

An Abridged Interpretation
of
Common Sense
by
Thomas Paine

What is the purpose of government?
(check all that apply)

- set limits on society
- educate the population
- protect natural rights

In Britain, who is not elected to office?
(check all that apply)

- King
- House of Lords
- House of Commons

What is a problem with monarchy?
(write your answer)

On the Origin and Design of Government in General, with Concise Remarks on the English Constitution

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 society. At best, government is a necessary evil. At worst, government is intolerable.

Without government, society has absolute freedom. People can do anything they wish. If people were angels, we would have no need of government. However, people can and do commit evil. Without government to restrain immorality, society will have no protection. Therefore, we give up some of our freedom to create a government to protect our natural rights.

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 serving themselves. This will make for a happy relationship between society and government.

Simple things are easily run and easily fixed. The English government is too complex. When something breaks, it is difficult to know what is wrong. The English constitution promises much but delivers little. Let us examine three parts of the English government:

First—The King.

Second—The House of Lords.

Third—The House of Commons.

Since the King and members of the House of Lords are not elected, they are absurd 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.

Of Monarchy and Hereditary Succession

People were originally all equal. Therefore, 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. How did kings start? There are three answers: by status, by election, or by force. 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 stable 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.

Thoughts on the Present State of American Affairs

Why did people leave Europe? (write your answer)

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 civil 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 this continent 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 affairs.

There are those who cannot see the abuses of Britain. If you believe that reconciliation can be made, you are deceiving yourself. If you can shake hands with murderers, then you have the heart of a coward.

Of the Present Ability of America: with some Miscellaneous Reflections

In the box, underline the words and/or phrases that show America's ability to fight Britain.

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 the 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.

Yes/No the colonies should become independent because (complete)

Business destroys the spirit of a country. The city of London submits to continued insults with the patience of a coward. The more men have to lose, the less they are willing to risk. The rich are in general slaves to fear.

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

First—other nations cannot mediate 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, the continent will 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.