

When I studied history in my AP class, I could not understand the indecision and hesitation of the American settlers on the eve of the Revolutionary War. How could they hesitate to protect their rights? The leaders of the Revolution were offering Americans freedom and they did not immediately snatch it up? But then I put myself in a colonist's shoes. If I were alive during the Revolution, I might not be as eager as I had previously thought. Nowadays, every aspect of our lives as Americans roots in one key truth: we are a free, democratic society. The colonists did not know that England would lose the war. England was all powerful, the motherland; its navy was a thing of legend and its army had protected the colonists from the French only a few years before. For centuries, the colonists (even before they were colonists) had pledged allegiance to a king. How, then, could they suddenly renounce their trusted leader? How could they say, "Forget all you have done for us Mother England; you are unfit to rule us colonies," when, less than a decade before, English and Americans had fought side by side in the French and Indian War? If I lived at that time, I would see friends turn on each other: colonists were suddenly grouped under two large headings: Tories and Revolutionaries. The Tories wanted the ungrateful rebels hanged; the Revolutionaries wanted the unjust tyrants persecuted.

What side do you pick? If you remain loyal to the king, your neighbors want you dead and if you join the revolutionaries, you become a traitor to one of the most powerful countries in the world. If the revolutionaries lost, you would surely hang. And who are these revolutionaries? You may have heard talk of a Continental Congress...you may even have read an excerpt of a revolutionary speech but it was in such extravagant language that you could not understand it... what do you really know? The revolutionaries say they are fighting for freedom but what will they do if freedom is actually obtained? What is freedom?

Then a pamphlet was published that changed everything. Thomas Paine was a failure. He was a radical writer whose business attempts had all failed. He was poor... he was common... but he had faith in the cause of the revolutionaries. He had faith in liberty. Thomas Paine published one of the most influential pamphlets in American History, Common Sense. Paine declared that it was only common sense for people to support the revolutionaries who were trying to protect the basic human rights of life, liberty, and prosperity from a government that had forgotten what it was formed for. He advocated for the cause of the revolutionaries with frank and simple arguments about protecting our rights as human beings. And because he spoke up, hundreds, maybe thousands flocked to the revolutionary cause.

But Thomas Paine's ideas were not new ones; many of the revolutionary leaders including Thomas Jefferson, Samuel Adams, Patrick Henry, and so on had long been advocating the same ideas. But what was so important about Common Sense was the style in which it was written. Thomas Paine wrote in common terms and made sure that his pamphlet could be understood by anyone from a poor farmer to the governor.

Because of this style, more people could understand exactly what the Revolutionary War was founded on and be more likely to support the colonists. Also, when charismatic speaker gives a speech, his voice can only carry so far; few will actually hear what that speaker had to say and most will only receive garbled and inaccurate summaries of what once was a rousing, patriotic speech. Common Sense, on the other hand, was published in pamphlet form, a cheap and easy way to get a point across to a large mass of people. No one need summarize or distort a pamphlet when it would be easier just to read it. Therefore, even after 100 people had read the pamphlet, the 101st person would still be hearing Thomas Paine's words, not a summary. All of these benefits of a pamphlet are reflected in the overall impact of Common Sense. Common Sense was the spark that lit the fire of revolution. It convinced the wavering colonists to strengthen their resolve and protect their rights. Who knows what would have happened without it? Would we still be an independent country today?

Common Sense is an example for us, American citizens. If this nobody... this failure... could publish an article that changed the face of history, then why can't we do the same. Thomas Paine was a normal, unnoticed citizen just like us before he published Common Sense but because he made his opinion known, he is one of the many heroes of the Revolutionary War. We have the opportunity to make our opinions known. Through our far reaching media, we, normal citizens, can express our ideas; many of us are already following Thomas Paine's example through blogs, the modern form of pamphlets. In blogs, normal, unnoticed citizens can publish their thoughts and who knows? Maybe someday a high school student will be writing a report about the impact of a blog or other publication that changed the face of the country today.

In conclusion, I urge you to follow the example of Thomas Paine and make your ideas known; only through communication will this country evolve into a better society. Thomas Paine did not sit around and just wish for support for the Revolution; he got up and did something about it. If you feel strongly about an issue, get up and do something about it and you may just change the world.