



Thomas Paine: Common Sense, 1776

Thousands of colonists who hesitated to follow the cries for independence from Britain were spurred into action by Thomas Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense*. Paine succeeded where others had failed because his pamphlet was addressed to ordinary people. His writings gave his readers the resolution to break away from British domination.

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 hath flourished under her former connection with Great-Britain, that the same connexion is necessary towards her future happiness, and will always have the same effect. Nothing can be more fallacious [untrue] than this kind of argument...America would have flourished as much, and probably much more, had no European power had any thing to do with 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. That she hath engrossed us is true, and defended the continent at our expence as well as her own is admitted, and she would have defended Turkey from the same motive, viz., the sake of trade and dominion...

But Britain is the parent country, say some. Then the more shame upon her conduct. Even brutes do not devour their young, nor savages make war upon their families...

Besides, what have we to do with setting the world at defiance? Our plan is commerce, and that, well attended to, will secure us the peace and friendship of all Europe; because, it is the interest of all Europe to have America a *free port*. Her trade will always be a protection, and her barrenness of gold and silver secure her from invaders.

I challenge the warmest advocate for reconciliation, to show, a single advantage that this continent can reap, by being connected with Great Britain. I repeat the challenge, not a single advantage is derived. Our corn will fetch its price in any market in Europe, and our imported goods must be paid for buy them where we will...

Every thing that is right or natural pleads for separation. The blood of the slain, the weeping voice of nature cries, "TIS TIME TO PART."

But 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 Britain. Yet that we may not appear to be defective even in earthly honors, let a day be solemnly set apart for proclaiming the charter; let it be brought forth placed on the divine law, the word of God; let a crown be placed thereon, by which the world may know, that so far as we approve of monarchy, that in America THE LAW IS KING. For as in absolute governments the King is law, so in free countries the law *ought* to be King...

A government of our own is our natural right: And when a man seriously reflects on the precariousness of human affairs, he will become convinced, that it is infinitely wiser and safer, to form a constitution of our own in a cool deliberate manner, while we have it in our power, than to trust such an interesting event to time and chance...

Questions for Discussion

1. What, according to Paine, is Britain's chief interest in its colonies?
2. How does Paine define absolute governments?