

Common Sense

By Thomas Paine

**First distributed in Philadelphia in
January of 1776**

Common Sense by Thomas Paine

- Originally published in January of 1776 (done anonymously, but originally signed, Written by an Englishman)
- At the time, had the largest sale and circulation in America of any publication
- Written in a style that “common” people could understand
- 47 pages in length
- Paine donated his profits to Washington’s Continental Army

**The pamphlet consists of
FOUR (4) parts:**

I. Of the Origin and Design of Government in general, with concise Remarks on the English Constitution.

In this part, Paine explains the difference between a SOCIETY and a GOVERNMENT. People exist in a state of “natural liberty”

- **As society grows, a government becomes necessary to enforce regulations [laws]**
- **When society gets so large that all people cannot meet in one place, that's when elections are held**
- **Paine points out TWO (2) problems with Britain's government – one is the monarchy, the second is the aristocracy (social / economic classes)**

II. Of Monarchy and Hereditary Succession.
In this section Paine looks at a monarchy from both a Biblical and historical perspective

- **In both cases, he points out that they are wrong and can cause more problems than they solve**
- **He also criticizes the idea of a “mixed state” [constitutional monarchy] (proposed by J. Locke)**
- **If a society can live under a Constitution, why would they want to extend power to a monarch?**

III. Thoughts on the present State of American Affairs.

In the third section Paine examines the hostilities between England and the American colonies and argues that best course of action is independence.

- **Paine proposes a Continental Charter (or Charter of the United Colonies) that would be an American Magna Carta.**
- **The Continental Charter would outline a new national government, which Paine thought would take the form of a Congress.**

**IV. Of the present Ability of America, with
some miscellaneous Reflections.**

**The fourth section of the pamphlet includes Paine's optimistic view of America's military potential at the time of the Revolution.
(Abundant timber could lead to the development of a large American Navy)**

Thomas Pains Arguments AGAINST Britain's Rule Over the American Colonies:

It was absurd for an island to rule a continent.

• America was not a "British nation"; it was composed of influences and peoples from all of Europe.

• Even if Britain were the "mother country" of America, that made her actions all the more horrendous, for no mother would harm her children so brutally.

• Being a part of Britain would drag America into unnecessary European wars, and keep it from the international commerce at which America excelled.

• The distance between the two nations made governing the colonies from England unwieldy. If some wrong were to be petitioned to Parliament, it would take a year before the colonies received a response.

• The New World was discovered shortly before the Reformation. The Puritans [Protestants] believed that God wanted to give them a safe haven from the persecution of British rule.

• Britain ruled the colonies for its own benefit, and did not consider the best interests of the colonists in governing them.