

Primary Source: Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*

Read the Primary Source below and respond to the follow up questions at the end of the doc.

*On January 10, 1776, while the Second Continental Congress was deliberating on the future of the “**united colonies**,” a pamphlet was put on sale in Philadelphia. Simply titled *Common Sense*, it became a publishing phenomenon, a popular best-seller that sold up to 150,000 copies in America and Europe. **Written by an Englishman, Thomas Paine**, who had arrived in America only fifteen months earlier, it expressed America’s pent-up rage against the mother country in fighting words, urging Americans to abandon the goal of reconciliation and fight for independence. While many of Paine’s arguments were not new, his accessible prose and insistent incendiary style were revolutionary, spurring the spirit of INDEPENDENCE among the “common people,” eliciting contempt from **Loyalists**, and disturbing **Patriot** leaders who feared the popular uproar would jeopardize the deliberative work of the Congress.*

Vocabulary

Loyalist: a colonist of the American Revolutionary period who supported the British cause.

Patriot: a colonist of the American Revolutionary period who supported breaking away from Great Britain.

THOUGHTS OF THE PRESENT STATE OF AMERICAN AFFAIRS

In the following pages I offer nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense; and have no other preliminaries to settle with the reader than that he will divest himself of prejudice and prepossession, and suffer [permit] his reason and his feelings to determine for themselves; that he will put on, or rather that he will not put off, the true character of a man, and generously enlarge his views beyond the present day.

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.

It hath been reported of the late Mr. Pelham (who tho’ an able minister was not without his faults) that on his being attacked in the House of Commons on the score that his measures were only of a temporary kind, replied, “they will last my time.” Should a thought so fatal and unmanly possess the colonies in the present contest, the name of ancestors will be remembered by future generations with detestation.

The sun never shined on a cause of greater worth. ’Tis not the affair of a city, a country, a province, or a kingdom, but of a continent of at least one eighth part of the habitable globe. ’Tis not the concern of a day, a year, or an age; posterity are virtually involved in the contest and will be more or less affected, even to the end of time, by the proceedings now. Now is the seed time of continental union, faith and honor. The least fracture now will be like a name engraved with

the point of a pin on the tender rind of a young oak; the wound will enlarge with the tree, and posterity read it in full grown characters.

By referring the matter from argument to arms, a new area for politics is struck; a new method of thinking hath arisen. All plans, proposals, etc. prior to the nineteenth of April, i.e., to the commencement of hostilities, are like the almanacs of the last year which, though proper [accurate] then, are superseded and useless now. Whatever was advanced by the advocates on either side of the question then, terminated in one and the same point, viz. [that is], a union with Great Britain. The only difference between the parties was the method of effecting it the one proposing force, the other friendship; but it hath so far happened that the first hath failed and the second hath withdrawn her influence.

As much hath been said of the advantages of **reconciliation**, which like an agreeable dream hath passed away and left us as we were, it is but right that we should examine the contrary side of the argument and inquire into some of the many material injuries which these colonies sustain, and always will sustain, by being connected with and dependent on Great Britain. To examine that connection and dependence on the principles of nature and common sense, to see what we have to trust to, if separated, and what we are to expect if dependent.

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

But she has protected us, say some. That she hath 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 motive, viz., the sake of trade and dominion.

Alas, we have been long led away by ancient prejudices and made large sacrifices to superstition. We have boasted the **protection** of Great Britain without considering that her **motive** was interest not attachment, 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. Let Britain wave her pretensions to the continent, or the continent throw off the dependence, and we should be at peace with France and Spain were they at war with Britain. The miseries of Hanover last war ought to warn us against connections [political alliances].

It hath lately been asserted in Parliament that the colonies have no relation to each other but through the parent country, i.e., that Pennsylvania and the Jerseys, and so on for the rest, are sister colonies by the way of England. This is certainly a very round-about way of proving relationship, but it is the nearest and only true way of proving enemyship, if I may so call it. France and Spain never were, nor perhaps ever will be our enemies as Americans, but as our being the subjects of Great Britain.

But Britain is the **parent country**, say some. Then the more shame upon her conduct. Even brutes do not devour their young nor savages make war upon their families; wherefore the assertion, if true, turns to her reproach; but it happens not to be true, or only partly so, and the phrase parent or mother country hath been jesuitically adopted by the King and his parasites, with a low papistical design of gaining an unfair bias on the credulous weakness of our minds. Europe, and not England, is the parent country of America. This new world hath been the asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty from every part of Europe. Hither have they fled, not from the tender embraces of the mother but from the cruelty of the monster; and it is so far true of England that the same tyranny which drove the first emigrants from home pursues their descendants still.

In this extensive quarter of the globe, we forget the narrow limits of three hundred and sixty miles (the extent of England) and carry our friendship on a larger scale. We claim brotherhood with every European Christian and triumph in the generosity of the sentiment.

But admitting that we were all of English descent, what does it amount to? Nothing. Britain, being now an open enemy, extinguishes every other name and title: And to say that reconciliation is our duty is truly farcical. The first king of England of the present line (William the Conqueror) was a Frenchman, and half the peers of England are descendents from the same country; wherefore by the same method of reasoning, England ought to be governed by France.

Much hath been said of the united strength of Britain and the colonies, that in conjunction they might bid defiance to the world. But this is mere presumption; the fate of war is uncertain. Neither do the expressions mean anything, for this continent would never suffer [permit] itself to be drained of inhabitants to support the British arms in either Asia, Africa, or Europe.

Besides, what have we to do with setting the world at defiance? 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 trade 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 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 make-weight in the scale of British politics.

Europe is too thickly planted with kingdoms to be long at peace, and whenever a war breaks out between England and any foreign power, the trade of America goes to ruin because of her connection with Britain. The next war may not turn out like the last, and should it not, the

advocates for reconciliation now will be wishing for separation then, because neutrality in that case would be a safer convoy than a man of war [warship]. Everything that is right or natural pleads for separation. The blood of the slain, the weeping voice of nature cries, **'TIS TIME TO PART**. Even the distance at which the Almighty hath placed England and America is a strong and natural proof that the authority of the one over the other was never the design of heaven. The time, likewise, at which the continent was discovered adds weight to the argument, and the manner in which it was peopled increases the force of it. The [Protestant] reformation was preceded by the discovery of America as if the Almighty graciously meant to open a sanctuary to the persecuted in future years, when home should afford neither friendship nor safety.

. . . until an independence is declared, the continent will feel itself like a man who continues putting off some unpleasant business from day to day, yet knows it must be done, hates to set about it, wishes it over, and is continually haunted with the thoughts of its necessity.

Questions:

Your responses should be a total of at least 500 words (1 page typed).

Write in complete sentences.

Check your work for proper grammar and spelling.

1. What are the Patriots and Loyalists debating over? Which side of the argument does Thomas Paine support? Is he a Patriot or a Loyalist? (You may need to look up the definition of each)

2. Paine states that some make the argument that Britain has protected America. Why does Paine believe that Britain has protected America? What has been their motivation to do so?

3. Paine refers to Britain as the “parent country”. What does he mean by this? Describe the relationship between parents and their children. What do parents provide for their children?

4. How does Paine balance the benefits of America remaining part of Britain with the costs and injuries? What conclusion does he draw?

