



Revolutionary Times



Containing the Latest News from the Sons of the American Revolution

Thomas Paine's 'Common Sense'

After fighting had broken out at Lexington and Concord, England's King George III expressed his view of the British-colonial relationship in a speech to Parliament on October 27, 1775.

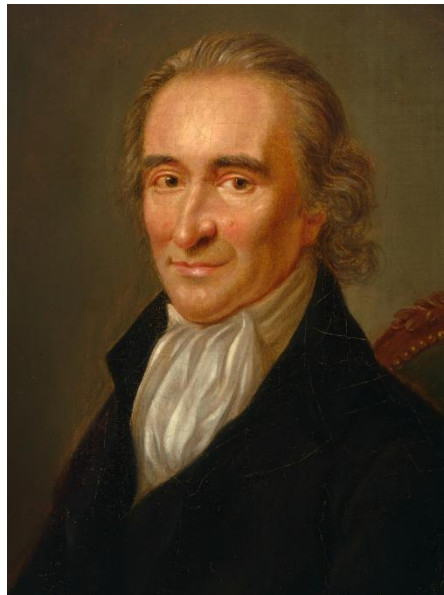
Both the king and the majority party in Parliament viewed any compromise with the colonies as a threat to the continued existence of the British Empire.

King George declared that the American colonies were in rebellion against the crown and therefore subject to military intervention.

Thomas Paine wrote a response to the king's pronouncement; Paine argued that the cause of America should not be just a revolt against taxation but a demand for independence.

Paine had originally intended Common Sense to appear in newspapers in several installments, but he realized that his argument was more convincing when taken as a whole, so he printed a booklet.

In part, Paine wrote in Common Sense, "Absolute governments (tho' the disgrace of human nature) have this advantage with them, that they are simple; if the people suffer, they know the head from which their suffering springs, know likewise the remedy, and are not bewildered by a variety of causes and cures."



"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, some will say in one and some in another, and every political physician will advise a different medicine."

"I know it is difficult to get over local or long standing prejudices, yet if we will suffer ourselves to examine the component parts of the English constitution, we shall find them to be the base remains of two ancient tyrannies, compounded with some new republican materials."

Thomas Paine's Common Sense was originally published on January 10, 1776; Paine often gets credit for more or less single-handedly galvanizing the reluctant colonists to commit to the war of independence.

As one historian puts it "Common Sense swept the country like a prairie fire," and "as a direct result of this overwhelming distribution, the Declaration of Independence was unanimously ratified on July 4, 1776."

There were many loyalist rebuttals of Common Sense. One of the earliest and best known is Plain Truth: Addressed to the Inhabitants of North America, written by Maryland planter James Chalmers under the generic pseudonym Candidus.

Paine's follow-up to Common Sense was a series of pamphlets called The American Crisis. He wrote, "Tyranny, like Hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph."

General George Washington had the first pamphlet read to his troops at Washington's Crossing in late 1776 to convince them to extend their enlistments so he could attack Trenton.

This broadsheet is dedicated to the 250th Anniversary Celebration of the Declaration of Independence for more information visit the National Society Sons of the American Revolution website at: www.sar.org

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