

Don't Tread on Me - *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine

The following dialogue and content is cited from an article published in the magazine, “American History” (August, 2009). The article features the Pulitzer Prize winner, William Goetzmann, though written by Gene Santoro. The question raised to William was:

“In 1776 Tom Paine titled his call to arms *Common Sense*. Why?”

He replies:

Like Thomas Jefferson, Paine believed that men are naturally meant to be free and have an innate sense of morality and brotherhood. Both men read Enlightenment philosophers like John Locke and the Scottish “Common Sense” school, who said that human reason could understand the universe.

In his revolutionary pamphlet *Common Sense*...Paine started transforming those ideas into America’s can-do pragmatism.

Continuing on the subject, the author asks, **“How?”**

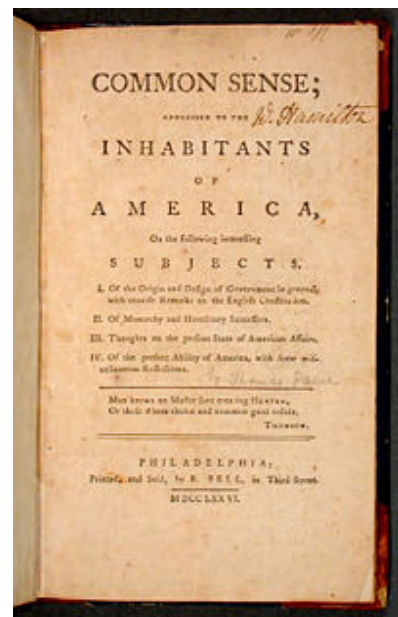
William replies:

He argued that a revolutionary government could be founded on rationally derived ideas – an ideology – not traditions or existing institutions. For the Founding Fathers, the role of government was only to insure that men would have the possibility of being free. Anything more was a form of tyranny that restrained human nature.

Again, an open question, **“Why?”** (Regarding the role...)

He replies:

Man naturally desires freedom. The more leeway people have, the more they can implement their ideas, on a political or moral scale. So freedom implies change. The Puritans had their *City on a Hill*. Paine had his utopian vision. Some kind of rebirth – spiritual, political, or personal – has always been a fundamental American idea.



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Then the question:

“How does that shape our history?”

Again, Mr. Goetzmann:

So many ways: religious revivals, reform crusades, the idea of *Manifest Destiny* and the frontier...

...

Okay, with the brief Q & A, let's try to find some additional sense in *Common Sense*. First, a brief about Thomas Paine:

An Englishman by birth, Thomas came to the colonies at the invitation of Ben Franklin. On the eve of revolution, he published *Common Sense* (1776) – which gained immediate popularity. Originally entitled, “Plain Truth”, and written in the implied simplistic style, the combination offered accessibility to the general public or people and was credited as a contribution to public debate about independence.



Additional understanding and association of his life will be addressed with the writings to follow under the Webpage, “Don't Tread on Me”. Each posting will feature a quote from this Founding Father and, in this quote, some association to his public life.

What should be noted as particularly interesting is that Paine's sentiment, ideas and writings did not occur without some pain. Anyone who opposes the ruling authority is putting themselves at risk, and for Paine, the risks can to fruition in the form of imprisonment and alienation.

Imprisonment is noted as occurring twice: much later (1793), he was arrested and imprisoned in Paris (during or around *The French Revolution*); a year earlier, he was indicted for seditious libel in England for his titled work, *Rights of Man...*

Legal trouble was not his only *plight* as another works, *The Age of Reason*, dealt with the controversial issues of deism and organized religion.

To learn more about Thomas Paine, visit Wikipedia.org (as I did...)

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