

Excerpt from *Common Sense*, Thomas Paine 1776

“...I shall conclude these remarks, with the following timely and well intended hint. We ought to reflect that there are three different ways, by which an independency may hereafter be effected; and that one of those three, will one day or other, be the fate of America, viz. By the legal voice of the people in Congress; by a military power; or by a mob. It may not always happen that our soldiers are citizens, and the multitude a body of reasonable men; virtue, as I have already remarked, is not hereditary, neither is it perpetual. Should an independency be brought about by the first of those means, we have every opportunity and every encouragement before us, to form the noblest purest constitution on the face of the earth. We have it in our power to begin the world over again. A situation, similar to the present, has not happened since the days of Noah until now. The birthday of a new world is at hand, and a race of men, perhaps as numerous as all Europe contains, are to receive their portion of freedom from the event of a few months. The reflection is awful and in this point of view, how trifling, how ridiculous, do the little paltry cavilings, of a few weak or interested men appear, when weighed against the business of a world....

In short, independence is the only bond that can tie and keep us together. We shall then see our object, and our ears will be legally shut against the schemes of an intriguing, as well as a cruel enemy. We shall then too be on a proper footing to treat with Britain; for there is reason to conclude, that the pride of that court will be less hurt by treating with the American states for terms of peace, than with those she denominates "rebellious subjects," for terms of accommodation. It is our delaying it that encourages her to hope for conquest, and our backwardness tends only to prolong the war. As we have, without any good effect therefrom, withheld our trade to obtain a redress of our grievances, let us now try the alternative, by independently redressing them ourselves, and then offering to open the trade. The mercantile and reasonable part in England will be still with us; because, peace with trade, is preferable to war without it. And if this offer is not accepted, other courts may be applied to. On these grounds I rest the matter. And as no offer hath yet been made to refute the doctrine contained in the former editions of this pamphlet, it is a negative proof, that either the doctrine cannot be refuted, or, that the party in favor of it are too numerous to be opposed. Wherefore instead of gazing at each other with suspicious or doubtful curiosity, let each of us hold out to his neighbor the hearty hand of friendship, and unite in drawing a line, which, like an act of oblivion, shall bury in forgetfulness every former dissension. Let the names of Whig and Tory be extinct; and let none other be heard among us, than those of a good citizen, an open and resolute friend, and a virtuous supporter of the rights of mankind and of the free and independent states of America.

Questions

1. What 3 possible outcomes does Paine spell out?
2. Why might soldiers not be citizens (the answer to this question is not found in document)?
3. Which of the 3 options does Paine advocate?
4. Does Paine think their struggle is important? How can you tell?
5. When does he think the push for independence should begin?
6. What does he want to happen in terms of trade with Britain?
7. Explain the following statement: "...peace with trade, is preferable to war without it".
8. Does it appear that all colonists are in agreement? How can you tell?
9. Summarize the last sentence in your own words as much as possible.

Answers

1. Legal separation by Congress, using a military, or mob.
2. Armies were for hire, for example the Hessians.
3. Legally through Congress.
4. Yes he believes it is important, he claims it will affect all of humankind and compares it to biblical times.
5. Immediately
6. He thinks it ought to open back up
7. The need to survive economically supercedes the need to fight.
8. It is obvious there is some disagreement since they are “viewing each other suspiciously”.
9. Let the names of Whig and Tory be extinct; and let none other be heard among us, than those of a good citizen, an open and resolute friend, and a virtuous supporter of the rights of mankind and of the free and independent states of America: Never mind our past ties to Britain, it does not matter which political party you were a part of, let us move forward together as team to make a new nation where all are free and have rights.