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THOMAS PAINE NATIONAL HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Founded in 1884 • New Rochelle, New York • ThomasPaine.org



Common Sense and the Revolutionary Moment

Thomas Paine on Government at the Birth of Democracy

by Gary Berton

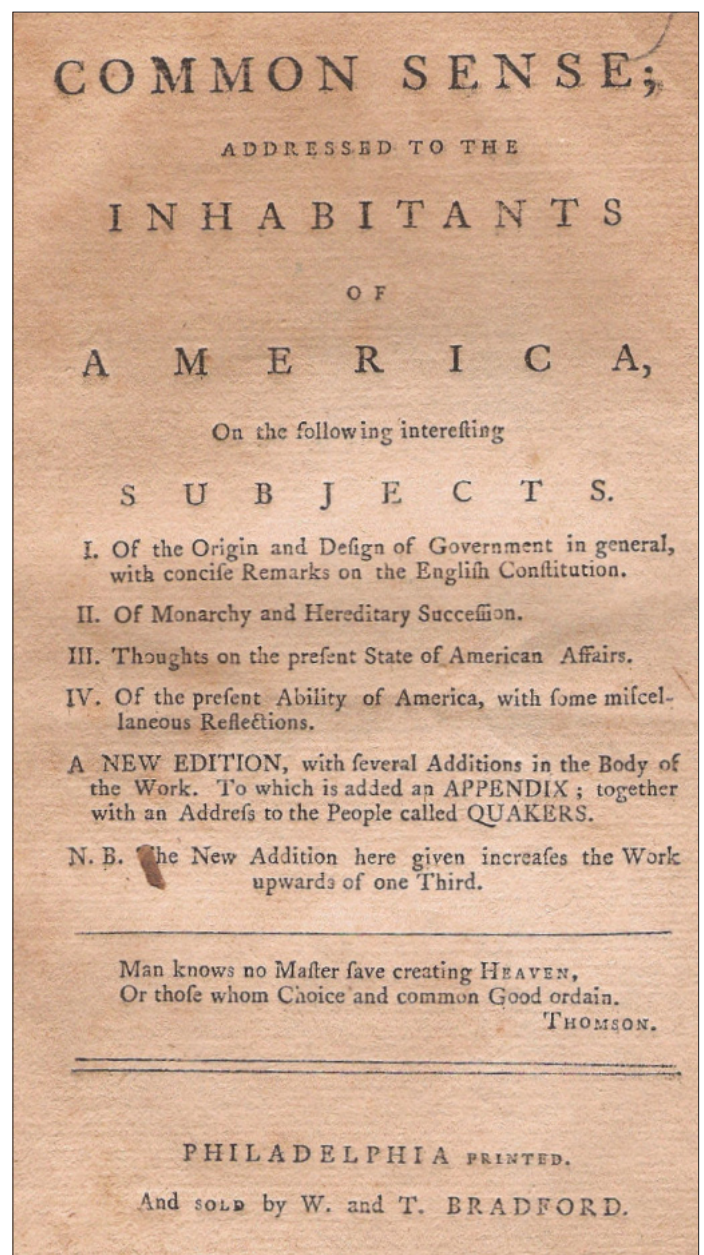
In *Common Sense*, Thomas Paine introduced the concept of modern democracy. This idea is what the “revolution” in American Revolution rested upon. Self-rule was a by-product of the concept of government “of the people, for the people, by the people.”

Before *Common Sense*, the meaning of “democracy” was diffuse. Multiple meanings of the term since have been used by other forms of government, even oppressive regimes. Holding elections, no matter how corrupt, has become the definition of democracy.

In *Common Sense*, Paine began his discussion about government by defining it for his readers:

Society in every state is a blessing, but government even in its best state is but a necessary evil; in its worst state an intolerable one.... Government, like dress, is the badge of lost innocence; the palaces of kings are built on the ruins of the bowers of paradise. For were the impulses of conscience clear, uniform, and irresistibly obeyed, man would need no other lawgiver, but that not being the case, he finds it necessary to surrender up a part of his property to furnish means for the protection of the rest; and this he is induced to do by the same prudence which in every other case advises him out of two evils to choose the least. Wherefore, security being the true design and end of government, it unanswerably follows,

Continued on pg. 2



First edition of Common Sense

The 47-page pamphlet was published on January 10, 1776.

Thomas Paine on Government — Continued from Pg. 1

that whatever form thereof appears most likely to ensure it to us, with the least expense and greatest benefit, is preferable to all others.

Anarchists and libertarians, plus conservatives, love this quote. They refer to it constantly, but like many historians, they do not read further.

The paragraph names *security* as the only purpose of government. This idea became an excuse for oppression. Government ensures the rich are “secure,” but the majority of the people are insecure due to corrupt government.

‘Here then is the origin and rise of government; namely, a mode rendered necessary by the inability of moral virtue to govern the world.’

To explain the origins of government, Paine told a parable imagining that “a small number of persons settled in some sequestered part of the earth, unconnected with the rest; they will then represent the first peopling of any country, or of the world.”

In this state of natural liberty, society will be their first thought. Thus necessity, like a gravitating power, would soon form our newly arrived emigrants into society, the reciprocal blessings of which, would supersede, and render the obligations of law and government unnecessary while they remained perfectly just to each other; but as nothing but heaven is impregnable to vice, it will unavoidably happen, that in proportion as they

surmount the first difficulties of emigration, which bound them together in a common cause, they will begin to relax in their duty and attachment to each other; and this remissness will point out the necessity of establishing some form of government to supply the defect of moral virtue

Six paragraphs later, after laying out his “design and end of government,” Paine sums up his thesis:

Here then is the origin and rise of government; namely, a mode rendered necessary by the inability of moral virtue to govern the world; here too is the design and end of government, viz. freedom and security. And however our eyes may be dazzled with show, or our ears deceived by sound; however prejudice may warp our wills, or interest darken our understanding, the simple voice of nature and of reason will say, it is right.

Paine changes the design and end of government (“end” meaning the goal) by adding freedom to security. Both are needed.

His opening paragraph was about the need for security; this last paragraph sums up his thesis. Security *and* freedom together is Paine’s definition of republican government. “Republican” was the term used at the time for popular government. The “democratic” term came into use from *Rights of Man* in 1792.

Sadly, self-interest does darken our understanding, as does fake news, propaganda, and blind obedience. As Paine observed in *Rights of Man*, “Ignorance submits to whatever is dictated to it.” ▲

Gary Berton is President of the TPNHA.

A Paine-Inspired Podcast: ‘Peaceful Political Revolution in America’

John Mulkins produces a syndicated podcast about America’s founding principles.

He opens with George Washington, “The basis of our political systems is the right of the people to make and to alter their constitutions of government.”

The podcast, he says, “started with the onerous problem of the American Constitution, with its anti-

democratic structure, its paralysis of rule by monied interests, and now the paralysis of Originalism.”

To find the episodes on Thomas Paine, click URL: ListenNotes.com/podcasts/peaceful-political-revolution-in-america and “Search Episodes.”

The podcast appears on most platforms, including Apple Podcasts, Spotify, TuneIn, and iHeart. ▲

By **Thomas Paine**

A Parable About the Origins of Government

From Part I of *Common Sense* [A verbatim excerpt]

In order to gain a clear and just idea of the design and end of government, let us suppose a small number of persons settled in some sequestered part of the earth, unconnected with the rest, they will then represent the first peopling of any country, or of the world. In this state of natural liberty, society will be their first thought. A thousand motives will excite them thereto, the strength of one man is so unequal to his wants, and his mind so unfitted for perpetual solitude, that he is soon obliged to seek assistance and relief of another, who in his turn requires the same. Four or five united would be able to raise a tolerable dwelling in the midst of a wilderness, but one man might labour out of the common period of life without accomplishing any thing; when he had felled his timber he could not remove it, nor



“Some convenient tree will afford them a State-House, under the branches of which, the whole colony may assemble to deliberate on public matters.”

Liberty Tree site marker near Boston Commons

Courtesy of Celebrate Boston

erect it after it was removed; hunger in the mean time would urge him from his work, and every different want call him a different way. Disease, nay even misfortune would be death, for though neither might be mortal, yet either would disable him from living, and reduce him to a state in which he might rather be said to perish than to die.

Thus necessity, like a gravitating power, would soon form our newly arrived emigrants into society, the reciprocal blessings of which, would supersede, and render the obligations of law and government unnecessary while they remained perfectly just to each other; but as nothing but heaven is impregnable to vice, it will unavoidably happen, that in proportion as they surmount the first difficulties of emigration,

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Thomas Paine News

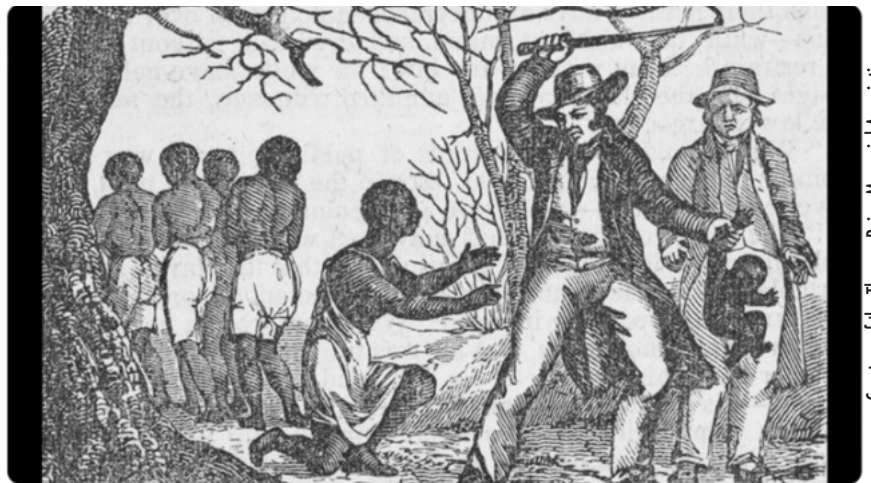
Freethought Society Releases Video of Paine Birthday Program

by Margaret Downey

The Freethought Society's Youtube channel now carries a recording of the program offered January 29 to observe Thomas Paine birthday, titled "The Anti-Slavery Efforts of Thomas Paine."

The Thomas Paine Memorial Association, Black Nonbelievers, the Secular Coalition for America, Freedom From Religion Foundation, Center for Inquiry, and the Freethought Society sponsored the international event. Gary Berton introduced the letter to Jefferson from "A Slave."

(See January edition of *The Beacon* for a detailed description of the program.) ▲



Courtesy of the Thomas Paine Memorial Association

To see the full program video, click the image above (in PDF)

Or click this link: youtube.com/watch?v=AoERxdSkGm8

Courtesy of The Freethought Society

About Thomas Paine

The Thomas Paine Plaque in Greenwich Village

by Barbara Crane

Easily missed in the bustling streets of Greenwich Village today is a small bronze plaque installed almost 100 years ago in honor of Thomas Paine. The memorial is at 59 Grove Street on a building now standing on the location of Paine's death in 1809.

Historical accounts indicate starting in 1802, Paine had a house on Herring Street, now 309 Bleecker Street, the site of a modern commercial building.

Paine likely was happier in Greenwich Village than on his isolated farm in New Rochelle. Freethinkers in the Village clearly admired him. To honor *The Age of Reason*, a short city street nearby in 1828 was renamed as Reason Street. Today it's called Barrow Street.

The building now at 59 Grove Street, built in 1839, opened its doors in 1928 as a restaurant (and speakeasy) called Marie's Crisis Cafe. Marie DuMont, a French national, named it for *The Crisis* papers Paine wrote to support the American Revolution. The establishment still operates today as a popular Village piano bar known for sing-along showtunes.

Marie DuMont inset the 1928 Paine plaque beside the entrance to the brick building.

Samilla Love Jameson Heinzmann designed the plaque. The Indiana-born artist was a member of the Greenwich Village Historical Society,, founded in 1922 by Catherine Clivette, wife of artist and magician Merton Clivette. Their daughter, Juanita, known as the "Sappho" of the already Bohemian Village, read a poem at the unveiling of the plaque. ▲



*Bronz plaque or "tablet" at the site of Thomas Paine's death
59 Grove Street in Greenwich Village, NYC*

Courtesy of DrivenToTears.com.

Barbara Crane serves on the TPNHA Board. She thanks and credits Sarah Bean Apmann at Village Preservation and Tom Miller at Daytonian in Manhattan, with additional information from Maria's Crisis Cafe.

Published in the edition for January 28, 1899 [verbatim excerpts]

by Eugene Macdonald
Former Editor, *The Truth Seeker*

The recurrence of the anniversary of the birth of Paine furnishes me with an excuse, if I need one, for presenting the following random notes.

An edition of Part I. of the "Rights of Man" printed at Boston by I. Thomas and E. T. Andrews, Faust's Statuë, No. 45, Newbury, street, MDCCXCI [1791], has the following on the back of the leaf which contains the dedication to Washington: After some prefatory remarks, Mr. Jefferson, the Secretary of State, in a note to a printer in Philadelphia, accompanying a copy of this Pamphlet for republication, observes:

“I am extremely pleased to find it will be re-printed here, and that something is at length to be publicly said against the political heresies which have sprung up among us.

“I have no doubt our citizens will *rally* a second time round the *standard* of COMMON SENSE.”

That it was Common Sense — that is, Thomas Paine — around whom American citizens rallied in '76 is strong testimony to the service performed by the Author-Hero; and it comes from a good man. The remarks of Jefferson above quoted are not found in current editions of the work, and have hitherto escaped my observation.

[That publisher, without Jefferson's knowledge or Paine's permission, published Jefferson's note, just as reported. The term "political heresies" inflamed Federalists against Paine, who faced their wrath upon returning to America in 1802. — *if*]

In the September 16, 1806, issue of the *Balance*... there is a coupling of the “two Toms,” Paine and Jefferson, thus: “A writer in one of the public papers calls Mr. Jefferson’s *Notes on Virginia* ‘the democratic bible.’ Though Mr. Jefferson pays no regard to Moses in his account of the deluge, and maintains in contradiction to said Moses and the apostle Paul that there are ‘different races of men,’ yet it is not known that the democrats have professedly adopted the celebrated performance as their Bible. If they have, ‘The Age of Reason,’ by Thomas Paine, will be naturally added as the apocrypha.”

The July 29 number [of *The Balance*] contained a brief acknowledgment: In those perilous [Revolutionary] times, when men's hearts began to quail with fear, among the foremost to defend the cause of a brave people stood Paine and our matchless Chief [Jefferson, now president]. The latter by his counsels and the former by his writings were to the great and good Washington equal to an host." ▲

Eugene (E.M.) Macdonald edited *The Truth Seeker* and managed the company from 1883 to 1909.



The Truth Seeker, January 28, 1899, Page 56
The publication had 50,000 readers, including Mark Twain.

Courtesy of The Truth Seeker and the Center for Inquiry.

Meet the TPNHA Board

How Bob Dylan led me to Thomas Paine

by Gary Berton

I had heard Thomas Paine's name, but Bob Dylan put me on the track of discovering Paine's profound importance in history.

Dylan has been the soundtrack of my life. When he sang about Paine in the song, "As I went out One Morning," on the 1967 *John Wesley Harding* album, his lyrics stayed with me.



Gary Berton
TPNHA President

As I went out one morning
To breathe the air around Tom Paine's
I spied the fairest damsel
That ever did walk in chains
I offered her my hand
She took me by the arm
I knew that very instant
She meant to do me harm

"Depart from me this moment"
I told her with my voice
Said she, "But I don't wish to"
Said I, "But you have no choice"
"I beg you, sir", she pleaded
From the corners of her mouth
"I will secretly accept you"

And together we'll fly south"
Just then Tom Paine, himself
Came running from across the field
Shouting at this lovely girl
And commanding her to yield
And as she was letting go her grip
Up Tom Paine did run
"I'm sorry, sir", he said to me
"I'm sorry for what she's done"

When I entered graduate school at the University of Toronto, this song was in my head. I pursued studies in the history of political philosophy. I soon realized that Paine was not part of the curriculum, so I left, instead preferring a factory job. But I continued reading and researching Paine.

For 56 years now, the path is paying off for me by being able to help bring the truth of Paine to the world, as in the form of the new *Thomas Paine Collected Works*, and by spreading it through the Thomas Paine National Historical Association. Bob Dylan led me to Paine. ▲

Gary Berton serves as the President of the TPNHA. Until 2021, he was the Coordinator of the Institute of Thomas Paine Studies at Iona College, New Rochelle, New York. Gary lives in the metropolitan NYC area.

Thomas Paine News

Status report for *Thomas Paine: Collected Works*

Our Association is managing the project to complete the collected works of Thomas Paine by spring 2026, the 250th anniversary of *Common Sense*. We're on schedule.

The works and correspondence have been collected and checked for accuracy. The project was aided by the AI Author Attribution Methodology, tested at over 90 percent accurate, backed by careful attention to the historical context of each work, together with other information that confirms Paine's authorship. The 6-volume set will double the corpus of known Paine's works.

Two TPNHA board members serve on the project editorial board, Scott Cleary and Gary Berton. Others are Greg Claeys in London, Marc Belissa in Paris, Yannick Bosc in Paris, and Carine Lounissi in Paris. The international project has benefitted greatly from the editorial board's expertise on British, French and American history, and especially on Paine.

The project will clarify Paine's critical contributions to political philosophy and his role at crucial historical moments during his lifetime. The collection will answer many questions that have gone unexplained. ▲

Paine's Parable — From Pg. 3

which bound them together in a common cause, they will begin to relax in their duty and attachment to each other; and this remissness will point out the necessity of establishing some form of government to supply the defect of moral virtue.

Some convenient tree will afford them a State-House, under the branches of which, the whole colony may assemble to deliberate on public matters. It is more than probable that their first laws will have the title only of Regulations, and be enforced by no other penalty than public disesteem. In this first parliament every man, by natural right, will have a seat.

But as the colony increases, the public concerns will increase likewise, and the distance at which the members may be separated, will render it too inconvenient for all of them to meet on every occasion as at first, when their number was small, their habitations near, and the public concerns few and trifling. This will point out the convenience of their consenting to leave the legislative part to be managed by a select

'They will mutually and naturally support each other, and on this (not on the unmeaning name of king) depends the strength of government, and the happiness of the governed.'

number chosen from the whole body, who are supposed to have the same concerns at stake which those who appointed them, and who will act in the same manner as the whole body would act, were they present. If the colony continues increasing, it will become necessary to augment the number of the representatives, and that the interest of every part of the colony may be attended to, it will be found best to divide the whole into convenient parts, each part sending its proper number; and that the elected might never form to themselves an interest separate from the electors, prudence will point out the propriety of having elections often; because as the elected might by that means return and mix again with the general body of the electors in a few months, their fidelity to the public will be secured by the prudent reflection of not making a rod for themselves. And as this frequent interchange will establish a common interest with every part of the community, they will mutually and naturally support each other, and on this (not on the unmeaning name of king) depends the strength of government, and the happiness of the governed. ▲

TPNHA Membership Dues and Benefits

Individual - \$25 yearly (Beacon subscription)

Family - \$40 yearly (Beacon subscription)

Supporter - \$100 yearly (Beacon, Paine lapel pin)

Donor - \$500 for 1 year (Beacon, lapel pin, personal plaque)

Benefactor - \$1,000 yearly (All the above & Memorial Building plaque)

Patron - \$10,000, 1 year (All the above & a set of the 2026 six-volume *Thomas Paine: Collected Works*, autographed by the Editorial Board.)



The Thomas Paine National Historical Association congratulates our "sister" publication on their 150th Anniversary!

The Truth Seeker has been the world's foundational source of freethought information continuously since 1873, longer than TPNHA has existed. The Truth Seeker was the main force behind our formation in 1884.





THE THOMAS PAINE NATIONAL HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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About TPNHA

The Mission of the Thomas Paine National Historical Association is to educate the world about the life, legacy and works of Thomas Paine.

TPNHA was founded in 1884 to correct the record on Thomas Paine by refuting negative propaganda and slanders perpetrated against him by most historians in the 19th century. We've since become the most reliable and accurate source of information about Paine worldwide. We assist scholars, authors, journalists, readers and anyone interested in Paine's life and work.

TPNHA is managing the international project to complete the Collected Works of Thomas Paine, which may double the corpus of known writings.

We operate the 100-year-old Paine Memorial Museum in New Rochelle, NY, where we hold educational programs. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, we're grateful for member support sustaining our efforts. ▲

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The Beacon is a bi-monthly publication for members of the Thomas Paine National Historical Association

The Beacon from the TPNHA extends the volumes of Gilbert Vale's influential *The Beacon* in the mid-19th century, both restoring the legacy of Thomas Paine.

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