



Common Sense and Other Writings

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Introduction and Notes by Joyce Appleby

Though he didn't emigrate from England to the colonies until 1774, just a few months before the Revolutionary War began, Thomas Paine had an enormous impact on that war & the new nation that emerged from it. *Common Sense*, the instantly popular pamphlet he published in January 1776, argued that the goal of the struggle against the British should be not simply tax reform, as many were calling for, but complete independence. His rousing, radical voice was balanced by the equally independence-minded but more measured tones of Thomas Jefferson, who wrote the Declaration of Independence later that year.

In later works, such as *The Rights of Man*, *The Age of Reason*, & other selections included in this volume, he proved himself a visionary moralist centuries ahead of his time. He believed that every human has the natural right to life's necessities & that government's role should be to provide for those in dire need. An impassioned opponent of all forms of slavery, he understood that no one in poverty is truly free--a lesson still to be learned by many of our leaders today.

Common Sense and Other Writings Details

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From Reader Review Common Sense and Other Writings for online ebook

James Carter says

Common Sense is an extraordinarily difficult book to read today when one cannot possibly understand what it was like to be in the middle of a state of flux between America and England 237 years ago.

Hence, the statements from the readers are as follows: "Boring," "Difficult to understand," and "Dry."

Understandably, it was a time of action for the citizens back then as to the future of America, but what was the right prescribed course of action? Here came *Common Sense* that served as the catalyst en route to an open declaration of independence for America from her mother country. It was really the tipping point which may seem to be so hard to believe for modern readers of today: how a simple pamphlet such as *Common Sense* can serve as a tool in making a country possible.

Thomas Paine in *Common Sense* defined the terms of society and government and argued about why a government is a necessary evil and how it should be inexpensive and not obtrusive. He believed in the rights of a man and that all men should be afforded the liberty, freedom, and pursuit of happiness. He favored talent and hard work over inherited rights. Hence, he debated against monarchy and how it ruined relations between the rulers and the ruled.

Notice the fierce passion of Thomas Paine in the final paragraph right before the next section entitled "Of the Present Ability of America, with Some Miscellaneous Reflexions." That was probably a moment that he wasn't sure if writing *Common Sense* was all worth the energy. Apparently, it was and worked out for the best in the end.

It can be comical and ironical that Thomas Paine died an obscure death and was not celebrated in his time, but today, he is the van Gogh of revolutionary writers.

All in all, today's readers and non-readers can all thank, whether they understand it or not, Thomas Paine for his service and for making America what it is today.

The edition I read of *Common Sense* is the Penguin Classics, and I think it's a well set-up book that will serve as an invaluable guidance. The inexperienced and the weak readers should be advised to begin with the background of the American Revolution and how it came to be and then read the biography of Thomas Paine.

I feel the readers can easily relate well with him before embarking on the main content of the book along with the Cliff's Notes and a dictionary.

Finally, they should read the argument of Thomas Paine and the rest of the next two sections. Perhaps, rereading *Common Sense* one more time thereafter will help, too.

As for the experienced readers, like I did, they should start off with *Common Sense* first and then the rest of everything else.

Dr. Pete Meyers says

Highly recommended to anyone who wants a diverse view of the American Revolution and the following years. This was a fascinating follow up to McCullough's Adams biography, especially since Paine and Adams came to be enemies. This includes "Agrarian Justice" and "Age of Reason", one of which essentially proposed the Social Security system, and the other which harshly denounces organized religion. Paine's works really fly in the face of any side claiming that the Founders as a whole had a single voice.

Travis says

One-line synopsis from the Age of Reason: The more unnatural anything is, the more is it capable of becoming the object of dismal admiration.

Paine was, of course, denouncing those savage Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Languages change and people (copyeditors, for example) are fallible; therefore, the immutable Word of God cannot be found in any book. Besides, the Torah, Bible, and Koran are tawdry books; they are a history of only the grossest vices and a collection of the most paltry and contemptible tales. To say these books compose the Word of God dishonors the Creator—the Flying Spaghetti Monster.

Matt says

"THESE ARE THE TIMES that try men's souls."

Overall 4 out of 5 stars ??????? for Common Sense and Other Writings by Thomas Paine. This collection of Paine's major works includes: **African Slavery in America, Common Sense, The American Crisis Papers, Rights of Man, The Age of Reason, Agrarian Justice, and Letters to the Citizens of the United States of America**

African Slavery in America was decent but it was too short and there wasn't a lot of "meat on the bones", so I'd give it 3 stars. The issue of slavery was heavily debated in America before and during the Revolution, but it was ultimately decided by the Founders that it was too much of a hot button issue and they kicked the can down the road. Paine was a staunch abolitionist.

Common Sense is awesome and I'd give it 10 stars if I could. It was a powerful political pamphlet published right near the beginning of the American Revolution and I believe it should be required reading for all Americans. In Common Sense, Paine took Americans from simply arguing taxes to why they should make a complete separation from Great Britain. It is very well written, and I have read that Washington had it read to his troops after it was published to get them fired up for their cause.

The American Crisis Papers were published throughout the Revolution and again were powerfully written and Paine provided sound reasoning throughout his Papers for America's break with Great Britain. Common Sense and the Crisis Papers were THE political pamphlets that folks in America were reading during the Revolution. I have read a lot of Revolutionary biographies and Thomas Paine's publications are mentioned in every one of them because they were so controversial at the time.

In **Rights of Man** Paine gets into literary criticism by lambasting a book by Edmund Burke that had

condemned the French Revolution. Paine rips Burke's work to shreds and he really gets personal and downright nasty in his critique of Burke. Paine was not shy and he didn't hold back - I knew right where he was coming from at the beginning of Rights of Man. Paine argued how the English Monarchy was already past its prime, and he discusses the "natural rights of man" vs the "civil rights of man". It is some good stuff, although it does get bogged down with too much detail of tax plans, etc.

The Age of Reason is Paine's personal reflections on religion and theology. He was a Deist which was very popular in the late 18th century, and he goes into how he believes Christianity is basically a big load of crap. Age of Reason was the most personal out of the works in this collection and it was interesting to read what Paine believed in because it puts his political writings into perspective.

Agrarian Justice is Paine's attempt to propose a plan to end poverty through a tax plan to spread wealth to everyone. Paine was a social liberal but he advocated smaller, less constrictive government like Thomas Jefferson did.

Letters to the Citizens of the United States of America were done later in Paine's life after he returned to America after being imprisoned in France during its Revolution. He was basically saved by James Monroe who was minister to France at that time and he lobbied the French to allow Paine to come back with him to America. In **Letters**, Paine aligns himself inseparably with the Jeffersonians and he dogs out President John Adams' administration, The Federalists, and the passing of the Alien and Sedition Acts.

Thomas Paine loved America and you can tell his passion for it throughout his writing career, the highlights of which are all included in this collection, I enjoyed this much more than I thought I would. Paine was a wonderful writer and while I didn't personally agree with all of his arguments, it is still very interesting to read all of this. All the mentions of Paine in the Revolutionary bios and history books I've read about the period finally have a solid background for me and I am glad I read this collection. Now I need to read the Federalist Papers which I believe will be quite the opposite of Paine's belief in a "less is more" government style.

Highly Recommended!

Misha says

I, of course, read Common Sense once upon a time in high school, but can't remember much about it other than the mystique that surrounds Paine's most famous work. I'm thinking about starting a new blog called "Education of a Political Journalist" in which I read and explore American political writings and thought starting with the Enlightenment and working my way to the present day and try to put some current political discussions into context. There's a lot of talk about the Constitution and the Founders these days, but I think too many people apply their own modern filters to their words, which would have had a very different meaning and context at the time.

But like all ambitious projects, who knows if it will ever see the light of day. Maybe I'll go ahead and create a wordpress account just in case.

Adam says

Still relevant enough in today's time. Should be required reading for all the hacks that want to be voted into

house and senate...and president for that matter. The American govt is becoming exactly what we broke away from in 1776. Common sense read in today's context illustrates that. The others are informative and enlightening. I enjoy how Paine matter of factly explains religion to us in rights of man. Paine's stance on slavery abolition nearly 100 years ahead of the civil war. Also some good comments on federalist govt versus states rights. "13 staves do not make a barrel without a ring." Paine I think had a good understanding of the balance check and control needed to go along with a central govt.

Myke says

The namesake of this collection of Paine's writings is a wonderful piece of persuasive writing that manages to effectively cut through the intimidating and sometimes baffling perceptions of government. In "Common Sense" Paine builds his philosophy from the ground up, explaining the differences between society and government and the uses of both. It is a wittily written and extremely educated piece that deserves its status as a classic.

Mileage varies for the other pieces in the collection. "The American Crisis Papers" echoes the same sentiments as "Common Sense" but with the added stigma of being a historical record from the era of the Revolutionary War.

I personally found "The Age of Reason" (essentially "Common Sense" for the French Revolution) to be a confusing and largely uninteresting slog. Largely a response to Edmond Burke's criticisms of the French Revolution, the piece often-times feels petty, and what pertinent or profound points it does make are hidden behind that pettiness as well as a rhetoric much more difficult to approach or understand.

"The Age of Reason", the piece which famously lost the author most of his old friendships, is every bit as incendiary today as in its own time. Though hyper-critical of religious organizations (most especially Christianity), Paine still imbues the work with a Deist philosophy that acknowledges the great uses for faith and, above all, kindness to others. If the take-downs of specific dogmas and doctrines unwelcome challenge readers' religious convictions, the piece is still rife with optimism.

While the quality of the many essays and letters varies, this is a very well put-together collection of some of the most approachable and applicable philosophy I've ever read.

David says

Excellent collection of Paine's works, which are probably the best American-Revolution era political philosophy I've ever read, or at least aligns with my own thoughts more than any other "founding father". Well, it does until late in his life, when he apparently decides to deride John Adams in every article he writes. (when it comes to John Adams lovers, it's me, David McCullough, and Tom Hanks, and that's it. At least, it seems like that sometimes.) But other than that, Paine hits an important road between moderate real talk and idealistic hopes for the future. I ended up buying a complete collection of his "American Crisis" papers, written while he was a member of Washington's army. (This book only had a couple of those papers, but all those selected were great) Can't wait to read his thoughts from the front line.

Brian says

I've only read the first three papers (African Slavery in America, Common Sense and The American Crises Papers 1,10 & 13) so far and even 200+ years later it is stirring; one can only imagine how reading (or having it read to you in a public) these inflammatory writings at the time could incite the imagination of a new world and galvanize the will of our fledging patriots.

Although Paine and his famous rhetoric were taught, I don't recall these as mandatory reading during my HS days (over 20 yrs ago); I can only wonder if succeeding generations will even know who Paine was and his influence on the birth of our nation in particular and modern democracy as a whole.

I'll update this review when I revisit and finish the book in the future.

Mike says

The only thing I can say about this book is that at the time, it was probably quite remarkable. It's a relic of the past, I suppose. Now, it just sounds like someone railing against the necessity of slavery - that argument has long since been fought and won.

Pat says

This collection of Thomas Paine writings is too complete. Some of the included texts, such as Common Sense, are good reads in that they are still relevant to the modern reader. They can tell us where we have been and can make us question our modern view of the proper role of government. If those had been the only texts included, this would have been a fine collection. Unfortunately, the texts that ramble about how much people should be taxed were dull and meaningless in the twenty-first century, and Payne was naive in some of his assumptions, such as population sizes and currency values remaining constant.

Tori Samar says

Although Thomas Paine has a penchant for propaganda, I was still intrigued to read the major works of this man, whom John Adams considered the one who started the American Revolution. Our country's history aside, however, I found the most fascinating section of the entire book to be 'The Age of Reason', Paine's scathing attack against Christianity and other "false religions." It is amazing that a man who so sincerely wanted to honor His Creator was so sincerely wrong about His knowledge of that Creator!

'The Age of Reason' definitely gave me more insight into the beliefs of the deists. Until reading it, I don't think I fully grasped just how antagonistic deism is toward the essential elements of Christianity. For example, Paine adamantly believed that what Christianity calls 'general revelation' was the only true 'word of God'. He rejected the Bible as a "stupid" book (his word, not mine!). Paine's work is also one of the clearest examples I have ever read of how foolish the cross seems to unbelievers (1 Cor. 2).

Regarding this particular edition, I wish the editors had included footnotes that provided a historical context for each of Paine's writings. The works included in the book were Paine's responses to specific events,

speeches, or documents. It would have been helpful to have that context so that I could make a more informed judgment about whether Paine was effectively arguing his own view while also accurately representing the views of others.

David says

A difficult book to read. And not all of the ideas got into my head. For example, the endnotes mentions Paine's hatred of George Washington, yet I couldn't encounter that in the book. I could only encounter his dislike of John Adams.

That said, some of the ideas in the book are intriguing. For example, how a constitution was a new instrument; Kingdoms never had such a thing-all governance was hereditary. And the constitution was what limited executive power. Additionally I had never thought of taxes and war as friends to a hereditary government, and things a democracy keeps to a minimum.

I also learned that John Adams (I think) wanted to create the Presidency in the manner of a king, with more power, and the balance of power between the branches was not initially added (only to the development of the constitution).

Perhaps these ideas are elementary in High School history, but ones I haven't heard of, or have simply forgot.

Finally, Paine's attitude towards religions seems sort of like Bill Maher's today, denouncing the bible. He has to be the first historical figure I have heard of who rejected the Judeo-Christian traditions.

This was a obtuse, difficult to read book, but I have learned a lot and am grateful to have read it.

Kevin says

Thomas Paine's writings are as prevalent today as they were back in the 18th century. To understand Thomas Paine, the Civil Rights movement, and equal liberties, one understands the Articles of Confederation, Constitution, The Bill of Rights and The Declaration of Independence.

Any Englishman who berates America's struggle has not had the piece of mind to understand Thomas Paine or Colonial America. An American who says "who cares about the bill of rights," has not had the piece of mind to understand Thomas Paine or Colonial America. Anyone who spits on American Freedoms or Independence has not had the piece of mind to understand Thomas Paine or Colonial America.

These are the founding principles of freedom, liberty, equality and advancement of a prosperous society. While some comments are dated, and shows Thomas Paine's century of birth, the book remains a testament to American Ideals, and it is only through understanding from whence we came can we progress further to the future utopia imagined in so many fantasy, science fiction, and prophetic creations of mankind.

Tim Floyd says

This book was a collection of writings by Thomas Paine (an early supporter of the American quest for independence), I loved the background story to Paine's experience & writings. The portion of the book I'm choosing to focus this review on is his writing called Common Sense, a paper on why Paine thinks America should be free from the grips of England. I found his arguments both persuasive and uncomfortable at times. I can definitely see why it wasn't very well received by the Crown. There are a number of quotes I found to be relevant & interesting, I thought I'd share some of my favorites.

Page 38: "Small islands not capable of protecting themselves are proper objects for government to take under their care; but there is some thing absurd, in supposing a Continent to be perpetually governed by an island."

Page 54: "The more men have to lose, the less willing are they to venture. The rich are in general slaves to fear, and submit to courtly power with the trembling of duplicity of a spaniel."

Page 54: "Most nations have let slip the opportunity, and by that means have been compelled to receive laws from their conquerors, instead of making laws for themselves."

~ What a thrilling time it must have been in to create, from scratch, what you wanted to become.

Page 55: "As to religion, I hold it to be the indispensable duty of government to protect all conscientious professors thereof, and I know of no other business which government hath to do therewith...For myself, I fully and conscientiously believe, that it is the will of the Almighty that there should be a diversity of religious opinions among us. It affords a larger field for our Christian kindness; were we all of one way of thinking, our religious dispositions would want matter for probation; and on this liberal principle I look on the various denominations among us, to be like children of the same family, differing only in what is called their Christian names."

~ I really respect this view on religion, I wish more people had this sort of tolerance for religion & religious views.

Page 64: "Wherefore, instead of gazing at each other with suspicious or doubtful curiosity, let each of us, hold out to his neighbor the hearty hand of friendship, and unite in drawing a line, which like an act of oblivion, shall bury in forgetfulness every former dissension. Let the names of Whig and Tory [and I suggest Democrat & Republican] be extinct; and let none other be heard among us, than those of a good citizen, and open and resolute friend, and a virtuous supporter of the RIGHTS of MANKIND and of the FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES OF AMERICA."

~ What a perspective on diversity & tolerance of different political views! Sometimes I feel like say this to people to get stuck in the rut of their political close mindedness, myself included at times.

In all, I found Paine to be a refreshing reminder of America's potential. Have we become what he hoped? Have we taken advantage of the possibilities set before us? Are we now at risk of having given too much power and authority to our President that Monarchial tendencies are starting to show itself? Common Sense and the other writings of Thomas Paine is an excellent book to remind America where we've come from & what our potential could still become.