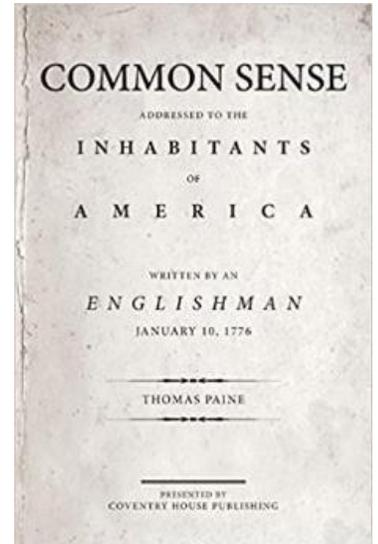




Common Sense

Thomas Paine

When I have time, I enjoy learning or re-learning information about our nation's history. Many years have passed since I last studied *Common Sense*, Thomas Paine's short pamphlet published in January 1776, approximately six months prior to the codification of The United States Declaration of Independence. *Common Sense* conveys the dangers and overreach of the British government, and ultimately advocates for American independence. I was inspired to read it again when I noticed it on the DoDReads bookshelf. My recommendation is to read the entire pamphlet—the original includes only four short chapters. If you don't have the time to read the entire pamphlet, identified below are passages from each chapter to inspire further thought. During my research, I learned that the pamphlet was a common medium to socialize new ideas between the 16th and 19th centuries. It is interesting to juxtapose that with many different ways we can share ideas using modern technology in the present day. Today's challenge is not in getting ideas out to an audience, rather it is actually having the discipline to slow down and think through our thoughts before delivering them via video, email, social media, or even through the tried and true postal service.



Chapter I: Of the Origin and Design of Government in General, With Concise Remarks on the English Constitution

"Some writers have so confounded society with government, as to leave little or no distinction between them; whereas they are not only different, but have different origins. Society is produced by our wants, and government for our wickedness; the former promotes our happiness positively by uniting our affections, the latter negatively by restraining our vices. The one encourages intercourse, the other creates distinctions. The first is a patron, the last a punisher."

"Here then is the origin and rise of government; namely, a mode rendered necessary by the inability of moral virtue to govern the world; here too is the design and end of government, viz., freedom and security."

"...that the more simple any thing is, the less liable it is to be disordered, and the easier repaired when disordered..."

"But the constitution of England is so exceedingly complex that the nation may suffer for years together without being able to discover in which part the fault lies..."

Chapter II: Of Monarchy and Hereditary Succession

"This shall be the manner of the king that shall reign over you; he will take your sons and appoint them for himself for his chariots and to be his horsemen, and some shall run before his chariots (this description

agrees with the present mode of impressing men)...and he will take your daughters to be confectionaries and to be cooks and to be bakers (this describes the expense and luxury as well as the oppression of kings) and he will take your fields and your olive yards, even the best of them... (by which we see that bribery, corruption, and favoritism are the standing vices of kings)..."

"For all men being originally equals, no one by birth could have a right to set up his own family in perpetual preference to all others for ever, and though himself might deserve some decent degree of honors of his contemporaries, yet his descendants might be far too unworthy to inherit them."

"The most plausible plea, which hath ever been offered in favor of hereditary succession, is that it preserves a nation from civil wars; and were this true, it would be weighty; whereas, it is the most barefaced falsity ever imposed upon mankind. The whole history of England disowns the fact. Thirty kings and two minors have reigned in that distracted kingdom since the conquest, in which time there have been (including the Revolution) no less than eight civil wars and nineteen rebellions. Wherefore instead of making for peace, it makes against it and destroys the very foundation it seems to stand on."

"The nearer any government approaches to a republic, the less business there is for a king."

"In England a king hath little more to do than to make war and give away places; which in plain terms, is to impoverish the nation and set it together by the ears."

Chapter III: Thoughts on the Present State of American Affairs

"Volumes have been written on the subject of the struggle between England and America. Men of all ranks have embarked in the controversy from different motives and with various designs; but all have been ineffectual, and the period of debate is closed. Arms, as the last resource, decide the contest; the appeal was the choice of the king, and the continent hath accepted the challenge."

"I have heard it asserted by some that as America hath flourished under her former connection with Great Britain, that 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 it is never to have meat; or that the first twenty years of our lives is to become a precedent for the next twenty."

"In no instance hath nature made the satellite larger than its primary planet, and as England and America, with respect to each other, reverses the common order of nature, it is evident they belong to different systems: England to Europe, and America to itself."

"Let the assemblies be annual, with a President only. The representation more equal. Their business wholly domestic, and subject to the authority of a Continental Congress."

"But where, says some, is the King of America? I'll tell you, friend, he reigns above, and doth not make havoc of mankind like the Royal of Britain."

Chapter IV: Of the Present Ability of America, With Some Miscellaneous Reflections

"We ought to view the building a fleet as an article of commerce, it being the natural manufactory of this country. It is the best money we can lay out. A navy when finished is worth more than it cost. And is that nice point in national policy, in which commerce and protection are united."

"Common sense will tell us that the power which hath endeavored to subdue us, is of all others the most improper to defend us."

"To unite the sinews of commerce and defence is sound policy; for when our strength and our riches play into each other's hand, we need fear no external enemy."

"Most nations have let slip the opportunity, and by that means have been compelled to receive laws from their conquerors, instead of making laws for themselves."

"Earlier in this work, I threw out a few thoughts on the propriety of a Continental Charter, (for I only presume to offer hints, not plans) and in this place, I take the liberty of rementioning the subject, by observing that a charter is to be understood as a bond of solemn obligation, which the whole enters into to support the right of every separate part, whether of religion, personal freedom, or property, a firm bargain and a right reckoning make long friends."

"To conclude: However strange it may appear to some, or however unwilling they may be to think so, matters not, but many strong reasons may be given to show that nothing can settle our affairs so expeditiously as an open and determined declaration for independence."

"These proceedings may at first appear strange and difficult; but, like all other steps which we have already passed over, will in a little time become familiar and agreeable; and, until an independence is declared, the continent will feel itself like a man who continues putting off some unpleasant business from day to day, yet knows it must be done, hates to set about it, wishes it over, and is continually haunted with the thoughts of its necessity."

Thanks to [Christopher Mulder](#) for contributing their notes. Help other military leaders & contribute on [DODReads](#).