

D9: "Common Sense" by Thomas Paine

"In the following pages I offer nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense;...

Volumes have been written on the subject of the struggle between England and America. Men of all ranks have embarked in the controversy, from different motives, and with various designs; but all have been ineffectual, and the period of debate is closed. Arms, as the last resource, decide the contest; the appeal was the choice of the king, and the continent hath accepted the challenge...

America would have flourished as much, and probably much more, had no European power had anything to do with her. The articles of commerce, by which she has enriched herself, are the necessaries of life, and will always have a market while eating is the custom of Europe...

But she has protected us, say some. That she has engrossed us is true, and defended the continent at our expense as well as her own is admitted and she would have defended Turkey from the same motives, viz (that is) for the sake of trade and dominion... We have boasted the protection of Great Britain without considering that her motive was interest not attachment and that she did not protect us from our enemies on our account but from her enemies on her own account, from those who had no quarrel with us on any other account, and who will always be our enemies on the same account... France and Spain never were, nor perhaps ever will be, our enemies as Americans but as our being the subjects of Great Britain...

Our plan is commerce, and that, well attended to, will secure us the peace and friendship of all Europe; because it is the interest of all Europe to have America a free port. Her traded will always be a protection, and her barrenness of gold and silver secure her from invaders...

I challenge the warmest advocate for reconciliation to show a single advantage that this continent can reap by being connected with Great Britain. I repeat the challenge; not a single advantage is derived. Our corn will fetch its price in any market in Europe, and our imported goods must be paid for, buy them where we will...

But the injuries and disadvantages which we sustain by that connection are without number; and our duty to mankind at large, as well as to ourselves, instructs us to renounce the alliance, because any submission to or dependence on Great Britain tends directly to involve this continent in European wars and quarrels, and sets us at variance with nations who would otherwise seek our friendship, and against whom we have neither anger nor complaint. As Europe is our market for trade, we ought to form no partial connection with any part of it. It is the true interest of America to steer clear of European contentions which she never can do, while, by her dependence on Britain, she is made the makeweight in the scale of British politics...

As to government matters, it is not in the power of Britain to do this continent justice. The business of it will soon be too weighty and intricate to be managed with any tolerable degree of convenience by a power so distant from us, and so very ignorant of us; for if they cannot conquer us, they cannot govern us. To be always running 3,000 or 4,000 miles with a tale or a petition, waiting four or five months for an answer, which, when obtained, requires five or six more to explain it in, will in a few years be looked upon as folly and childishness there was a time when it was proper, and there is a proper time for it to cease..."

Reading Questions:

Does Paine think there is still room for debate? Explain:

Would America be successful without Britain? Why?

Are the enemies of Britain those of America? Explain why / why not:

What should America's plan be, according to Paine?

What challenge does Paine issue? Is he right, in your opinion? Explain:

Why does Paine think we are better off separate from Britain?

Why is government from Britain not desirable?