

# COMMON SENSE II

*Capitalizing on the familiarity and influence of Thomas Paine's "Common Sense" pamphlets that provided American colonists with exposure to the conversation of great thinkers in the pre-Revolutionary period, this paper assumes the name COMMON SENSE II. Similarly, today's series of pamphlets strives to give a direct response to great political events and ideas of our time.*

July 2021

Democracy Issue

Vol. 16 Issue 6

## What Is a True Patriot?

By Brian Vroman

The Fourth of July saw the usual parties, fireworks, time at the lake, and good times with friends. But hopefully, we'll spend some time thinking about what the holiday is about—the celebration of our independence, or at least our Declaration of Independence—from British rule; we had a war to fight before the declaration became a reality. More broadly, we can say that the Fourth of July is about patriotism.

Just what is patriotism? Is it merely waving the flag and standing for the anthem? Or is there more to it?

Our country has never been perfect. Our past includes slavery, the mistreatment of Native Americans, denial of woman's suffrage, discrimination against our LGBTQ+ friends and neighbors and family members, and other shortcomings. But what makes America special is that

we have the capacity to get better, and we do. The true patriot is not the one who limits his love for country to waving the flag. The true patriot is someone who wants to help America improve.

In our personal lives, if we wish to improve, we must start by acknowledging our faults. Only when we do so can we begin to work on ourselves and become better people. Likewise, as a nation we need to admit historical shortcomings rather than sweep them under the rug. Frank admission and discussion of America's shortcomings is not about cutting our nation down or making it look bad. It is the patriotic thing to do.

Democracy is a constant process of renewal. To think we have "arrived"—that we are done—is a mistake. This leads to stagnation and calcification

at best and to the fascist myth of a Golden Age at worst. Assuming that there is nothing more to be achieved, that we have arrived at a finishing point, does harm to our country.

Think of a dynasty hockey team, one that has won many titles. It may be that such a team becomes complacent. If that happens, some up-and-coming hungry team is sure to surpass them. In this scenario, the good coach does not simply praise his team members.



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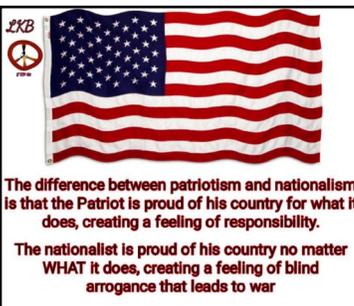
He must sting them out of their complacency. His job is to criticize them, make them strive harder, even shout at them if necessary. Only through such means can he keep them sharp and help maintain their winning edge.

The citizen is like a coach. Sometimes it is appropriate to heap praise on America. But at other times, it is necessary—like the coach of our hypothetical hockey team—to criticize the nation in a constructive way in order to help it improve. This is what a good citizen does. A good citizen is a true patriot. His criticism is not an act of hate but of profound love.



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So remember as you reflect on this Independence Day, there is more to love for country than waving the flag and setting off fireworks. If you really love this country, you should want to make it better, and this can only be done by admitting weaknesses so we can work on them and turn them into strengths.



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# This Is What Democracy Looks Like

By Vicki Andrews

Over the years I have spent many hours in the courtroom. I have been and am intrigued and impressed with the court process. In my career as a social worker specializing in child protection, I



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was often in family court to request a court order to remove children from abusive and/or neglectful parents or court orders to place a chemically addicted or mentally ill child into a treatment program so he or

she could return home and live a safe and productive life. I was also often in criminal court as a witness in child protection cases where a parent had been seriously abusive and needed to be incarcerated or removed from the home in order to protect the child. Since retiring 15 years ago, I have also been in court a number of times as a defendant. I have been arrested and gone to court for protesting our wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, primarily in Washington, D. C.

I have also had the honor of serving on a jury and truly felt the importance of listening intently to the proceedings and struggling to come to the right decision. I recently sat in on a court hearing in Grand Rapids



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for the trial of four friends who were charged with trespassing and destruction of Enbridge property; their intent was to protect the Earth. Theirs was an example of civil disobedience, which is breaking a law as a form of peaceful protest. I listened to the lawyers question the defendants, who explained what they did and why they did it. I watched the judge, who was extremely focused on everything being said. I watched the jury listening intently, aware of the responsibility they had to determine the verdict in the case. I again realized how important the courts are in our democratic system and what an important role the judge, the attorneys, the jury, and the defendants play in the courtroom.

In recent years I have felt discouraged many times watching news coverage of politicians ranting and raving at each other or giving speeches degrading

and dehumanizing the opposition. The lies that are told in the name of democracy have saddened me as have the ridiculous statements that have been made by right-wing fanatics about Q-Anon and Black Lives Matter. I have watched the followers of former President Trump appear to be under his spell,



<https://www.falcaria.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/conspiracy1.gif>

believing whatever he tells them, no matter how ridiculous, seeming to think he is their savior and can free them from the evil clutches of the radical left. I watched the January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection when crowds of Trump supporters stormed the Capitol, destroyed

property, caused injuries—even deaths. It has been a discouraging time. Like many others, I have come to truly fear for our democracy. I am reminded of the days the Nazis took over Germany and other countries where dictators have come into power almost overnight. I have been concerned about the possibility of a coup or some other type of violent action that would damage or destroy our democracy.

As I watched the trial in early July, a feeling of hope came over me as I realized—as I have in courtroom experiences in the past—that the courtroom is an excellent example of democracy. I have always been impressed with how the judge and the attorneys listen to the defendants carefully and ask appropriate questions. The jurors stay alert and focused on the proceedings and take their role in deciding guilt or innocence very seriously. They realize that their decision is of great importance and really care about making the right decision.



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This is an example of what democracy looks like!

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# Ratifying Democracy\*

## (Completing the George Floyd Trilogy)

By Bob Passi

The guilty sentence handed down in the George Floyd murder case is, on its face, a ratification of our basic democratic principles, often followed more in U.S. courts by exception than by rule, especially when it comes to racial groups and the poor.



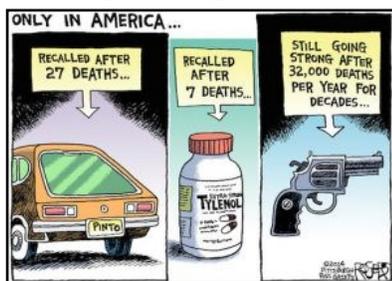
[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/5/5c/George\\_Floyd\\_protest\\_2020-05-28\\_Columbus%2C\\_Minnesota.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/5/5c/George_Floyd_protest_2020-05-28_Columbus%2C_Minnesota.jpg/300px-George_Floyd_protest_2020-05-28_Columbus%2C_Minnesota.jpg)

There was much to celebrate with the verdict, but everyone had a strange and eerie feeling that there was another shoe to fall. Was this an indication of a real shift in our dealings with blacks in our courts, or was this just an anomaly? The following days and weeks have not provided much clarity.

We hoped for the signs within the society of a recognition of the past imbalances of justice and some movement redirecting not only policing practices but also dealing with an entire range of social problems, now too often and inappropriately left to the police to handle.

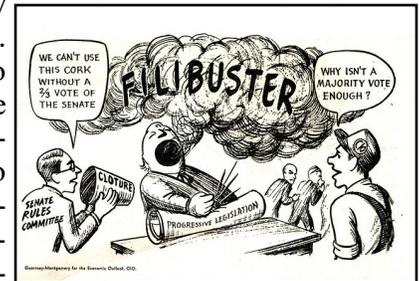
Unfortunately, we saw here in Minnesota and across the nation almost immediately a continuation of police killings of unarmed black citizens. One was left with the haunting concern that some police saw the verdict as an affront and were willing to double down on their present deadly tactics. We also watched as too many of the conservative side—egged on by the Republican Party, which was still too much the party of Trump—began to resist any meaningful change in policing or in national policy. It appeared to be the same-old-same-old obstructionist strategies of the past, slowing down any momentum for change, hoping that it would fade away and be satisfied with some mere window dressing instead of any real change.

This brings to mind the hopes for gun control in the face of continuing gun violence in this nation. Gun control gains momentum after each mass shooting with little to no meaningful response. We watch, again and again, as those hopes slowly die after battering themselves against the unbreachable walls of the conservatives in the U.S. Senate, who are always willing to use the filibuster as a last resort rather than allow any change.



<https://awesomelylulvvic.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/America-Gun-Control-Job-Rogers-300x212.jpg>

Too often we have seen the glimmer of hope for any real ratification of the principles of democracy, which should be the foundation of this nation, being beaten down by the entrenched power of conservative forces who want no change. Instead, we see the return, again and again, to the domination of an entrenched aristocracy of an economic elite. Those forces are too often much more concerned with economics as a way to retain their hegemony than to any concerns for social justice or democratic ideals.



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This is a part of a narrative that has been foisted upon the unwary citizens of this nation. It is based on an illusion of a world dominated by innately wise and wealthy, white, male, Christian elites, who have been chosen by the universe or by God to control the rest of the citizens. It is the illusion of White Christian Supremacy with the assumption of inferiority when dealing with other racial, religious, and even ethnic peoples. It is an illusion of a static world and society with no change possible or even necessary. As the illusion gets farther away from the observable reality of the world and of the life most people deal with, the justifications get more strained, and the tactics used to sustain those illusions get more extreme. To sustain that illusion they must disregard science and logic and reports of what is actually happening. They must limit and control education to allow only the indoctrination of that delusional narrative. They must control ideas by controlling the communication media of the nation. They must disregard all but the most fundamentalist Christian beliefs. They must justify their actions by economic standards and not by any human standards or by the standards of a democracy. They must rely on imposed solutions handed down from on high, allowing no deviation and with punishment being immediate and harsh.

After the ruling of the George Floyd murder case, we almost immediately saw some states outlaw educational attempts to understand the role of race within our society. We saw states restricting voting rights, especially those aimed at racial groups. We saw an easing of gun controls. And we saw a portion of society ready to move into an armed camp to defend the status quo at all costs.

But the struggle is not over yet. Social justice still has great momentum within our society and will not

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

be easily turned aside by the old solutions of a dying system. The inactivity and frequent obstructionism of factions within governments on the national—or even state—level will not stop this call for change. If it cannot be done with political support on that level, then it will continue to be practiced on the individual and community levels. The recent experiences of the pandemic have reminded everyone of how vital and effective individual and community activity can be in sustaining our society. The community is the real representative of the political will of the people, and this will not be stopped by the “political won’t” of the conservative elements of government.

The situation is very much like an old and dying, very powerful and entrenched system, willing in its death throes to bring everything down with it regardless of the consequences. Those within that system feel as if they are fighting some noble and preordained fight for what is good and true. They are sure there is no meaningful life outside the bubble of their illusion.

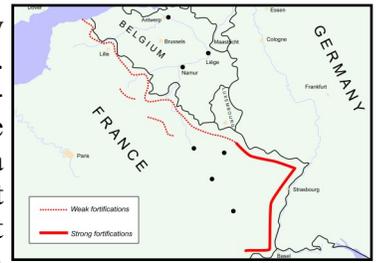
The way past this is to change direction and leave that old system behind with less and less support



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as their irrelevance becomes more and more apparent and their isolation grows. It is as if they have constructed an impenetrable castle in the hopes that it will stand for all time and protect their illusions of a world gone by. That castle is sustained by the support of those who toil outside the walls of the castle, whose purpose, they are told, is to support the

needs of the aristocracy within the castle walls. Until one day that aristocracy within the castle walls awakens to a world without sufficient support to sustain that castle. It will become



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clear that their castle has become as irrelevant as the Maginot Line was to the French when WWII began and the German invaders simply went around the fortifications. That castle will simply be an abandoned artifact of another era and will exist as a monument to past folly.

Regardless of what past illusions some in our society are trying frantically to sustain, the need for fairness, inclusivity, racial justice, and the other principles of a democracy will win out if we have the courage to continue on the path of justice and equality to ratify democracy in the face of an old and dying system.

The result of the George Floyd murder trial seems to have been to clarify the distinctions between the faction for the old system and a new faction with the courage as individuals and communities to create and ratify a democracy with its actions.

\*This completes my George Floyd Trilogy. We have just passed the first anniversary of the killing of George Floyd. This past year, watching events in Minneapolis from my home a bit farther north in Minnesota, I have written three articles about his killing, the political implications, and the national and international response. All three have been published in *Common Sense II* and online in [www.OpEdNews.com](http://www.OpEdNews.com). The first one, “Catalyst,” was published online on June 12, 2020, shortly after the initial event. The second, “The Soul of American Democracy,” was published online on April 10, 2021, as the trial was beginning. This, “Ratifying Democracy,” is the third of the trilogy about the results of the trial and about the aftermath of the George Floyd case. (You can access the previous *CSII* issues at our website, [www.Itascaprogressive.org](http://www.Itascaprogressive.org). Look for archived issues June 2020 and April 2021.)

## **CALENDAR OF EVENTS: GET INVOLVED AND GET IT DONE!**

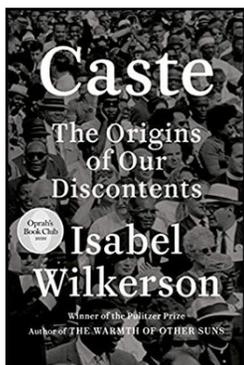
<b><u>Event</u></b>	<b><u>Date /Time</u></b>	<b><u>Location</u></b>
DFL Headquarters Open (326-6296)	Thursdays 2:00-5:00	DFL Headquarters
Itasca Progressive Caucus (259-4490)	3rd Tuesday 6:30	DFL Headquarters
DFL Central Committee Meets	4th Monday 6:30	DFL Headquarters
DFL Social Club & Lunch	1st Wednesday Noon	DFL Headquarters
DFL Pot Luck (Open to the Public)	3rd Wednesday 5:30	DFL Headquarters
Working Families Alliance	Suspended	Dutchroom
Earth Circle	Suspended	GR Public Library
Circles of Support	Suspended	811 NE 4th St. GR
Haven: A Place for All	Mondays 5:30 Zoom	218-328-4450
Deadline for <i>Common Sense II</i>	August 6, 2021	conray@arvig.net



## Our Die Is Caste

By Valerie Conner

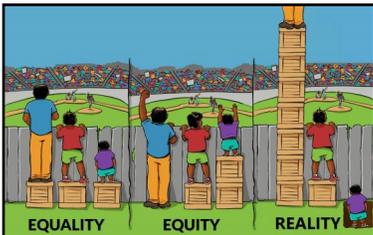
In *A Brave New World* Aldous Huxley created a society where everyone is decanted (all are test tube or bottled babies) into rigidly defined and static castes from which there is no escape. The upside is everyone is programmed to believe that his or her station in life is the best and most essential to society, so there is no class envy or desire for upward mobility. That is, of course, fiction. In *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* Isabel Wilkerson analyses the reality of social divisions in our society.



<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/F/F8/>

She first disputes that we are really a racist society. Rather, she says we are a caste based society. The difference is that while people are assumed stations in life by circumstance of birth, race is an artificial and relatively recent marker. Race is more of an identifier of one's caste or place in the social hierarchy. Wealth and position are more of a result of the privileges and opportunities or lack thereof than the caste itself. For example, regardless of a black person's education, wealth, or success, he or she will always upon initial encounter be of the lowest caste in America.

Throughout the book she examines and compares the caste systems of Nazi Germany, India, and the American South. In



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all three societies, where a person is on the hierarchy affects how that person acts and reacts to daily life. Socioeconomic status can be earned or lost, but caste is permanent. For example she cites the highly educated and accomplished Dalit—a member of the lowest, Untouchable, class of India—who has lived in the this country for years who bought shoes too big for him because he didn't feel worthy enough to bother the

shoe salesman for the right size. We're all aware of The Talk black parents have with their sons of driving age of how to react when pulled over by the police, a discussion white parents don't necessarily feel the need to have.

Laws and attitudes are beginning to change, but she was still able to cite a number of indignities she and others suffer and expect at any time on a day to day basis. Ironically, everyone is a victim of a caste system. She tells of an incident as a New York Times reporter having arrived for a scheduled interview with a Chicago business man. He didn't have time to speak with her because he was waiting for a New York Times reporter to interview him. He refused to accept that she, a black woman, was that reporter and missed the opportunity.

Huxley realized that every level of society is necessary for that society to run smoothly. Without leaders, we have chaos; without sewer workers, we have disease and stench. His solution was to have everyone programmed to believe his or her particular caste was the best. Instead of programming, we need to assure everyone has the dignity he or she deserves. While we might assume that the dominant caste can function on its own, it is perhaps most dependent on a caste system, because without it they have no status. That might be why it is so hard to move beyond this antiquated system.



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### \*\*\*Progressive Caucus Update\*\*\*

As with many organizations, the Itasca Progressive Caucus is considering how and when to resume past operations. After trying a couple in person meetings, we decided to forego them for the time being. We will continue with the monthly publication of *Common Sense II* and to support kindred organizations. We will have a presence at the Itasca County Fair next month. Stop by the DFL booth to chat.

In the meantime, thank you for your support, and if you have issues to discuss, send them to Val at [conray@arvig.net](mailto:conray@arvig.net). Together we can get through this and make this a better world.

## First They Came

(With a Nod to Pastor Martin Niemöller)

By Valerie Kozlovsky

First they came for the manufacturing jobs,

But I was a white collar worker, so I didn't say anything.

I didn't care about them because I could buy more cheap, foreign-made stuff.

Then they came for the welfare recipients, but I wasn't on welfare.

I didn't believe in government handouts.

Besides they were immoral, and people got what they deserved.

Then they came for the immigrants, but I wasn't Hispanic, Black, or Islamic,

So I said nothing.

Besides they're all terrorists, or criminals, or hate America and what it stands for.

Then they came for the government employees and teachers,

But I wasn't one of those over-paid, lazy bureaucrats, so I supported Governor Walker.

Besides my taxes were too high.

Then they sent my white-collar job to India,

But there was no one left to speak for me.

There were no unions, no collective bargaining, no unemployment insurance, no Badger care, no workers compensation, no minimum wage laws, no retraining programs or supported schools to help me.

Everyone was busy working two part-time jobs to care about me.

Then we all wondered what had happened to the economy and good jobs we used to have—Everyone except the rich Republicans in their gated communities.

## Freedom and Responsibility

By Valerie Conner

It's becoming more and more obvious that this nation needs a refresher course on the social contract. Brian explained what democracy is all about. Freedom and democracy are not the same thing.

Pure democracy involves all citizens participating in every decision. That's quite time consuming and a drag on the economy when people have no time for jobs. So we have a representative democracy wherein we collectively agree to select people to represent our interests for us. Because we have more than one idea and representative preference, we agree to abide by the majority decision. That means if your guy loses, you try harder next time. You don't undermine the process and pout about your loss for the term.

Pure freedom means there are no restraints. First of all, that strains the laws of physics. Secondly, it ignores the process of cause and effect. Short term freedom can undermine long term freedom. In addition, when more than one person is involved as in a society no matter how sparsely populated, one person's absolute freedom can easily run up against another person's absolute freedom.

Enter the social contract. Members of society expressly or tacitly agree to respect each other's rights in order to have their rights respected. The insurgents on January 6<sup>th</sup> expressly disagreed to the social contract by running roughshod over the Capitol and the government itself. They maintained that they had a right to their version of governmental legitimacy despite the reality of the election results. In clashing with the rights of the rest of us, they threatened and almost succeeded in destroying centuries of our democratic republic and the nation itself.

With freedom comes responsibility. Without responsibility, no one has true freedom.

Rights of Citizenship	Responsibilities of Citizenship
govt. will treat you equally to other citizens	support and defend the <i>Constitution</i>
govt. will protect your rights of expressing yourself as long as you do not put others in danger	inform yourself on issues affecting your community, your state, and your nation
govt. will protect your right to worship as you wish as long as you do not put others in danger	participate in the democratic processes in place in the U.S. constitutional republic
govt. will protect your rights if you are accused of a crime—providing a fair and equitable judicial process	respect and obey local, state and national laws
govt. will protect your right to vote for individuals to represent you in the government	respect the rights, opinions, and beliefs of others in your community, your state, and your nation
you have the right to run for elected office	participate at the local level
you have the right to apply for a job that requires U.S. citizenship	pay your taxes on time and according to local, state, and federal rules
govt. will protect your freedom to live your life and maintain your liberty and individualism as long as you do not put others in danger	serve on petit or grand juries if called upon
govt. will protect your right to pursue what makes you happy as long as your actions do not infringe on the rights of others	defend your country if the need arises
<small>Revised from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "Citizenship Rights &amp; Responsibilities"</small>	<small><a href="https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship/learners/citizenship-rights-and-responsibilities">https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship/learners/citizenship-rights-and-responsibilities</a></small>



An LGBTQIA+ Community Group

Invites the Grand Rapids area community to save the date for our

PRIDE



PICNIC

Saturday, July 24  
Central School  
Grounds  
11am to 2pm

Lunch Provided!

Everyone is welcome!

Games, bouncy house  
and face painting for kids.

See you on the 24th!