



The American Revolution

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Sons of the American Revolution

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Article 6

Common Sense

Hold on readers! We are going to turn back the clock from 28 June 1776, to 10 January 1776, when a major event occurred, which demonstrated the deep thinking and soul searching of the coming conscientiousness of our America. The man's name was Thomas Paine and the pamphlet he wrote is named *Common Sense*. Thomas anonymously published this work 10 January 1776. He wrote it in clear and persuasive prose and made a sound clear argument advocating America's independence from Great Britain. *Common Sense* was sold and widely distributed across the colonies, where it was even read aloud in taverns and churches. In proportion to the population of the colonies [roughly 2.5 million people], it had the largest sale and circulation of any document published in American history. As of today, it remains the all-time best selling American title. It is still in print.

So what did Mr. Paine have to say that attracted so much attention? It was and is

basically a propaganda pamphlet divided into four basic sections. In section one, Thomas talks to all, about the origin and design of government in general, and he pointedly contrasted it to the English constitutional government. Paine relates common Enlightenment Theory on the state of nature to all readers, and goes on to make a distinction between society and government. Society, Paine said, is like a man trying his best to survive and do well in life, but he isn't doing any of that alone. No, he has a partner. He and his partner have children, and so it's the family of common people which is central to his ideas. Just as man is not struggling to survive alone, he and his family are not struggling to survive all alone either. When families join together to make life and its struggles easier, you have society. Government becomes necessary when the number of families struggling together grows. This association of families must have rules and regulations in order to operate efficiently, ergo, laws. When the association grows larger than the size of the local town hall, then representative forms of government become necessary. Paine pointed with graphic clarity to the American colonies as that governmental being, which was conforming to the laws of nature and contrasted it to the Constitution of the United Kingdom. Paine found that the English constitution contained two tyrannies: monarchical and aristocratic in nature. It ruled by divine right, which moved down the generations by hereditary progression, and contributed nothing to the wellbeing or survival of the common people. It is from this clear idea that later on, we will hear of another document which begins, *We the People*. In section two, Paine considers the nature of monarchies and hereditary succession. He first considers monarchy in a biblical perspective and then in a historical view. He initiates his argument by stating that all men are created equal by their God, therefore the distinction between kings and their subjects is a false one. He goes on to criticize

constitutional monarchy, saying that the constitutional part of that body becomes corrupted and undermined by the monarch part. The resulting tyranny has the monarch exceeding any limitations placed upon him by the constitution. Paine argues that supporters of constitutional monarchy even concede that the power of the monarch is dangerous to the constitution, so why include the monarchy?

In the third section, Paine takes up the affairs of Colonial America. Paine considered the contest between the colonies and the king and argued for colonial independence. He proposed that a continental charter be constructed which could serve as America's *Magna Carta*. He even reasoned that some "body" outside the government would have to meet as a group representative of we the people [continental congress, maybe?]. The responsibility of this "body" would be the task of creating a Continental Charter or *American Magna Carta*. This charter would secure the freedom and property to all common men and ensure the free exercise of religion. This charter would also outline how a new national government should be. Paine was in favor of a congressional form of representative government.

The fourth section deals with America's abilities and potential. Paine is an optimist, who sees in the American Colonies the resources, manpower, intellectual and fiscal abilities to become a world power. He knows in his heart of hearts that this will be, but only if *we the people* are free from tyranny.

Thomas Paine put our spiritual house in order, cleansed our collective minds of all fuzzy doubts, and provided a populace with the moral concrete for nation building.