

An Abridged Interpretation of
Common Sense by Thomas Paine

1. What is the purpose of government? (circle one)

- a. to allow people to have absolute freedom
- f. to educate the people
- g. to protect natural rights
- h. to allow representatives to only help themselves

The Purpose of Government

Society and government are two separate things. People in society do what they want in search of happiness. Government exists because of what people do wrong—it sets limits on the behavior of people. At best, government is a necessary evil. At worst, government is intolerable.

Without government, society has absolute freedom. People can do anything they wish. Unfortunately, people can and do commit evil. Government punishes evil doers, hence, government protects society. Therefore, we give up some of our freedom to create a government to protect our freedom and provide our security.

We elect representatives to our government to make sure that government protects the natural rights of the citizens. Elections should be held often so that representatives can be reminded of what the citizens want. Frequent elections will also keep representatives from helping only themselves. This will make for a happy relationship between society and government.

2. In Britain, who is not elected to office? (circle two)

- a. the king
- f. House of Lords
- g. House of Commons
- h. Parliament

The English Government

Simple things are easily run and easily fixed. The English government is too complicated. When something breaks, it is difficult to know what is wrong. The English government promises much but delivers little. Let us examine three parts of the English government: (1) the king, (2) the House of Lords, and (3) the House of Commons.

Since the King and members of the House of Lords are not elected, they are meaningless and useless. They do not care about the people. Members of the House of Commons are elected and are the only voice of the people. Yet, the King tells Parliament what to do and Parliament does it.

3. What is a problem with monarchy? (circle two)

- a. sons of kings may be fools
- f. kings are always good
- g. someone else rules for kings who are too young or old

The Rule of Kings

It is ridiculous that one capable man who becomes king should have all the future generations of his family also rule. His son might be a dictator or a fool. England has had a few good monarchs but many bad ones. Another evil of kings is that someone else rules in his place when a king is too young or too old. Kings do not make good governments. Under kings, there have been at least eight civil wars and nineteen rebellions. In England, all a king does is start wars and give away property. One honest man is worth all of the kings who ever lived.

4. Why did people leave Europe? (circle two)

- a. religious freedom
- f. to make money
- g. political freedom
- h. to fight France

The Current Situation in America

On the following, I offer nothing more than common sense. War will decide who will rule America. Some say that America needs Britain to be successful, but they are wrong. America would have been great without Europe. People escaped from Europe to come to America for political and religious freedom. And to call Americans Englishmen is wrong since many people in America come from other countries.

America has no advantage by being connected with Great Britain. Our relationship with Britain has brought America into war with other nations. Whenever Britain goes to war, it disrupts American trade with other European countries. It is better that America stay out of European problems.

There are those who cannot see the abuses of Britain. If you believe that peace can be made, you are lying to yourself and you have the heart of a coward.

5. Underline or highlight three phrases that show America's ability to fight Britain.

The Ability of America to Fight a War

I have never met with a man, either in England or America, who has not said the colonies and Great Britain would separate at one time or other. The time is now. It is cheaper to fight than to spend millions to repeal acts of Parliament. We are united and this continent has the largest number of armed men of any power in the world. It would be easy for America to build a navy; we have the resources of tar, timber, iron, and cordage. America builds some of the best ships in the world. While Britain has some powerful ships, most of them are not fit to use. Our arms are equal to any country, and we can produce our own gunpowder and cannon.

6. Why is it important for America to declare independence? (circle one)

- a. to anger the British
- f. to gain help from France and Spain
- g. to start a war
- h. to stop taxation

Independence

To conclude, many reasons may be given for independence. Some of which are

First—other nations cannot solve our conflict as long as we are considered a part of Great Britain. Hence, the conflict will go on forever.

Second—France and Spain will not help us if we do not break with Britain.

Third—we must not be seen as Englishmen and rebels fighting Britain but as a different people seeking independence.

Fourth—if we sent a document to foreign governments stating British abuses and our failed attempts to peaceably fix them, and showed that we were pushed towards separating from Britain, it would do us great good.

Until independence is declared, America will suffer.