

Common sense



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The name Thomas Paine might not ring a bell when the lists of the most important founders of the United States are mentioned. I believe his contribution to the American Revolution was voluminous despite the fact that he did not fight for independence or sign the Constitution. Different from other revolutionists, Paine grew to be a master of both spoken and written words, which inspired many to fight for freedom. Perhaps it is important to note that, at Valley Forge, General Washington gave orders for words of Paine to be read to his soldiers.

Born in 1737 as an Englishman, Tom Paine became a revolutionary by both conviction and choice, and an educated classical journalist and scholar. He was invited from England to Philadelphia by Ben Franklin just a year after the Boston Tea Party (Thomas, 1819). In my view, he might have become the first to use the term 'United States of America' (referring to the first thirteen states). He wrote inspiring pamphlets and articles on personal liberty, which then convinced many to think of themselves as citizens of a new nation. They were to think of themselves as Americans with rights, and not as Englishmen whose rights had been snatched away.

In 1776, the idea of having a land with God-given rights was enthusiastic and a new one. Other writers like John Amor thought of Paine as the father of the revolution. The reason was because Paine was inspiring in writing *Common Sense*, which was read by almost all Americans who could at that time (1776). Moreover, he went on to inspire others who could hear his words being read aloud at public meetings (Thomas, 1819).

Common Sense was his first and most influential pamphlet. He had published by early 1776 in Philadelphia anonymously. It is estimated that about a half million copies were printed; this reached many of the former colonialists who could read. Today, it is amazing to think of how this writer was inspiring to the many readers of his time.

Looking into the first pages of Common Sense, Paine strongly brings the idea that; every social problem has to have a governmental or olitical solution. These ideologues have utopian schemes that work with coercion.

Paine wrote that society and government were different and had different origins, and that, while a government was produced by our weakness, society is produced by our wants. The government denies happiness by restraining our vices but society promotes happiness by uniting people's affections. He goes on by referring to society as a blessing, but the government as a necessary evil. He also equates government to a dress; a badge of lost innocence.

Paine brings out the idea that, monarchy is the root of all sufferings and oppression to many. A government that is very far cannot govern effectively. He disapproves the notion that America is England's child; only a few came from England. Any allegiance of America to England would draw it to European wars and in the end, impoverish America's trade. His final point of argument was that America was still an infant, and hence the timing was right for a split, form its own new government, a new culture and good, civic habits (David, 1974).

Paine became famous for writing Common Sense. The piece of writing takes a peek into the Founders minds; how a representative republic should look like. He suggests a model for the government with a President, members from each of the colony at large, and from each of the colony's legislature. He also suggests the legislature to be a huge one so that no colony would rule the others. However, each of the body was to be empowered differently from the rest. By doing this, he thought that there will be so much infighting until rulers forget to oppress the people.

It is important to note that, the last feature of Common Sense was a call towards drafting a manifesto to be dispatched to various foreign governments. It was aimed at helping the other governments understand why it was important for America to split from Britain. It shone light on the oppression and miseries that most Americans had gone through. He hoped that the governments in Europe would give Americans political support when a rebellion arose. The call for such a manifesto came to be realized in July fourth, 1776.

What interested me in Paine's work were the imperfections associated with the monarchy. The monarchy escalated violence and lends themselves easily to oppression, deprivation and warfare. While this is specifically aimed at hereditary succession, I can equate it to many of the current political class; they have a similar attitude. They think that it is their right to rule while the rest of us follow like sheep. They pass laws that don't affect them, and hence live in a world different from them. It is like they consider they are entitled to rule while the common man is supposed to obey.

Another interesting quote in Common Sense deals with the Founding Father's attitude towards issues surrounding religion. I personally believe that the diversity in religion is good for humanity. However, there should be limits in diversity so that it does not affect identity. Paine's quote seems to be interesting in its overt religiosity. The Founders believed that the Church was to be protected from the states by any means. They also believed that, a free society is that which has public officials and population taken as a whole and submitted to the Christian God's authority (David, 1974).

In conclusion, Common Sense did challenge the British government's authority, as well as the royal monarchy. The simplicity of the language that Paine used made sure that the message reached the American public. He spoke specifically to those who thought that Britain was being oppressive to the Americans. This publication was the first to directly ask for independence from Britain. Paine begins by offering his thoughts on government and religion, and then goes ahead to allegations against abuses by the British on fellow colonists. It is important to note is that, this document would have definitely appealed to those with European background. Common Sense can be described as the ferment of the times. It stirred many to strengthen their resolutions, and in the end a revolution was inevitable.