
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.

August 2021 Our Future/Our Choice Issue Vol. 16 Issue 7

I Pledge Allegiance to the Flag

By Michaela Raymond



This is Dennis, my son-in-law. This is his flag—our flag.

Last month he was sworn in as a citizen of the U.S. It was a complicated and lengthy process that he endured and one that each person seeking citizenship knows can be a roller coaster of emotions. One’s background, competence, skills, and criminal record are

scrutinized. A series of interviews are conducted, and sometimes the immigrant must travel a considerable distance for parts of the process. The applicant must demonstrate knowledge of United States history and government. (This is an oral, not a multiple choice, test; the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation found of the general American population only 36% could pass that test when it was in the multiple choice format.) The point is that not many scammers can sneak in. Here is the oath of allegiance taken by Dennis (and millions of other naturalized Americans):

I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law; and that I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God.

The events of January 6th came to mind as I was sharing the news of Dennis’s citizenship. How many of the insurrectionists went through this process? Correct me if I’m wrong, NONE. Obviously, to them the flag means something entirely different from what it means to Dennis and most of us.



They see the flag as a weapon to be used against other Americans. They understand “freedom” to mean license to do whatever they want to whomever they want just because they want. How irresponsible and childish!

We see the flag as our forefathers did—as a quilt sewn from many nations to comfort and shield us from tyranny. The thread that binds the parts together is our belief in democracy and our acceptance of the responsibility we owe our country and each other. This is the flag that has from the beginning been a beacon to the oppressed, the “huddled masses,” and a symbol



of hope and opportunity. Despite our current woes, people from all over the world still see it as such. My flag is a shield—not a weapon—a symbol of pride and democracy—not an implement of destruction and intimidation. Which is your flag?

Choosing Survival

By Bob Passi

Here it is, folks! The moment we tried so hard to avoid, the choice between survival and subservience. It is truly about this ultimate existential choice: Do we take charge of our future and chart a path for survival, or do we simply fail the courage test and meekly follow leadership that not only has a historical record of disaster, but also assures us of a bleak and hopeless future in service to them, leaving the hope of human survival within the web of life, whimpering in defeat, and dying?

The dominant narrative for the last several millennia has been that the ordinary people are totally incapable of surviving without a strong leader or some elite group leading them. This narrative always portrayed the ordinary people as mere human resources to be used as those leaders saw fit. They were always the most expendable: those who should always be the first to make the necessary sacrifices, when that sacrifice was dying.

Those in leadership positions always found ways to justify their position:

- ◆ It was what God or the gods wanted.
- ◆ It was that they had superior military skills.
- ◆ It was that they were the most economically successful.
- ◆ It was that they were the best educated.
- ◆ It was that they owned the most land.
- ◆ It was that they had always been in charge.

They also devised complex ideologies, some within religions, to justify their visions.

The biggest challenge to that kind of leadership was that those without power realized there was some basic unfairness to that kind of top-down structure and began to demand a share of that power. The result has been that those in power created hierarchies to begin to share some of that power with some other groups who were claiming a right to some degree of that power. All of this was normalized and structured with the appropriate laws and enforced by police and armies and courts and prisons.

But as the ordinary people began use their ordinary intelligence



and common sense, it became clear that they knew how to live and survive and that they had been doing just fine

in their daily lives—often in spite of the restrictions imposed on them from above. The ordinary people saw the basic unfairness of such systems and began to understand the power that their numbers gave them. They began to create what would later become the basis of democracy. They knew that, as a group, they could make wise decisions about their future, a future that would treat people as equals.

Over the last several centuries such democratizing ideas flared up from time to time and were often put down harshly by those who wanted to maintain the status quo. Those in power passed new laws to control such behavior; they used violence and repression; they developed elaborate hierarchies and ideologies; they put forward grand illusions of what their leadership would provide for the ordinary folks.



https://hk.boell.org/sites/default/files/styles/social_media/public/2021-04/

In spite of all that work that they expended to keep the power, the democratic impulses could not be exterminated from the hearts of the people.

Ultimately, the unsustainability of such power structures became clear. People saw the excesses resulting from hierarchies. People saw the flaws in the self-serving ideologies and even the religious hierarchies.

People realized that working together and forming communities was not only a more effective way to solve problems but was also much more satisfying and actually provided a possible path to a survivable future. They saw that cooperation was ultimately more effective than competition. They saw that working in harmony with the planet was the only way to provide a sustainable future.

So now, here we are faced with immediate and undeniable existential challenges. We have a planet that is adjusting to years of extreme devastation imposed upon it by faulty leadership: leadership that put power, domination, and wealth above the health of the planet or its people. The planet is responding to our years of abuse with radical climate changes that threaten our ability to survive in any kind of humanly recognizable future. We have a global pandemic that is killing millions of people and is far from contained, much less cured.

All of the wealth of that cohort of leadership, all of their attempts at domination, all of their power, all of their police and armies and surveillance services, all of their laws and courts, all of their failed narratives and ideologies, all of their empty illusions will not

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change current realities.

Only human cooperation and unified efforts can begin to tackle such immense challenges. Only a system that values and supports democracy can possibly provide a cooperative structure which will allow that to happen. We must value and rely on each other to have any hope of mutual survival.

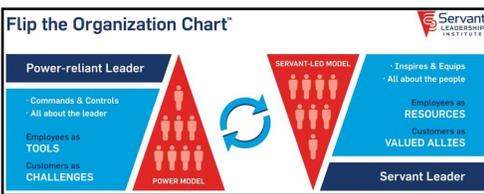
To that end we must build community, regardless of what governments seem to tell us. We must ignore any self-serving leadership that takes us further down that old road to destruction. We must come together as a community of interdependent and cooperative human beings and provide the leadership necessary to confront our urgent existential issues. We cannot wait for such a shift to be sanctioned by our present governments. We must act now, with or without them. If those governments are to survive, those governments will need to learn, once again, to follow our lead.

We must take the responsibilities of leadership on ourselves as caring citizens if we have any hope for a human race which can combat this pandemic and begin to make the human choices necessary to rescue our planet and restore a sustainable balance within the web of life. We must recreate our world.

We must choose survival as a human community.

We must choose survival as a human community.

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Move Over, Lemmings

By Vicki Andrews

We are living in a divided country. The division is not so much physical but rather in basic beliefs, ideologies, hopes, and fears, etc. It has divided families, friendships, and many other facets of our lives.



<https://transform-italia.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/america->

We have many people with strong conservative views and many who are very liberal. Few of these people change their minds easily; most associate with others who believe as they do, which strengthens their stand and makes it less likely they will change their minds. Many avoid conversation with people with different views; the conversations that do happen often turn into arguments. The two sides listen to different news sources and follow different leaders. Many get their news only from like-minded friends, family members, and social media. A 40 year old woman told me recently that she gets all her news from Facebook.

The most concerning examples of this divide are situations that are truly life-threatening. One is the climate crisis and the other is the COVID pandemic. First, the climate: many people are very concerned about the damage we are doing to our planet, and others think it's an overreaction. This month the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued a dire warning about our future. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres stated, "Greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel burning



<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/>

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS: GET INVOLVED AND GET IT DONE!

Event	Date /Time	Location
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

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and deforestation are choking our planet and putting billions of people at immediate risk. This report must sound a death knell for coal and fossil fuels, before they destroy our planet.” How can anyone read this without demanding immediate action? Well, they can and do. According to *Inside Climate News*, conservative groups at the forefront of global warming skepticism are “doubling down on trying to discredit this report by the IPCC. They’ve been cranking out a stream of op-eds, blogs, and reports to sow doubt in the public mind before its publication.” Conservative writer Marc Morano, author of *Green Fraud*, states that the goal of the “political” UN report on climate change is to scare everyone, to convince them of the need for unnecessary “climate action.” The Heartland Institute re-



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leased a competing report, the NIPCC (the N stands for Non-governmental) a week earlier that criticizes the IPCC as political and “expressing a high level of alarmism.” The NIPCC report finds human impact on climate “is very small...likely so small as to be invisible against a background of natural variability and that man-made climate change is not a crisis.” Talk about totally opposing views!

Another example is the divide about the coronavirus vaccine. Is the whole thing a hoax, designed to get some dastardly substance into our bodies which will make us infertile, more malleable, and able to be tracked by the government or even turn us into zombies? Or is it a life-saving drug, one which can significantly slow down the illness and death caused by COVID and eventually defeat it? There is clear medical evidence that the answer to ending the pandemic and getting back to normal is to reach herd immunity, which will happen when a sizable majority of the population—at least 70%—has been vaccinated or has become immune through contracting the disease. Unfortunately, it has become such a contentious issue that the number of people who refuse vaccination and the number of people in the United States who have been vaccinated is fairly even, so we have not reached herd immunity and may never.

The United States was built on the idea of freedom for all. We are (theoretically) free to make our own choices about how to live; thus—to our detri-

ment in these cases—we have become a nation where many put individual freedom above the good of society. This has reached a peak in the present time as we follow different leaders, listen to different news sources, and march to different drummers. Unfortunately, in situations that have life and death consequences for many like the climate crisis and the COVID pandemic, those drummers are leading us in totally different directions which may lead us right off a cliff. Move over, Lemmings!

Becoming Educated

By Brian Vroman

I have always told my students that the most important part of becoming an educated person is learning to think for yourself. But what that means is more difficult to unpack than might be expected.

To be an independent, critical thinker, it is necessary to avoid logical fallacies. One fallacy is known as “appeal to authority.” It is important to understand what this means and what it does not mean.

Nothing is true just because someone says so. Even



<https://presbooks.bccampus.ca/whywriterguide/wp-content/uploads/>

if someone is an expert in a particular field, the fact that he says something is true does not make it true. His claim is only true if it is based on the best interpretation of the best available evidence. Even then it is only provisionally true, because outside

of very limited fields such as mathematics it is always theoretically possible that new and better evidence will emerge that will warrant a new interpretation.

Another point is that evidence is not oracular. In other words, it is not only accessible to a special few, to a closed society of priests or gurus, for example. In principle, it must be possible for any rational person to examine the evidence and reach the same conclusion. This is in principle; in practice, it might take years to come to an adequate understanding of evidence in certain fields. It is not reasonable to expect, for example, to understand the evidence for and against string theory without years of study. But in principle, people with the time and ability could come to an understanding of this evidence.

So how, then, as independent, critical thinkers, do we deal with expert opinion? It depends.

For example, if I go to a doctor and she tells me I

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need surgery but I am not in immediate danger, I might get a second opinion. However, if I am in a car accident and the ER team tells me I need immediate surgery or I will die, it is probably not a good time to ask for a second opinion.



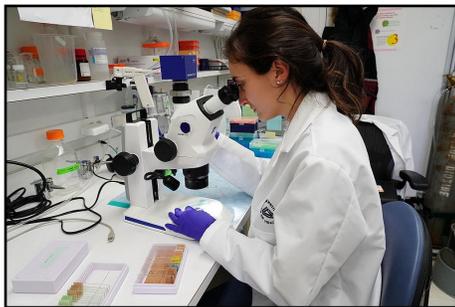
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It is also important to know who is an expert and who is not. If I am having heart trouble, I don't call the plumber. But if the water isn't running in my house, a plumber is exactly whom I need. Being an expert in one field does not make you an expert in another field.

So what do we do with important issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic?

Some people say it's a hoax. Others say it is very real and very dangerous. Whom should we believe?

Some people say we should do our own research. Let's talk about that for a moment. There is some research we can do on our own and some we cannot. I have a master's degree in history. I had formal,



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graduate level classes on historical research. On the other hand, I have not done serious research of the kind that working historians do in quite some time. So

I would say I am moderately qualified, but there are many who are more qualified than I. But I am absolutely unqualified to do cutting edge cancer research. That kind of research is difficult and requires great precision as well as certain infrastructure. Not only am I unqualified, it is impossible for me to even ATTEMPT serious, cutting edge cancer research. How would I?

This doesn't mean that when my mother was diagnosed with fatal brain cancer, I didn't read about the particular type of cancer and discuss various options. But this was not "doing my own research." This was reading about research that others had done and discussing it with family members and medical professionals so we could help my mother make the best possible decision for her.

Likewise, when it comes to something like COVID-19 (or climate change or any number of other topics), I am not in position to do my own research. The best I can do is to read about—and yes, rely on—the research of others. This is NOT committing the appeal to authority fallacy. That fallacy is only committed when we assume something is true JUST BECAUSE someone who is perceived to be an authority said it. It is always logically possible for virtually any claim (synthetic claims, to use some philosophical jargon) to be wrong. It is also true that the CDC and their colleagues in other countries employ processes such as peer review in keeping with the best scientific practices.

So, when I hear the CDC (or NOAA or the UNIPCC when it comes to climate change) make a



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claim about COVID-19, and then I hear someone claiming that what the CDC says is false, how should I react?

Just as something is not automatically true because a perceived authority says it, something is not automatically false because a person has a bias. However, because I am not in position to do my own research, it is reasonable to ask if the dissident who is challenging the CDC has a bias, an agenda, or is working for a paymaster who has a bias or agenda. If he does, that is cause for suspicion. Peer review doesn't mean a few of your buddies. Actual scientists look for ways to disprove claims. If none are found, the claim is provisionally accepted.



<http://s3.amazonaws.com/1bapps/accounts/34374/images/>

Because of the way scientific organizations operate, because of their strong vetting and error correcting processes, if we are laymen, we should have a strong propensity to believe them. We should demand very, very high evidentiary standards if we are going to believe a lone voice over a scientific organization conducting peer reviewed research—especially if it is potentially a matter of life and death.

Rage, Rage, Against the Dying of the Light

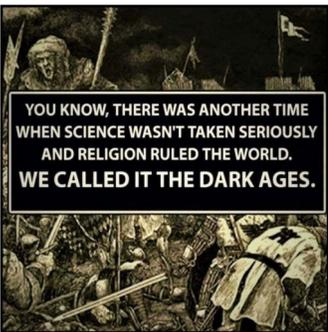
By Valerie Conner

The march of history does not go in a straight upward line. Certainly, we've made scientific, medical, and maybe even humane progress since the ancient world.

Still, we haven't really figured out how the pyramids were built other than by expendable slave labor. Contrast the cruelty in the Old Testament with the kinder New Testament. The little written evidence we have from ancient times gives us a glimpse of their intellectual sophistication. But wars, fires, and general intellectual atrophy set human progress back for centuries.

Humanity did not arrive on this Earth with an owner's manual. Everything we know we learned by observation, experimentation, and speculation. When the things we'd learned were lost, we had to observe, experiment, and speculate about all over again.

The Western world recognizes the Fall of Rome during the 5th Century CE as ushering in the Dark Ages in Europe. There were a number of factors leading to the Fall: poor leadership, political rivalry,



<https://siyach.org/sites/default/files/images/TheDarkAgesMeme.jpeg>

climate change, epidemics, an emerging new religion, and "the Barbarians at the gates." Sound familiar? Christianity played an unsavory part in keeping learning from the masses. While some of the clergy were literate and even somewhat educated, they had no interest in allowing the masses

to have the tools to question them. To them as George Orwell wrote, "Ignorance Is Strength." As literacy waned, humanity regressed. We lost medical knowledge, scientific understanding, and lib-

eral treatment of the general populace, especially of women.

Slowly, the Dark Ages morphed into the Late Middle Ages that gave way to the Renaissance. It took 1,000 years—a millennium—for humanity to



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begin to emerge into what we egotistically call the modern world. It's taken us a good 500 hundred years to go from there to

where we are today, or at least to where we were a few years ago.

Look around. We have external enemies in the Middle East—always the Middle East. We have internal enemies seeking to undermine our government and storming the Capitol.

We have elected "leaders" who support the insurrectionists. Thank you, Rep. Stauber. We have neighbors who disrupt school board meetings. We have an intolerant religion growing in popularity as well as growing religious intolerance.



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We have people who go beyond denying the real threat of climate change to obstructing rational mitigation. Thank you, fossil fuel industry.



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We have people who increase and prolong the effects of the pandemic by not only refusing to get vaccinated and mask themselves but also inhibit others from doing so. Thank you, Gov. DeSantis and Gov. Abbot. We have people who spread misinformation about the COVID vaccine so the gullible refuse to take a proven, safe, scientifically developed vaccine in favor of an off-the-wall horse deworming medication because they're "afraid of the vaccine."

As our culture coarsens, as people came to realize what Trump has known his whole life that social norms can be flouted for short term personal satisfactions, we watch with dismay and anger at our world as we have come to expect it disintegrate before our eyes. The coming of a New Dark Age is upon us. It is time to take Dylan Thomas' advice he gave his dying father, "Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

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Editor: Valerie Conner conray@arvig.net

ITASCA PROGRESSIVE CAUCUS
Chair: Valerie Conner conray@arvig.net

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Frankly, We Did Win This Election: A Review

By James Raymond

It used to be that for many Americans the mental images of a bombastic tyrant, who substituted sage wisdom doled out by experienced staff for petty narcissism and self-aggrandizing projects of little public value, came from historical recounts of backwater, tin pot dictatorships and banana republics formed out of colonial exodus. At least it was until Donald Trump assumed the American Presidency in early 2017. By now you are likely aware of the widely publicized misgivings of the authoritarian wannabe. And while his single term in the Oval Office has come to a close, the fallout of Trump's ego-affirming and politically damaging actions (and inactions) of recent years continue to wreak havoc on a polarized and weary American populace.

Recently, I finished Michael Bender's *Frankly, We Did Win This Election: The Inside Story of How Trump Lost*, which was released on July 13, 2021, by Twelve Books. While I am a sucker for even a



modest insider account of political corruption, this book provided a thrill similar to that of watching a blaze-engulfed locomotive race speeding off a cliff. Bender's collection of firsthand and corroborated accounts from within the previous administration takes the frustration caused from what most Americans know about Trump's shortcomings, adds an element of dire exasperation, and begs the question of whether or not the entire four years was really just a horrible fever dream. Whether trust in granting such access and inclusion in the divulging of blatantly awful policy decisions by administration officials was due to Bender's employment by the conservative-friendly *Wall Street Journal* or simply a lack of good judgment by those who happened to be speaking in his presence at the time (or a combination thereof), it leads the reader to wonder about proposals and discussions not chronicled by the author. Even so, many of the in-depth anec-

dotes and gasp-inducing accounts included in the book would have made Richard Nixon pause with concern.

Throughout the book, Bender also winds the tales of multiple ordinary Americans—known as the “Front Row Joes due to their regular attendance at Trump’s rallies—who were unfortunate enough to fall under the MAGA spell of promises of an economically reindustrialized and politically revamped United States under Trump’s



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guise. Readers will find that the Joes described by Bender are likely quite similar to family members or neighbors they have, who, when presented with basic facts and evidence, would rather trust the conspiracy-laden and illogical words of their dear leader than acknowledge reality. Even though some Joes are shown to begin questioning the almighty prowess of

Trump’s leadership, their pride still leads them to the ballot box at his command. Thankfully, we can now celebrate that even such absolute



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cult-like blindness was not enough to garner a second term. Unfortunately, as the book reveals, many of them simply do not realize that they themselves are political and economic casualties of a failed nascent dictatorship.

A strongly recommended read, Bender's book is among a handful of insider portraits released in recent months. Yasmeen Abutaleb and Damian Paletta's *Nightmare Scenario* focuses mostly on the administration's fumbling of the coronavirus pandemic, while *I Alone Can Fix It* by Carol Leonnig and Philip Rucker showcases Trump's tyrannical tendencies, exacerbated during and after his failed reelection bid. All are solid in their providing of facts and evidence, which will likely embolden those who already understand the danger that Trump and his allies pose to our society and will hopefully convert some of the Front Row Joes who got caught up in the orange-hued lime-light. With numerous independent and verified recounts of the almost unquantifiable amount of antidemocratic scheming, unconstitutional directives, and explosively divisive rhetoric during his tenure, Trump will almost certainly go down as the worst leader in American history. Through his efforts with this book, Michael C. Bender will help to bestow that title.