

# Study on thomas paines argument history essay



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Thomas Paine begins his pamphlet, *Common Sense*, by asserting that government is a necessary evil that is a part of society. Paine goes further in depth with his analysis for the need of government by criticizing Britain's government. He believes that there is a "less of two evils" in terms of government and Britain's government is the more evil one. He strongly disagrees with Britain's monarchy and their complex government. He states that their government is corrupt and unjust and that their immoral way of governing is affecting the lives of colonists through unfair taxes and mistreatment. Paine argues that America needs to strive for absolute independence because if they do not, no other country will try to intervene in the quarrel between Britain and America as long as America is seen as a part of Britain. Nor will any country help America if that country thinks that their assistance will later be used by America to reconcile with Britain in the future. By declaring independence, America could begin to gain the benefits of alliances and trade as well. By gaining complete independence from Britain will America truly be free from wrongful taxes and exploitation.

Paine makes it clear that he is not fond of government. For Paine, living without government is perceived as being ideal. Paine sees the idea of "government even in its best state as a necessary evil; in its worst state an intolerable one" (Paine 3). He believes a government's existence is justified only to the extent that it mitigates problems between civil disputes. Other than ending civil quarrels, Paine believes that a government's purpose is to "restrain our vices" (3) and act solely as a "punisher" (3). Paine presents government as an institution whose function is to restrain the evil in man. If people were to act morally, government would not be necessary. However,

since people are capable of committing sins, government is necessary for the protection of life and property. Government's fundamental purpose, therefore, is to provide security. If a government fails to improve society than it is not worth keeping or at the very least should be reformed.

Common Sense attacks Britain's monarchy and all that comes with it. Paine declares his problems with the British monarchy distinctly with his contempt for the idea of hereditary succession and the multiple complaints he makes against the king. In a country, where they believe all men are created equal Paine criticizes Britain for having kings, essentially being hypocrites. The idea of kings originates from the Bible when the Jews asked the prophet, Samuel, for a king. Samuel warned the Jews of the outcomes of having a king but the people did not listen. Therefore, Paine believes that the origin of a king comes from sin. Kings and the idea of sin might not be as important in today's society but including the argument of kings and religion in his pamphlet made a more significant impact on readers in Paine's generation because they were strict on religion. Even in biblical times, kings were reasonable positions although they were viewed as coming from sin. Kings back then were often generals or judges; however, " in England, a man would be puzzled to know what is his business" (16). Paine is saying that there is no real reason to have a king because we have generals and judges; therefore the duties of a king are meaningless. Paine adds that hereditary succession of kings brings other evils. For example, people who see themselves as born into an elite existence are often " ignorant and unfit" (15). Paine believes that a king should not exist within a government because the king has too much power and their " touch with society" is lost.

Lastly, Paine opposes the theory that hereditary succession reduces civil wars. At least nineteen rebellions and eight civil wars broke out in Britain's past. Paine concludes that monarchy and hereditary succession have produced nothing besides a wrongful government and bloodshed.

Paine argues that America will eventually be independent. Since many people in Paine's time are uncertain about the idea of a revolution, it is important to establish the grounds for American independence. He establishes American independence as being a necessity, not a choice, in order to escape from taxes. It is easier for Paine to make the case for an immediate and full rebellion by convincing his audience that America will someday become independent. Paine states clearly that America will, in the end, separate from Britain. It is not a matter of if, but a matter of when they will separate. Paine says the ideal time to separate from Britain is now. Paine states if the British continue to rule in America the country will weaken. Paine persuades his readers by stating that America has an extensive amount of men ready to retaliate and willing to fight. Additionally, Paine argues, the colonies are small enough to be united. If the colonists allow too much time to pass by, more and more people will flock to America. With more people, Paine believes, it will be more difficult to work with everyone and organize a full rebellion.

Another key point in Paine's argument comes from the scenario if America were to make peace with Britain. Paine argues that if America was to repair relations with Britain, the problems they presently face will come back and begin an endless cycle. A cycle where America and Britain reconcile and then Britain breaks their part of the agreement by creating some other absurd

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taxes. The new taxes that would be imposed would interfere with the colonists' lives. Paine supports his argument by pointing out the flawed relationship that America has with Britain, specifically the Stamp Act and the events that follow. Paine references the Stamp Act of 1765, where Parliament imposed taxes on a variety of printed materials. After the colonists protested, Britain revoked the tax. However, by 1767, Parliament imposed a new round of taxes on a large range of goods in the colonies. These taxes are just an endless cycle that will continue to occur, unless America just ceases all relations with Britain.

One of the key problems that had colonists doubting revolution was the British Navy. Even though Britain was notorious for being an impressive world empire, many colonists found it hard to believe that the colonies could break free from Britain's grasp. The colonists knew that the British Navy was one the strongest, if not strongest, naval forces of their time. Paine addresses this problem by stating that America can raise a navy of their own that will match up or even surpass the British Navy. He explains that this is possible because America currently has no national debt and can afford to construct a navy. Paine presents calculations, done by Mr. Burchett, Secretary to the navy, that show the cost of around 3, 500, 000 pound sterlings to build a navy. Paine shows with detailed calculations that the colonists could build a navy to rival Britain. Furthermore, Paine also adds that America has all the natural resources, such as " tar, timber, iron, and cordage", (36) to construct a navy. Paine explains that it would cost even less because there are raw materials and natural resources conveniently available to them. Paine makes a more convincing case that America can do

what many would consider impossible by establishing a detailed plan of how America could assemble a navy to rival Britain's.

Another significant argument that Paine makes, in regards to the navy, is that America's coasts are unprotected and vulnerable. Paine writes, "The more sea port towns we had, the more should we have both to defend and to lose" (34). By raising a navy it would both further expand business and trade of America and provide defense for their shores. In addition, Paine writes that the British Navy is too busy patrolling numerous colonies of the British Empire, and an American navy would only need to concern itself with protecting their own coast. Paine concludes by stating, "to expend millions for the sake of getting a few vile acts repealed, and routing the present ministry only, is unworthy the charge" (34). Paine says that the cost of the war is justified if the result is absolute freedom. However, Paine believes that it is not worth putting up a struggle if it is simply to repeal some tax laws. Paine wants absolute independence, and nothing less.

There are counter-arguments that Britain protected America from the French and Indian; therefore, the colonists should be grateful. However, Paine points out the Britain only protected America for its own financial reasons. Britain did not protect America out of concern for the colonists. Furthermore, if America had not been a part of Britain in the first place, they would never have needed the protection. It is because America was a colony of Britain that they needed protection.

Another counter-argument that Paine addresses is being of British descent. Paine argues that being of British descent does not matter. He uses an

analogy that Britain's population is made up by French. However, unlike the colonists, the French that live in Britain are not forced to pay French taxes while living in Britain. Paine uses this analogy to criticize the taxes imposed on America by Britain. If the British themselves do not pay taxes for the French, the colonists have the right not to pay either.

Common Sense plays a pivotal role in the American Revolution because it forges the attitude of Americans. Common Sense is easy to comprehend, and that is Paine's goal. He presents these arguments so that the common man is able to understand. He stresses that the time for independence is now and presents strong arguments as to why the time is now. With the importance of raising a navy and pointing out the corrupt government Britain has America under, Paine illustrates that independence is America's top priority. Until America declare independence from Britain, the colonists " 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" (44). Paine could not have explained the importance of haste for independence any better.