

1 Common Sense
2 by Thomas Paine, 1776

3 ...I have heard it asserted by some, that as America has flourished under her former connection with
4 Great Britain, the same connection is necessary towards her future happiness, and will always have the
5 same effect. Nothing can be more fallacious than this kind of argument. We may as well assert that
6 because a child has thrived upon milk, that it is never to have meat, or that the first twenty years of our
7 lives is to become a precedent for the next twenty. But even this is admitting more than is true; for I
8 answer roundly that America would have flourished as much, and probably much more, had no European
9 power taken any notice of her. The commerce by which she hath enriched herself are the necessities of
10 life, and will always have a market while eating is the custom of Europe.

11 ... We have boasted the protection of Great Britain, without considering, that her motive was INTEREST
12 not ATTACHMENT; and that she did not protect us from OUR ENEMIES on OUR ACCOUNT; but from
13 HER ENEMIES on HER OWN ACCOUNT, from those who had no quarrel with us on any OTHER
14 ACCOUNT, and who will always be our enemies on the SAME ACCOUNT. Let Britain waive her
15 pretensions to the Continent, or the Continent throw off the dependence, and we should be at peace with
16 France and Spain, were they at war with Britain.

17 ...But Britain is the parent country, say some. Then the more shame upon her conduct. Even brutes do
18 not devour their young, nor savages make war upon their families. Wherefore, the assertion, if true, turns
19 to her reproach; but it happens not to be true, or only partly so... Europe, and not England, is the parent
20 country of America. This new World hath been the asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious
21 liberty from EVERY PART of Europe. Hither have they fled, not from the tender embraces of the mother,
22 but from the cruelty of the monster; and it is so far true of England, that the same tyranny which drove the
23 first emigrants from home, pursues their descendants still...

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

27 ...But the injuries and disadvantages which we sustain by that connection, are without number; and our
28 duty to mankind at large, as well as to ourselves, instruct us to renounce the alliance: because, any
29 submission to, or dependence on, Great Britain, tends directly to involve this Continent in European wars
30 and quarrels, and set us at variance with nations who would otherwise seek our friendship, and against
31 whom we have neither anger nor complaint. ...

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

39 ... The powers of governing still remaining in the hands of the king, he will have a negative over the whole
40 legislation of this continent. And as he hath shewn himself such an inveterate enemy to liberty, and
41 discovered such a thirst for arbitrary power; is he, or is he not, a proper man to say to these
42 colonies, "*You shall make no laws but what I please.*" ...

43 ...America is only a secondary object in the system of British politics, England consults the good of *this*
44 country no farther than it answers her *own* purpose. Wherefore, her own interest leads her to suppress
45 the growth of *ours* in every case which doth not promote her advantage, or in the least interferes with it.

46 ... even the best terms, which we can expect to obtain, can amount to no more than a temporary
47 expedient, or a kind of government by guardianship, which can last no longer than till the colonies come
48 of age, so the general face and state of things, in the interim, will be unsettled and unpromising.
49 Emigrants of property will not choose to come to a country whose form of government hangs but by a
50 thread, and who is every day tottering on the brink of commotion and disturbance; and numbers of the
51 present inhabitants would lay hold of the interval, to dispose of their effects, and quit the continent.

52 But the most powerful of all arguments, is, that nothing but independence, i. e. a continental form of
53 government, can keep the peace of the continent and preserve it inviolate from civil wars...a government
54 which cannot preserve the peace, is no government at all...

55 ...O ye that love mankind! Ye that dare oppose, not only the tyranny, but the tyrant, stand forth! ...
56

57
58 Copyright ©1999-2014 by the Independence Hall Association, electronically publishing as ushistory.org.
59 The IHA is a nonprofit organization in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, founded in 1942.
60 On the Internet since July 4, 1995.

61
62