



Common Sense

Thomas Paine (1737 - 1809)

Read by:	Bob Neufeld	Format:	MP3 CD in DVD case
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Common Sense is a pamphlet written by Thomas Paine in 1775–76 that articulated the argument for the American colonies seeking independence from Britain at a time when the matter was the issue of the day. Paine reasoned and wrote in a clear, simple style accessible and tangible to the common man. He structured *Common Sense* as a sermon using Biblical references to make his case. In doing so he drew together the drive for independence with prevailing dissenting Protestant tenets to forge a uniquely American political identity. Published anonymously on January 10, 1776, it became an instant sensation, “the most incendiary and popular pamphlet of the entire revolutionary era”. Its sales in proportion to the overall population remain the highest of any book published in American history.

Thomas Paine (February 9, 1737 – June 8, 1809) was a British-American philosopher, political theorist, activist, author, and revolutionary well known as the author of *Common Sense* and *The American Crisis* that inspired the American Revolution. Paine has been described as “a corsetmaker by trade, a journalist by profession, and a propagandist by inclination”. Born in Thetford, Norfolk, he was apprenticed at age 13 to his father, a corsetmaker. After a brief term as a privateer he opened his own shop, but failed. He became an excise officer and eventually settled in Lewes, Sussex, marrying Elizabeth Ollive, operating her family’s tobacco shop, serving as an excise officer, and becoming involved in civic affairs. His first political work was an article appealing to the crown for better pay and working conditions for excise officers. Shortly thereafter he was fired, his shop failed, and he sold his possessions to avoid debtor’s prison. He separated from his wife and emigrated to the American colonies with the help of Benjamin Franklin in 1774. He became secretary of the Congressional Committee on Foreign Affairs and participated in a critical mission to France in 1781 that helped fund the revolution. He naturally became engrossed in the French Revolution and wrote *The Rights of Man* as a rebuttal to Edmund Burke that tore apart the monarchy and traditional society and sold nearly a million copies. Harassed by the English government for his views, in 1792 he published *Rights of Man, Part the Second, Combining Principle and Practice*, which also became a sensation and prompted an indictment for seditious libel. Chased out of the country, he was tried and convicted in absentia. France made him an honorary citizen and he was elected to the National Convention. His views conflicted with the radical Montagnards and Robespierre, however. He was excluded from the Convention, arrested and imprisoned, narrowly escaping execution during the Reign of Terror.