

Thomas Paine on the Dangers of Elitism

On January 10, 1776, Thomas Paine published a little pamphlet known as [*Common Sense*](#). The pamphlet would become one of the many sparks lighting the fire for the American Revolution.

Thomas Paine made any number of important and influential comments in his little book including the following:

“Men who look upon themselves born to reign, and others to obey, soon grow insolent; selected from the rest of mankind their minds are early poisoned by importance; and the world they act in differs so materially from the world at large, that they have but little opportunity of knowing its true interests, and when they succeed to the government are frequently the most ignorant and unfit of any throughout the dominions.”

Although Paine wrote this in reference to hereditary rulers (i.e. King George), I couldn't help but think how many of America's politicians now fit this same description. Like hereditary rulers, their repeated selection for office leads them to believe they are something “important.” Like hereditary rulers, they are secluded from what is really going on in the hearts, minds, and lives of those they are supposed to be serving. And like hereditary rulers, that seclusion and disconnect hinders them from truly considering the interests of their constituents. In short, they operate in a bubble.

Scholar Charles Murray [recently wrote](#) about this “bubble” in *PBS Newshour*, noting that those who live in higher income zip codes and are college-educated often have thicker ones, insulating them from a knowledge of how the rest of America really lives. As Murray explains, “almost all of those who run the nation's culture, economy and politics” are individuals

who live at the very top in a highly padded bubble.

Considering these insights, perhaps the dumbfounded shock which members of the media, elite, and ruling class greeted the 2016 election results isn't all that surprising.

One can only wonder what Thomas Paine would say about such a development.

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