

# A Royal Paine

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## ABSTRACT

From the early 17th century to 1763, America flourished as a colony within the British Empire. It reaped advantages that included access to British worldwide trade under mercantilism, exchanges with British intellectuals, and the protection of Britain's military. America was content under British rule because they could enjoy the benefits of salutary neglect under King George III's (1760-1820) mild monarchy. This provided the colony with opportunities that included local governance with minimal interference and economic freedom of their own trade institutions. These salutary benefits substantially contributed to the colony developing its own independent identity. In 1763, Britain raised taxation on America and increasingly centralized control over their colonies after the Seven Years' War drained Britain's reserves. American revolts against British taxation without representation escalated in 1773 with the Boston Tea Party. In 1774, Britain created the Intolerable Act to punish revolters in Boston by instating military troops across the region. At the peak of American anticolonialism in 1776, Thomas Paine published *Common Sense*, a revolutionary pamphlet that advocated for American independence. As *Common Sense* increasingly gained traction in America, British authors including James Chalmers, Rev. Charles Inglis, James Gillray, and Rusticus began publishing responses against *Common Sense*. This paper compares the American and the British perspectives to identify the key ideological differences that contributed to the American Revolution. The paper concludes that the American Revolution primarily emerged due to the ideologically different definitions of what constitutes good governance and representation.

## Introduction

From the early 17th century to 1763, America flourished as a colony within the British Empire. It reaped advantages that included access to British worldwide trade under mercantilism, exchanges with British intellectuals, and the protection of Britain's military. America was content under British rule because they could enjoy the benefits of salutary neglect under King George III's (1760-1820) mild monarchy. This provided the colony with opportunities that included local governance with minimal interference and economic freedom of their own trade institutions. These salutary benefits substantially contributed to the colony developing its own independent identity. In 1763, Britain raised taxation on America and increasingly centralized control over their colonies after the Seven Years' War drained Britain's reserves. American revolts against British taxation without representation escalated in 1773 with the Boston Tea Party. In 1774, Britain created the Intolerable Act to punish revolters in Boston by instating military troops across the region. At the peak of American anticolonialism in 1776, Thomas Paine published *Common Sense*, a revolutionary pamphlet that advocated for American independence. As *Common Sense* increasingly gained traction in America, British authors began publishing responses against *Common Sense* such as: *Plain Truth* by James Chalmers, *The Deceiver Unmasked* by Rev. Charles Inglis, *Tommy Paine, the Little American Taylor, taking the measure of the crown, for a new pair of Revolution* by James Gillray and *Remarks on a late pamphlet entitled Plain truth* by Rusticus. This paper compares the American and the British perspectives to identify the key ideological differences that contributed to the American Revolution. The paper concludes that the American Revolution primarily emerged due to the ideologically different definitions of what constitutes good governance and representation.

## On Representation and Liberty

Thomas Paine was an English-Born American sympathist who advocated for the American Revolution. As a working-class stay-maker who earned little wage, he was emphasized with the financial struggles Americans faced under British taxation without representation. Instead of writing using an academic style, Paine's *Common Sense* was written as a simple and accessible pamphlet that appealed to the American working class. Writing in the perspective of the American Revolutionaries, Paine advocated against Taxation without Representation by first establishing that there was no American representation in the British government. *Common Sense* argued that a colony must directly elect representatives with the same interests as those who elect them. Paine claimed that there was no American representation in the British government because the people of America did not directly elect a representative into the British Parliament.<sup>1</sup> A month after *Common Sense* was published, Rev. Charles Inglis, a British-born Loyalist, defended Britain in his pamphlet *The Deceiver Unmasked*. In his publication, Rev. Charles Inglis claimed that America was represented through the Parliament because the Parliament made decisions that benefited the British colonies.<sup>2</sup> Inglis fundamentally disagreed with Paine's interpretation of representation. Inglis believed that America could be represented in Parliament without the colonies directly electing representatives because the British believed that representation was about representatives acting in their people's best interests.

However, Paine believed that America wasn't represented in the empire, even by the British definition of representation, because Parliament did not always act in America's interests. *Common Sense* emerged after the Battle of Lexington and Concord, where British militia fought against the Patriots without a regard for American lives. Paine criticized Britain's disregard for America by comparing Britain to brutes and savages: "Even brutes do not devour their young, nor savages make war upon their families."<sup>3</sup> Paine argued that the Parliament was not incentivized to check the King's power in America because the Parliament viewed America's interests as secondary to that of the British Empire. Paine explained, "there are checks against [the King] in England, but he can easily pass bills in America."<sup>4</sup> From the British perspective, representation of the colonies was not about acting in the best interest of an individual colony but rather acting in the interests of the entire empire. Paine's concern could have never been resolved by the British parliament because Britain had too many colonies of commonwealth countries to prioritize any of them above the British Empire.<sup>5</sup>

Paine used the lack of American representation and liberty in the British Empire to advocate for American independence. James Chalmers, a British loyalist, claimed Britain had given America vast liberties. Paine argued that America had the right to leave the British Empire, as "The good people of this country [were] grievously oppressed by the combination [of the King and Parliament], they [had] an undoubted privilege to inquire into the pretensions of both, and equally to reject the usurpation of either."<sup>6</sup> To this argument, James Chalmers responded in *Plain Truth*: "Liberty, says the great Montefequieu, is a right of doing whatever the laws permit; and if a citizen could do what they forbid, he would no longer be possessed of liberty, because all his citizens will have the same power."<sup>7</sup> Chalmers saw the Intolerable Act as a necessary means to create order in Boston, like a parent punishing a child to teach them a lesson, not an oppressive law.

Paine and Chalmers also disagreed on the fundamental definition of liberty. While Paine believed liberty was fighting against tyrants, Chalmers believed liberty was the freedom of actions within the necessary bounds of society's

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<sup>1</sup> Paine, "Common Sense," 8.

<sup>2</sup> Inglis, "The Deceiver Unmasked," 24.

<sup>3</sup> Paine, "Common Sense," 29.

<sup>4</sup> Paine, "Common Sense," 40.

<sup>5</sup> Hitchens, "The Actuarial Radical: Common Sense about Thomas Paine," 51

<sup>6</sup> Paine, "Common Sense," 3.

<sup>7</sup> Chalmers, "Plain Truth," 23.

laws. While Chalmers saw the Intolerable Act and other British retaliation against American anti-colonialism as necessary for the continuation of the British Empire, Paine saw it as an act of oppression against the American people.

## On ‘Good Government’

The second key disagreement between the British and the American colonies was what a good government looks like. *Common Sense* contains strong anti-monarchy sentiment. Paine claimed that a monarchical system was inherently anti-God because Prophet Gideon claimed in the Hebrew and Christian Bible: “I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you, the lord shall rule over you.”<sup>8</sup> To Paine, God and the monarch were two separate entities. Thus, he believed that laws created by a monarchy did not represent God’s will. Chalmers’ response to Paine’s anti-monarchy sentiment claimed, “It [was] the province of gods to make laws for men.”<sup>9</sup> Chalmers misunderstood Paine’s argument because Chalmers believed Paine was arguing against laws. The law and the monarch are synonymous in Britain, but not to Paine. Paine argues against the monarch dictating laws, not to the existence of laws itself. The contrasting understandings of the relationship between the monarch and the law prevented Britain from clearly addressing Paine’s argument.

The British and Americans also disagreed on the extent to which a government should interfere in public and private affairs. Paine claimed, “Society in every state is a blessing, but government in its best state is but a necessary evil.”<sup>10</sup> To Paine, the true purpose of the government was to maintain security. Accustomed to King George III’s salutary neglect, Paine believed that the government should have a limited role aside from matters of security. Conversely, Rusticus believed that it was within the government’s prerogative to preserve safety and create prosperity in the nation rather than just maintain security. Rusticus wrote, “The purpose of political society, the preservation and prosperity of its members, in no quarter of the globe are these marks so certainly to be found, as in Great Britain and her dependencies.”<sup>11</sup> Rusticus believed that the King could interfere to any extent, as long as it helped their nation’s prosperous growth.

## On Monarchy and Democracy

Unlike Paine, Rusticus believed society is not a blessing in all states. Rusticus believed that society is only a blessing when a King, who has superior intelligence, rules over them. Rusticus explained in *Remarks on a late pamphlet entitled Plain truth* that the majority of citizens did not have the advanced mental capacity to rule over the nation; instead, “To investigate the conditions of society which may best answer the purpose of nations, would require the abilities of some superior intelligence.”<sup>12</sup> While Paine and Rusticus agreed that only men with superior intelligence should be allowed to make important government decisions, Paine argued that the King was not necessarily more intelligent. Paine advocated for distinctions based on intelligence and merit but opposed the British class distinctions under monarchical rule. Paine explains, “Mankind being originally equals in the order of creation, could only be destroyed by..the distinctions of rich and poor...the distinction of men into kings and subjects.”<sup>13</sup> Paine further criticized the British monarchy by arguing that the men in the House of Commons, who were meant to act as a counterbalance to the King, were “exclude[d] from the means of information, yet empower[ed]...to act in cases where the highest

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<sup>8</sup> Paine, “Common Sense,” 16.

<sup>9</sup> Chalmers, “Plain Truth,” 2.

<sup>10</sup> Paine, “Common Sense,” 5.

<sup>11</sup> Rusticus, “Remarks on a late pamphlet entitled Plain truth,” 10.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 14.

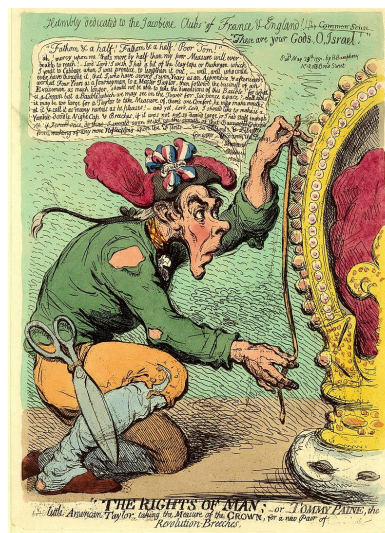
<sup>13</sup> Paine, “Common Sense,” 14.

judgment is required.”<sup>14</sup> Paine argued that a monarchy was not the ideal form of government because neither the King nor the House of Commons had the intellect to make decisions to benefit society. Conversely, Rusticus believed the best form of governance was through a monarchy because the monarchy system had been effective in England since the late 9th century.

Instead of a monarchy, Paine advocated for democracy. Paine believed that democracy was founded on the laws of nature because everyone was equally represented. The American Enlightenment claimed that a government based on the laws of nature was progress. Unlike Paine, Rusticus associated civilization and progress with having strong legal boundaries to protect the nation's interests. Rusticus claimed democracy was degenerating and Britain's tight control over American colonies was necessary: “Without such control, our constitution would degenerate into a democracy.”<sup>15</sup> Rusticus and Paine fundamentally disagreed on whether democracy was a form of progress or degeneration.

## On Economy

While Paine believed that America's economy would flourish more if they left the British empire, the British believed that Paine underestimated the benefits Britain offered America. Paine argued that America's close relationship with the British Empire prevented America from trading with other European countries. During the American Enlightenment, Britain was at odds with many countries, such as France, and thus, America had limited trade with Britain's adversaries. Paine noted that it was in, “the true interest of America to steer clear of European contentions, which she never can do while by her dependence on Britain.”<sup>16</sup> Conversely, the British believed that *Common Sense* was imperceptive because Paine only considered the good of the American colonies and missed the larger benefits the British Empire brought to America. James Gillray's satirical caricature print, *Tommy Paine, the little American taylor, taking the measure of the crown, for a new pair of Revolution*, depicted Paine kneeling, using measuring tape to measure a massive crown (Figure 1).<sup>17</sup>



<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>15</sup> Rusticus, “Remarks on a late pamphlet entitled Plain truth,” 2.

<sup>16</sup> Paine, “Common Sense,” 32.

<sup>17</sup> Gillray, “Tommy Paine, the little American taylor, taking the measure of the crown, for a new pair of Revolution,”

**Figure 1.**

Paine was dressed in ragged clothing. In the print, Paine said, “That’s more by half than my poor Measure will ever be able to reach!” The crown in Gillray’s print represents the English monarchy. He mocks Paine as inferior to the British Empire because Paine is depicted crouching in front of the crown. Gillray’s illustration of Paine’s measuring tape being insufficiently long to capture the crown’s measurements conveys Paine being short-sighted in his analysis of the monarchy’s importance. By diminishing Paine’s credibility and turning him into a satirical caricature, Britain conveys Paine’s advocacy for American independence as foolish. The American Revolution was inevitable because Britain never took the possibility of American independence seriously enough to address the colonies’ concerns about the British Empire.

## On Inevitability of British-American Conflict

The British believed that the American Revolution was not inevitable, while Paine argued that America’s conflict with Britain could not be resolved. Paine explained, “The one proposing force, the other friendship; but it hath so far happened that the first hath failed, and the second hath withdrew her influence. Reconciliation, which like an agreeable dream, hath passed away.”<sup>18</sup> Paine refuted that America should reconcile with Britain because Britain was America’s mother nation. Paine claimed that Britain is a tyrannical mother who would continue to oppress America unless the colonies advocated for independence. However, Britain believed that American independence could be prevented. In *Plain Truth*, James Chalmers addressed the pamphlet to John Dickinson, an American founding father who believed that the Declaration of Independence was too extreme. Chalmers’ pled with Dickenson to calm the American people because independence “would inevitably plunge our once preeminently envied country [the British Empire] into ruin, horror, and desolation.”<sup>19</sup> Chalmers was still hopeful that America and Britain could reconcile, or he would not have asked Dickinson to prevent the revolution.

## Conclusion

The American Revolution was ultimately inevitable because Britain and America’s ideologies on key issues were inherently contradictory. While Paine believed that representation was the act of electing a representative with your interests in mind, the British believed that representation was only about considering the interests of the British Empire in general, since the American colonists’ interests were already being indirectly represented in Parliament’s protection of the Empire. Paine believed that Britain did not and could not represent America because the colonies were Britain’s secondary priority. Paine believed that Americans did not have freedom under the British Empire, while Britain believed that restrictions on the colonies were necessary. Paine was strongly anti-monarchy and pro-democracy, while the British saw monarchy as the key to good governance and democracy as degeneracy. While James Chalmers may have believed that the American Revolution was preventable, Britain was ironically as short-sighted as Gillray’s depiction of Paine because the American Revolution resulted from gradual, fundamental, mutually exclusive differences between British and American ideology.

## Acknowledgments

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<sup>18</sup> Paine, “Common Sense,” 28.

<sup>19</sup> Chalmers, “Plain Truth,” 5.

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