc of mankind like the royal brute of Great Britain.... So far as we approve of monarchy...in America the law is king....

A government of our own is our natural right.... Ye that oppose independence now, ye know not what ye do: ye are opening the door to eternal tyranny.... There are thousands and tens of thousands, who would think it glorious to expel from the Continent, that barbarous and hellish power, which hath stirred up the Indians and the Negroes to destroy us....

O! ye that love mankind! Ye that dare oppose not only the tyranny but the tyrant, stand forth! Every spot of the old world is overrun with oppression. Freedom hath been hunted round the Globe. Asia and Africa have long expelled her. Europe regards her like a stranger, and England hath given her warning to depart. O! receive the fugitive, and prepare in time an asylum for mankind.

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