

Thomas Paine, January 1776

COMMON SENSE

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

(1) 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....

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

(3) 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, that is, for the sake of trade and dominion.

(4) 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*; and 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. Let Britain waive 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...

(5) 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, 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 a 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....

(6) 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.

(7) 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 conflicts, 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. 'Tis 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 makeweight in the scale of British politics.

(8) 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...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....

(9) But if you say you can still pass the violations over, then I ask, Hath your house been burnt? Hath your property been destroyed before your face? Are your wife and children destitute of a bed to lie on, or bread to live on? Have you lost a parent or child by their hands, and yourself the ruined and wretched survivor? If you have not, then you are not a judge of those who have. But if you have, and can still shake