

Thomas paine – common sense



In Thomas Paine's Common Sense, there are some similarities and differences in the tone as compared to Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence. Paine's approach to his work contrasts that of Jefferson's. However, they still use the same basic techniques to making their feelings known, which include examining the problem, giving reasons for why it is a problem, and offering their opinion on the solution. Jefferson's and Paine's difference in their tone is evident when examining who they are addressing the documents to, the overall layout of their documents, and the relative importance of the documents.

Thomas Paine constructs Common Sense as an editorial on the subject of the relationship between the Colonies and Great Britain. Through the paper, he hopes to educate his fellow Americans about this subject. In his introduction, he says he feels that there is ' a long habit of not thinking a thing wrong'; which ' gives it a superficial appearance of being right'; (693). He is alluding to the relationship, also calling it a ' violent abuse of power'; (693). This choice of words is similar to those of Jefferson, who asserts that the king had established an ' absolute tyranny'; over the states. Both men set an immediate understanding about their feelings towards the rule of Great Britain over the States. However, where Common Sense seems to be an opinionated essay, Thomas Jefferson writes somewhat of a call to battle. Paine generally seems to be alerting his readers to the fact that there is more going on than they are aware of. Jefferson, on the other hand, begins his declaration by stating, ' When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another'; (715). Unlike Paine, this seems to presuppose

that readers are aware of the plight of the nation, and Jefferson is announcing that the time has come to take a stand.

The main part of Common Sense contrasts in concept with the majority of the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson takes a rather rough approach to his writing style, deciding to introduce his ideas in the beginning few paragraphs, then proceeding to list his grievances in the bulk of the piece. Paine however, presents his ideas in more of a persuasive essay style. By providing his readers with more of a storytelling format, he is able to bring them up to date with what is happening, as he does with such paragraph introductions such as ‘ It hath lately been asserted in Parliament’; (695) and ‘ But Britain is the parent country, say some’; (695). These phrases communicate to the reader what has been going on, and allows Paine to give his audience a background that will allow them understanding of his propositions. Jefferson simply lists one by one, all of his charges against the king. It assumes your knowledge of events leading up to his document; if not, then you have only his facts to rely on.

One of the obvious reasons for the difference in tone between these two writers however, can simply be the situation in which both pieces of writing were constructed. This is evident even from the heading of Paine’s third chapter, ‘ Thoughts on the Present State of American Affairs.’; The word ‘ thoughts’ can infer that what follows is simply one man’s conception on how things are and how they should be; that they may not necessarily reflect the true views of one nation. In fact, Paine says this in his introductory paragraph, by disclaiming that ‘ perhaps the sentiments contained in the following pages are not yet sufficiently fashionable to procure them general

favor’; (693). By this, he obviously means that his word may not speak for all. In contrast, the Declaration of Independence is a bold and assertive document. Jefferson states that ‘ We hold these truths to be self-evident’; (715) and goes on to list the rights he feels the States are denied by being in allegiance with Britain. By using ‘ we,’; he implies reference to all the people of the States. In reality, he probably only meant wealthy white men, but the insinuation is that he is the voice of the people. Additionally, to conclude the document, Jefferson does not suggest but announces the separation of the states from Great Britain. This confident tone differs greatly from Paine, who seems to be merely proposing his ideas to people who, by his own admission, may not even be paying much attention.

Differences in their tone can also be seen in the whole general makeup of the documents. Whereas Jefferson is clearly proclaiming that the time is now, Paine often suggests that the changes he advises be meant for later on. When speaking of the government of Great Britain, he says it is an authority which ‘ sooner or later must have an end’; (697). Furthermore, Paine offers great detail on his suggestions, often forming excellent examples of why an independent nation would be far more beneficial than one which is dependent on Great Britain. He gives economic, industrial, and foreign relations reasons for the need to abandon British rule. Jefferson alludes to ‘ inalienable rights,’; or those rights which forever exist, then simply outlines what Britain has done to provoke this rebellion. This goes back to the earlier label that Paine constructed more of a persuasive essay, clearly backing up his thoughts with specific examples as to why they were relevant. Paine realizes he is convincing whoever will listen what is in the States’ best

interests. Jefferson knows that his responsibility is to draft a document that proclaims the States breakaway from Great Britain. Both men had to know of the significance of their documents, so this was another factor on their tone.

In conclusion, Jefferson and Paine show some similar views and intentions in their respective documents. Both writers argue that the new States would be better off without the ties to Great Britain, and both offer very valid points as to why this should occur. However, the differences can be seen in the writing styles and overall tone of the work. Paine becomes more of a salesman, trying to sell his readers to his thoughts on the government of Great Britain, though not completely becoming a force on the matter. Jefferson maintains a very up-front approach, simply overwhelming his readers with numerous examples and energetic voice, concluding with the 'final word' on the matter. However much the style differs, though, the two documents were equally compelling and served to motivate a nation into fighting for their independence.