



AP U.S. Government and Politics

Arguments for Independence

Name:

Section:

Score: ____/5

Directions: The following arguments for American Independence were written by Thomas Paine in a pamphlet titled "Common Sense" that was published in 1776. The excerpts come from the third section titled "Thoughts on the present State of American Affairs."

Excerpt 1: "But the injuries and disadvantages which we sustain by that connection, are without number; and our duty to mankind at large, as well as to ourselves, instruct us to renounce the alliance: because, any submission to, or dependence on, Great Britain, tends directly to involve this Continent in European wars and quarrels, and set us at variance with nations who would otherwise seek our friendship, and against whom we have neither anger nor complaint. As Europe is our market for trade, we ought to form no partial connection with any part of it. It is the true interest of America to steer clear of European contentions, which she never can do, while, by her dependence on Britain, she is made the makeweight in the scale of British politics."

1. What is Paine saying in this paragraph about America's connection to Britain? How is it actually harmful to American interests?

Excerpt 2: "Every quiet method for peace hath been ineffectual. Our prayers have been rejected with disdain; and only tended to convince us, that nothing flatters vanity, or confirms obstinacy in Kings more than repeated petitioning — and nothing hath contributed more than that very measure to make the Kings of Europe absolute: Witness Denmark and Sweden. Wherefore, since nothing but blows will do, for God's sake, let us come to a final separation, and not leave the next generation to be cutting throats, under the violated unmeaning names of parent and child."

2. In this paragraph what is Paine saying about what has been done and what needs to change? What type of evidence does he use to support this?

Excerpt 3: "As Britain hath not manifested the least inclination towards a compromise, we may be assured that no terms can be obtained worthy the acceptance of the continent, or any ways equal to the expense of blood and treasure we have been already put to."

3. What does Paine say here about the possibility of dealing with the British and what does he propose to change it? Do you agree with his argument? Explain.

Excerpt 4: “A government of our own is our natural right: And when a man seriously reflects on the precariousness of human affairs, he will become convinced, that it is infinitely wiser and safer, to form a constitution of our own in a cool deliberate manner, while we have it in our power, than to trust such an interesting event to time and chance. If we omit it now, some, Massanello may hereafter arise, who laying hold of popular disquietudes, may collect together the desperate and discontented, and by assuming to themselves the powers of government, may sweep away the liberties of the continent like a deluge...”

4. Where does Paine argue that power is derived from and why is it safer?

Excerpt 5: “But the most powerful of all arguments, is, that nothing but independence, i. e. a continental form of government, can keep the peace of the continent and preserve it inviolate from civil wars. I dread the event of a reconciliation with Britain now, as it is more than probable, that it will followed by a revolt somewhere or other, the consequences of which may be far more fatal than all the malice of Britain.”

5. How does Paine use future considerations to argue his case for independence now?

Thought Question: Of all of Paine’s arguments which is the most compelling? You may also look to other resources to find more arguments.