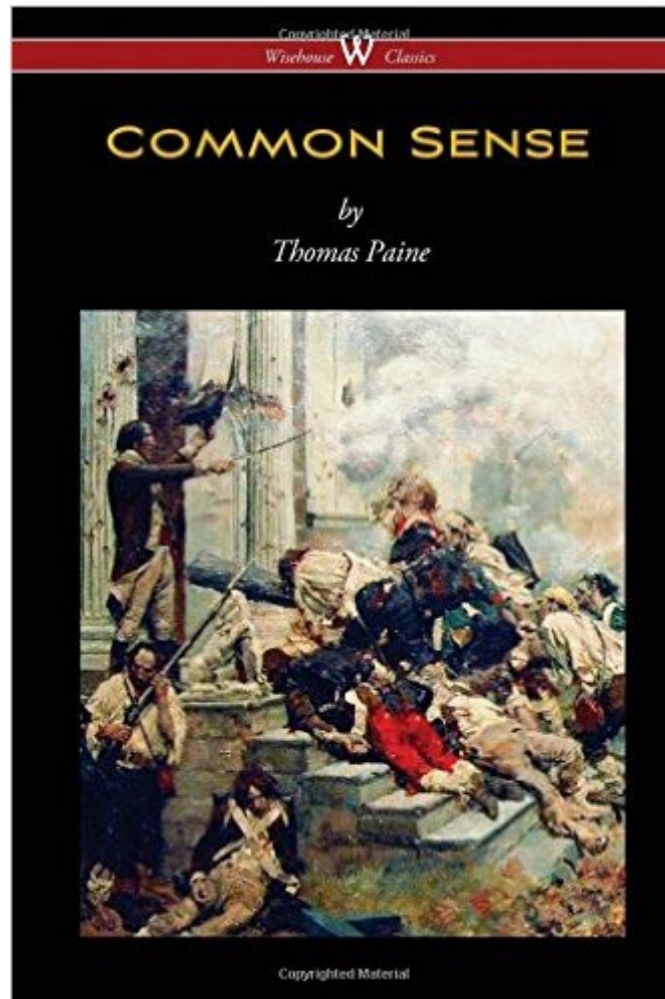


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Common Sense (Wisehouse Classics Edition)



Synopsis

COMMON SENSE is a pamphlet written by Thomas Paine in 1775-76 that inspired people in the Thirteen Colonies to declare and fight for independence from Great Britain in the summer of 1776. The pamphlet explained the advantages of and the need for immediate independence in clear, simple language. It was published anonymously on January 10, 1776, at the beginning of the American Revolution and became an immediate sensation. It was sold and distributed widely and read aloud at taverns and meeting places. Washington had it read to all his troops, which at the time had surrounded the British army in Boston. In proportion to the population of the colonies at that time (2.5 million), it had the largest sale and circulation of any book published in American history. As of 2006, it remains the all-time best selling American title. COMMON SENSE presented the American colonists with an argument for freedom from British rule at a time when the question of whether or not to seek independence was the central issue of the day. Paine wrote and reasoned in a style that common people understood. Forgoing the philosophical and Latin references used by Enlightenment era writers, he structured COMMON SENSE as if it were a sermon, and relied on Biblical references to make his case to the people. He connected independence with common dissenting Protestant beliefs as a means to present a distinctly American political identity. Historian Gordon S. Wood described COMMON SENSE as "the most incendiary and popular pamphlet of the entire revolutionary era".

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Customer Reviews

Common Sense is one of the greatest articles of argumentation ever written. Paine was the finest pamphleteer of his age and was able to turn the discontents of the colonists and, especially, the intellectual leaders of the revolutionary movement into arguments that were easily understood by ordinary colonials and which inspired them to rally to the cause of independence. I first read Common Sense more than fifty years ago and remember well being impressed with Paine's ability to carry arguments and to anticipate those of his opponents before his tract even hit the street. Over the course of my lifetime, I was inspired by the author and became a pamphleteer of sorts myself. I always told my colleagues that I wanted to become a poor man's Tom Paine. But after reading the piece once again, I realize that almost all who aspire to follow in his footsteps, if not fill his shoes, are doomed to become but very poor copies of the original. Other reviewers have noted the fluidity of his writing; it reads as simply, directly and forcefully today as it must have nearly a quarter of a millennium ago. Obviously, one did not have to be a great reader to be swayed by the force of Paine's words or to be inspired to the side of those wishing to throw off the English yoke. I was struck by echoes of Paine in many great American speeches that were running through my mind as I read. A number of quotes from Robert F. Kennedy seemed to have been directly inspired by Common Sense, and I hastily looked them up and offer these two for your consideration: "It is not enough to understand, or to see clearly. The future will be shaped in the arena of human activity, by those willing to commit their minds and their bodies to the task.

In an unrelenting quest to understanding the history of the United States, one obscure name comes to mind, Thomas Paine. Paine helped establish the meaning of democracy and the "united" in United States. His two monumental works, COMMON SENSE AND RIGHTS OF MAN, provided the philosophical and rhetorical building blocks that the founding fathers, such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, et al., would emulate with the writing of the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights. Many take for granted the origins of freedom and democracy in the United States, and as with many school history textbooks depict, Paine merely appears in a paragraph or two, and quickly disappears to historical oblivion. Nevertheless, when one reads COMMON SENSE AND RIGHTS OF MAN: AND OTHER ESSENTIAL WRITINGS OF THOMAS PAINE, there will be no doubt how significant his philosophical and political writings transformed the political structure of the colonies. Although this may sound somewhat romanticized, Paine's words ignited the energy for the colonists to free themselves from the tyrannical-monarchical leadership of England's King George III. With all the talk of Paine being a founding father, he may also be considered the father of revolution, American Revolution and French Revolution, and human rights. Without the inspiration

from his friend Edmund Burke, author of REFLECTIONS ON THE REVOLUTION IN FRANCE, Paine may not have been able to write the pamphlet Rights of Man. Indeed, his power of the written word translated to revolutionary action, and Jeffersonian ideology. In clear and no nonsense language, Paine's perspective of the state of the colonies are elaborately told in COMMON SENSE.

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