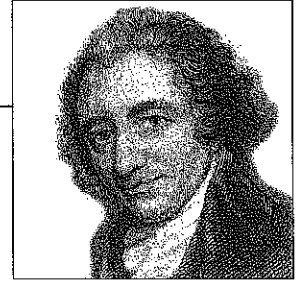


## Thomas Paine

### Bold Voice of Protest

A daring writer and thinker, Thomas Paine devoted his life to the cause of liberty. His words moved American colonists to join the struggle for independence.



Thomas Paine was born in England in 1737. His father made corsets—tight-fitting garments worn under women's clothes. When Paine was 13 years old, he dropped out of school and worked in his father's corset shop. Paine used any extra money to buy books about science, religion, and ethics—the proper treatment of self and others.

At age 19, Paine left England to explore the world on a ship called the *Terrible*. A man known as Captain Death headed the crew. Paine's rebellious ideas may have begun to form during this time. While the ship was in port, his father begged him to reconsider his life at sea. It was sound advice. Paine left the crew just days before the ship was destroyed while attacking a French cargo vessel.

Paine tried other jobs—a grocer, a teacher, and a tax collector. By 1772, his political ideas began to get him into trouble. He wrote a pamphlet urging other tax collectors, known as excise men, to band together and demand higher wages. Because of the pamphlet, Paine was fired as a tax collector. This experience left him with a bitter awareness of unequal and unfair treatment in society.

**A Fresh Start in America** Paine later met Benjamin Franklin, who was visiting London. Franklin was impressed with Paine's ideas and called him an “ingenious, worthy young man.” Franklin convinced Paine to come to America. In 1774, Paine left England.

Franklin wrote a letter to help Paine find a job. Paine was quickly hired to work for *Pennsylvania Magazine*. One of his first articles condemned slavery. He also wrote essays promoting women's rights and the fair treatment of animals.

Paine had arrived in America when the colonists were on the brink of revolution. After the battles of

Lexington and Concord in 1775, Paine spoke out for another great cause—independence. He declared his opposition to the British monarchy.

**American Patriot** In January 1776, Paine published his famous pamphlet *Common Sense*. In less than 50 pages, Paine forcefully spelled out the American cause for liberty. He raised important issues: Why should a huge continent be tied to a little island thousands of miles away? Why should American colonists submit to laws that hurt their trade and industry? Why should the colonists show their loyalty to a king who oppresses them? Declaring independence from Great Britain, Paine argued, was the common-sense action to take.

#### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

Many strong and striking reasons may be given to show that nothing can settle our affairs so [quickly and efficiently] as an open and determined declaration of independence. . . . [a document] setting forth the miseries we have endured.

THOMAS PAINE, *Common Sense*

In April 1776, George Washington wrote, “I find *Common Sense* is working a powerful change in the minds of many men.” Colonial leaders heeded the stirring call to break ties with Great Britain. On July 4, 1776, the Second Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence.

During the Revolutionary War, Paine joined the Continental Army. Between 1776 and 1783, he published 16 pamphlets titled *The American Crisis*. He used the top of a drum as a desk to write the first pamphlet. The opening words lifted the soldiers' spirits.

## A VOICE FROM THE PAST

These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it now, deserves the thanks of man and woman. Tyranny . . . is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph.

THOMAS PAINE, *The American Crisis*,  
"Number 1"

George Washington ordered that his soldiers at Valley Forge hear Paine's first pamphlet read aloud. Discouraged soldiers felt a new sense of patriotism. John Adams later summed up the power of Paine's writing: "Washington's sword would have been wielded in vain had it not been supported by the pen of Thomas Paine."

Paine's patriotic pamphlets were wildly popular. Hundreds of thousands of copies were sold. At the end of the American Revolution, though, Paine was still poor. He refused to accept any profits so that cheap editions of his works would be available to ordinary people.

For a few years after the war, Paine turned to peaceful interests. He worked on inventions—designs for an iron bridge and a smokeless candle. Soon, however, Paine would find himself at the center of another revolution.

**New Struggles for Liberty** Benjamin Franklin once said, "Where liberty is, there is my country." Paine's version was, "Where liberty is not, there is mine. My country is the world." When the American Revolution was over, Paine felt he had completed his goal. He eventually looked to other nations where he could further the cause of liberty.

In 1787, Paine sailed for France and then returned to England. He became drawn into another political struggle—the French Revolution. In 1789, French peasants rebelled. The common people formed a revolutionary government in which all citizens had these basic rights: "liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression." Paine's support of the revolt earned him enemies. In London clubs, men bore nails with Thomas Paine's initials, "TP," into their boot heels. These men said they were stomping on Paine's ideas.

Paine defended the French Revolution and attacked the British monarchy in a two-part book, *The Rights of Man* (1791–1792). As a result, Paine was tried for treason but escaped arrest by fleeing to France. There he was considered a hero until another revolutionary group turned to terror and violence. This group declared that Paine was a citizen of an enemy nation—England—and jailed him for almost a year. In 1794, James Monroe, the American ambassador, came to Paine's rescue. Monroe said that Paine was an American citizen. Paine was then set free.

**Unhappy Ending** Paine returned to the United States in 1802, but he was no longer welcome there. Before his arrival, he had published two works that angered many Americans. In *The Age of Reason*, Paine expressed his extreme views on religion. This booklet was considered an attack on Christianity. Paine also had written an insulting letter to George Washington. Paine died in 1809 and was buried on his New York farm.

## Review Questions

1. Why did Paine decide to come to America?
2. What happened to Paine during the French Revolution?
3. Which of Paine's works damaged his reputation in the United States? Why?

## Critical Thinking

4. **Forming and Supporting Opinions** How do you think Paine should be remembered—as a devoted patriot or a dangerous radical? Explain.
5. **Recognizing Effects** How did Paine's pamphlets *Common Sense* and *The American Crisis* influence the American Revolution?
6. **Generalizing** How would you explain Paine's views on government and people's rights?