



Common Sense, The Need for Newspapers and The Age of the Internet.

"I view things as they are, without regard to place or person; my country is the world, and my religion is to do good. Achieving online Ad Parity is the road to our independence and autonomy as well as the tool by which we can advance the cause of our newspapers to preserve true freedom of speech and press, the bedrock of democracy."

By Thomas Paine

[Common Sense](#)

1776

Dear [Mr. Murdoch](#), other esteemed members of the [press](#), [media](#), and Illustrious Members of the United States [Senate](#), [House](#) and [Administration](#):

Recall the last time I expressed myself was in the year of 1776 when I wrote even then about the plain truth and common sense and how it pertained to our great nation. Perhaps the sentiments expressed herein are not fashionable enough to procure them favor among the bearers of contemporary, technological wisdom with respect to the traditional media and newspapers, but a habit of not thinking a thing wrong, gives it a superficial appearance of being right, and raises at first a formidable outcry in defense of custom, even if that custom is grounded in the most recent dawn of the [Internet Age](#). Unfortunately, custom springs from habit and habit too often makes more converts than reason. Let us examine closely, the plight of that cornerstone of [Democracy](#), the American Newspaper as well as Broadcasting.

The cause of America's newspapers and broadcasting is in great measure, the cause of all Democracy. Many circumstances regarding traditional media have, and will arise, which are not local, but universal, and through which the principles of all believers of Democracy are affected. Some [pundits](#) have so confounded the *Internet* and *Democracy* by twisting the meaning of

“Information Freedom”, as to leave little or no distinction between them; whereas they are not only different, but have different origins and purposes. The Internet is produced by innovation which springs forth from our wants, while Democracy is the child of our wickedness; the former promotes our happiness positively by sharing information and uniting our affections, the latter negatively by restraining our vices through balance, diversity, and representation. The Internet encourages intercourse, democratic government creates distinctions and compromise. The Internet has indeed increased access by the masses to information but that access has not necessarily led to a greater proliferation of Democracy.

One of the essential qualities of Democracy is [freedom of speech or expression](#), and by extension a [free and independent press](#), and this great bulwark of liberty cannot be restricted to the extent that the marvelous diversity of viewpoints becomes threatened. Of course, these views must be responsible, truthful and transparent and their proponents willing to take ownership and not hide behind the cloak of anonymity which is all too often the case with the Internet. The truth is that there is something quite un-democratic about anonymous opinions, reporting, campaign donations and communication, regardless of the rhetoric thrown about the Internet being a liberating force, unless the citizens of a nation are so *violently* repressed as to leave no other choice. Now then, in order to participate in the Democratic process and to make truly informed decisions, our citizens must have access to this type, quality and diversity of information, and that access has traditionally come from our nation’s great newspapers and broadcasters that produced responsible, independent, transparent and pluralistic journalism. But I fear there is a grave darkness that has begun to cast the shadow of Information tyranny across the light of Democracy, and will soon overrun and oppress much that we have come to cherish in our nation.

If [Congress shall make no law](#) abridging the freedom of speech or press, then will Congress standby and watch that essential Freedom become hostage to the tyranny of Information rearing forth from an Internet Oligarchy working in [concert](#)? Indeed, will the newspapers stand by and witness their own undoing because they are unable or unwilling to adapt to a rapidly evolving Internet paradigm? The tragedy is that our Nation’s newspapers produce the raw content of *Information Freedom* that is so very fundamental to Democracy. Yet they find themselves in a dependent relationship with the Internet Oligarchy, forced into an unfair, yet necessary revenue sharing relationship that they don’t fully comprehend. Their raw content or news is taken from them, and they are unable to fully monetize its value. They are losing subscribers, advertisers and print advertising revenue and are unable to make it up with the paltry, ambiguous revenue share they receive for their online content from the Interactive giants. Even more disturbing is the harsh reality that [independent journalism](#) is falling victim to diminishing ad revenues and responsible reporting and quality information is no longer independent and diverse. Make no mistake, Democracy is threatened.

There is something exceedingly ridiculous about a virtual island or [Internet Oligarchy](#) of websites consisting of a few Search Engines, Interactive ad Networks and a Disassociated Press controlling over 90% of ad revenues derived from the Internet and ruling an industry of thousands of newspapers and scores of newspaper associations that have served the citizens of

Democracy for hundreds of years. Shall the vast continent of independent newspapers and associations allow itself to be ruled by nothing more than an internet island consisting of a few websites? Who truly possesses the resources such as subscribers, patrons, advertisers and journalists and has a local presence on a global scale? It is simply, newspapers and broadcasters.

The advent of the Internet should not be the destruction of traditional media, but its [reinvention](#). How did the art of retail overcome supply-side economics where manufacturers' dominance and forced distribution of products was replaced by demand-side retail centers? It was simply the invention of the bar coding system and certain improvements in distribution efficiencies that allowed the great retailers to determine the most valuable shelf space in their establishments, which products sold the best, and which returned the most to them. Today we have a tremendous abundance of choice when we visit the marketplace. Likewise, we must not lose the diversity and independence of retail views and expressions so crucial to our Freedom. If we exclude our citizens from this means of quality information because that information becomes [centralized](#), corrupted and polluted, then they are no longer empowered to think and act where their highest judgment is required – as free thinking citizens of a Democracy. We must come together to identify the challenges facing our newspapers and develop strategies and tools to meet those challenges head on, not become fugitives fleeing from the tyranny of a few, seeking asylum in self-righteous dogma that will only lead to a brutal ending.

The Oligarchic tyranny rules the newspapers for its own benefit yet [dribbles lip service](#) feigning a cooperative partnership while it dines on the remains of its partner publishers. They rule through pride and vanity because they have divined the technical lore of Interactive media, and in turn have earned the newspapers' contempt. Independent journalism and diversity of viewpoints has fallen prey to the highest bidder. Journalistic perversion and advertising greed are Siamese twins born from a twisted excuse that is more terrible than a lie, because an excuse is a lie guarded. True, few have the virtue to withstand temptation during these dark times that try our souls, so the excuse for advertorial expression and journalism create a deformity in the womb of the mind, and this will lead to a great calamity for Democracy.

When we examine the grudging, competitive cooperation between the newspapers, traditional media and the Oligarchy, it becomes apparent that the best course of action is independence for traditional media. But how? The current Oligarchy is no different from any other in history insofar that its purpose is to monopolize power and profit by creating a [superstition](#) or "[secret sauce](#)" surrounding its interaction with its subjects, the newspapers. There are those with the knowledge and those without. To newspapers and traditional media, this unedifying realization must be particularly repugnant and inconsistent with their self-view which in the past has been to inform and educate the uninformed and uneducated citizenry. Of further interest is the thorny blasphemy that has not only blurred the lines between the news room and ad departments at newspapers, but the internal rifts that have arisen between the print and online divisions of publishers, sometimes locked in internal bitter rivalries as they vie for the meager crumbs that fall from the Oligarchy's table.

It is not in numbers, but in unity, that our great strength lies; yet our present numbers are sufficient to repel the force of all the Oligarchy. [Our industry](#) has, at this time, the largest body of content, journalists, advertisers and subscribers of any power under Heaven; and has just fallen to a pitch of strength, in which, no single entity of traditional media is able to battle the Oligarchy, but the whole, when united, can accomplish the matter that might be fatal in its effects upon us as separate and individual publishers with no common front. Independent, diverse and balanced journalism is America's greatest pride, and in which, she has led the whole world. The great search engine and ad network empires are mostly centralized in both abilities and purpose, and consequently excluded from the possibility of us were we to but realize our strengths and come together. Some of the Oligarchy have audiences. Others have advertising and still others content. Where nature hath given the one, she has withheld the others; but to Newspapers and Broadcasters, only hath she been liberal with all those resources.

The case can now be altered if we so choose, and we can regain our ground and achieve parity. Some, perhaps, will say, that if we made it up with the Internet Oligarchy, she will protect us. Can we be so unwise as to mean, that she shall place [vast treasures](#) in the harbors of our balance sheets for that purpose? Common sense and our experiences with them will tell us, that the power which hath endeavored to subdue us, is of all others, the most improper to defend and assist us. Conquest may be effected under the pretence of friendship; and ourselves, after a long and brave resistance, be at last cheated into slavery. And if her ships are not to be admitted into our harbors, I would ask, how are we to be protected so that we might again compete and prosper? If we must hereafter protect ourselves, why not do it for ourselves? We must build our own ships and raise our own forces if we are to regain our independence. While we do possess the raw resources to achieve this with respect to those items I have enumerated such as journalists, content, subscribers, etc., we do not own the [means of production](#) in an Internet economy to properly monetize these resources. In times past when our economies were agrarian, industrial, and even at the beginning of the information age, the keys to wealth were land, labor, factories and such. However, the Internet is a qualitative leap, and in less than a decade has connected the world through a vast network of information exchange like no other phenomena ever before seen. Now, it is the rapid and accurate production, distribution, and monetization of information by powerful technologies and interactive advertising that defines wealth, as well as defines the winners and losers in this [brave new world](#) where online businesses are divided up into a caste system.

The Oligarchy's arsenal is long and formidable, but not a tenth part of them are at any time able to concentrate against any one of us effectively in the backyards of our confederation, if we would but realize this. From a mixture of prejudice and inattention, we have contracted a false notion of over-respecting the technology of the Oligarchy, and have talked as if we should have the whole of it to encounter at once, and for that reason, supposed, that we must have one of us as large and technically advanced; which not being instantly practicable, have been made use of by a set of disguised [Tory Analysts](#) to discourage our beginning thereon. Nothing can be farther from truth than this; for if you had only a twentieth part of the technology of the Oligarchy, you would be by far an over match for her; because, of those great distances they

would need to cover before they could attack us where we are strong, with armies of journalist on the ground, droves of subscribers, local content of our own and from our allies and loyal advertisers.

To conclude, however strange it may appear to some, or however unwilling they may be to think so, matters not, but many strong and striking reasons may be given, to show, that nothing can settle our affairs so expeditiously as an open and determined declaration for interdependence and willingness to work together as well as independence from the Oligarchy, otherwise I fear that there will soon emerge only one [centralized press](#). Some of the reasons are firstly, it is the custom of commercial entities, when any two are at war and litigation, for some other powers, not engaged in the quarrel, to step in as mediators, and bring about the preliminaries of a peace: but so long as newspapers subject themselves to the whims of the Oligarchy, no power, however well disposed she may be, can offer mediation. Wherefore, in our present state we may quarrel on until we perish. Secondly, it is unreasonable to suppose, that government will give us any kind of assistance, if we mean only, to make use of that [bailout](#) assistance for the purpose of repairing ourselves without accountability and measurable improvement in our standing as well as our positive impact on our nation as a whole. Thirdly, while we profess ourselves to be independent, we must, in the eyes of many be seen as begging for crumbs that were once our bounty. The precedent is somewhat dangerous to our cause, but to unite resistance necessary for independence, and the subjection we are experiencing, requires an idea much too complex for the common understanding. Fourthly, were a manifesto to be published, it must be dispatched to all the world's courts, setting forth the miseries we have endured, and the peaceable methods we have ineffectually used for redress; declaring, at the same time, that not being able, any longer, to live happily or safely under the cruel disposition Oligarchy, we had been driven to the necessity of breaking off all connections with her; at the same time, assuring all such courts of our fair disposition towards them, and of our desire of remaking ourselves and adhering to those journalistic principals of fair and balance reporting that has helped make our nation the greatest on earth.

I offer nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and [common sense](#). Traditional media has practiced independence fiercely for centuries. Now is the time to come together at least for the purpose of regaining control of their most precious asset – the news. They should develop a [Bill of Rights](#) that govern the relationships between new age publishers, advertisers and subscribers. The current interactive paradigm for information, news and advertising is nothing less than grotesque debauchery rife with fraud and lacking in transparency and accountability. I believe we need to develop strategies and implement technologies that that allow traditional media to achieve [ad Parity](#) so they can manage, audit, prioritize, synchronize and fully monetize their online properties in a way that does not compromise their editorial independence. During the renaissance era, printing methods based on Gutenberg's printing press revolutionized our industry. I believe that [ad Parity](#) can do the same in this modern era. It is necessary to the happiness humans, that they be mentally faithful to themselves. Infidelity does not consist in believing, or in disbelieving; it consists in professing to believe what one does not believe. It is impossible to calculate the moral mischief, if I may so express it, that mental lying to oneself has produced in society. When one has so far corrupted and prostituted the chastity of one's own mind, as to

subscribe belief in things one does not really believe, one has prepared oneself for the commission of every other crime. The only way to avoid this terrifying enslavement of independent thinking and journalism is to once again become independent, self reliant and autonomous.

I Remain

[Thomas Paine](#)