

## ***Common Sense* and *Declaration of Independence* Synthesis**

The pamphlet *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine and the *Declaration of Independence* by the Second Continental Congress were both extremely important to the formation of the American Revolution. While the ideas in the documents had already begun formulating in Europe with the Enlightenment and in the rebellious lifestyle of the Americans, these two documents were amongst the first to rouse popular support for the idea of a complete separation of the colonies from Great Britain, and they both provided a set of logical claims to persuade the colonists.

Paine's *Common Sense* was the most important document to bring the revolutionary idea to the American colonists. Before he had published the pamphlet, the colonists were still highly loyal to Great Britain: the Stamp Act Congress had politely asked for reforms, the First Continental Congress petitioned the king for amendments to their relationship; and no major leaders called for the revolution of Great Britain. However, being born in Enlightenment-era Europe and inspired by the radical ideas of contemporary thinkers such as John Locke with his philosophy of "natural rights" and a "social contract," Paine brought to America a new view that was previously deemed too radical to the colonists: complete separation. He claimed that Great Britain offered no advantage at all to the colonies, that it had repeatedly denied the colonists' calls for redress, that it was even worse than "brutes" and "savages" in that it exploited the Americas. He said that this was the problem, and that military conflict would be the only solution, and that this conflict would affect an entire continent. His entire writing was written in a very confident tone, as he asserts that it is only common sense that gives him such perfidious thoughts towards Great Britain; that anyone that "love[s] mankind" would stand up to fight this obvious despotism.

The important idea about Paine's writing was not its content—the grievances had already been enumerated in other documents such as the Stamp Act Congress' petition to Parliament and the king—but the radicalness of his expression. No one had previously thought that the injustices of Great Britain towards the colonies had been so fundamentally damaging; Thomas Paine worded his document to seem as though it was sensible and ordinary (hence "common sense") to feel the need to rebel in such times. When it became the best-selling book in the American colonies, it showed that this sentiment was already common, but had not been voiced—Paine's passionate writing set the precedent for other Revolutionary writing. If the other revolutionaries were hesitant, scared of being the sole dissenting voice against Great Britain, *Common Sense's* direct antagonism of Great Britain paved the path and made the idea of revolution and complete separation acceptable in society.

The *Declaration of Independence* was a similar document in its content and tone, but it had the advantage of being a formal document that listed, with all of the colonial legislative power, the absolute independence and war that the Americans so wanted. While *Common Sense* may have put the colonists on a tipping point that considered revolution as a plausible alternative to the oppressed life they were living, the *Declaration of Independence* gave the official signal to begin fighting. Because *Common Sense* was already a hot commodity in the colonies, the *Declaration of Independence* does not deserve much credit in sparking revolutionary sentiment, but it certainly plays a role in solidifying it.

This was because there existed more continuity in the *Declaration of Independence*. It lists, specifically, the grievances that been plaguing the colonists; it provides a sound reasoning of the want of natural and civil rights; and it lists specific powers that they want as an independent country. While these ideas have been brewing in American society for decades and were not new ideas, this summarized the revolutionary wants and needs of the people, creating a solid claim for revolution.