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# Rights Of Man, Common Sense, And Other Political Writings (Oxford World's Classics)



Thomas Paine  
Rights of Man, Common Sense  
and Other Political Writings

OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS



## Synopsis

Thomas Paine was the first international revolutionary. His *Common Sense* (1776) was the most widely read pamphlet of the American Revolution--and his *Rights of Man* (1791-2), the most famous defense of the French Revolution, sent out a clarion call for revolution throughout the world. Paine paid the price for his principles: he was outlawed in Britain, narrowly escaped execution in France, and was vilified as an atheist and a Jacobin on his return to America. This new edition contains the complete texts of both *Rights of Man* and *Common Sense*, as well as six other powerfully political writings--*American Crisis I*, *American Crisis XIII*, *Agrarian Justice*, *Letter to Jefferson*, *Letter Addressed to the Addressers on the Late Proclamation*, and *Dissertation on the First Principles of Government*--all of which illustrate why Paine's ideas still resonate in the modern welfare states of today. *About the Series:* For over 100 years Oxford World's Classics has made available the broadest spectrum of literature from around the globe. Each affordable volume reflects Oxford's commitment to scholarship, providing the most accurate text plus a wealth of other valuable features, including expert introductions by leading authorities, voluminous notes to clarify the text, up-to-date bibliographies for further study, and much more.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Thomas Paine is a radical democrat in the sense of someone who supports universal suffrage, the equality of all people, the leveling out of special privilege, the well-being of all people in a nation, fair

and progressive taxation, lowering of taxes, the health of business and the economy, the preservation of natural and civic rights, and the assertion that the sovereignty and authority of government arises from the people. He not only supports these values but he also argues quantitatively as well as politically how they can be achieved simultaneously. Such positions are "radical" because they are opposed by many of those who rule so-called democratic governments, a fact as true today as it was in the Eighteenth Century. Most democratic governments are in need of reform because, as Paine puts it, "The man who is in the receipt of a million a year is the last person to promote a spirit of reform, in the event, it should reach to himself." (p. 257) Then as now most governments are run by millionaires. But Paine could diagnose what a good government would look like: "When it shall be said in any country in the world, my poor are happy; neither ignorance nor distress is to be found among them; my jails are empty of prisoners, my streets of beggars; the aged are not in want, the taxes are not oppressive; the rational world is my friend; because I am the friend of its happiness: when these things can be said, then may that country boast its constitution and its government." (p. 317) And his argument in "Rights of Man" was that England could not so boast. He hoped that America (and France) by contrast could and would continue to do so. But Paine was opposed and ridiculed by more than one of our "founding fathers", including John Adams. His thinking, however, especially that of "Common Sense" (included in this volume), which was massively published in pamphlet form, was very well received by the American colonies seeking an end to English oppression. It can be argued that without the mass publication of "Common Sense" there might not have been a revolution in North America, as without the work of Benjamin Franklin in France that revolution might not have succeeded. It is notable, then, that Paine was opposed by so many of the leaders--many of whom were "in the receipt of a million a year"--and that his thinking has continued to be suppressed or ignored. But every person, American or otherwise, who believes in his values as mentioned above should be familiar with the clear writing and thinking of this patriot. This volume is an excellent compendium, and it is not difficult to read despite its age. Beware, though--"they" probably don't want you to read it.

Democracy, independence, economic growth, people's revolution and taxation as a means of redistributing wealth " " all these are commonly accepted by 'the left' and it is interesting to read the thoughts of an 18th century radical and see how these ideas were being thought afresh. The Quaker belief in egalitarianism, in man who does not need priests to mediate and who has the inner light of conscience contribute to his thought. That he wasn't formerly educated means he can think freely without the crippling weight of tradition behind him. His writings are original and do not cite large

bibliographies and think the thoughts of other men after them. I scarcely ever quote; the reason is I always think.' His analytical treatment of political affairs shows indebtedness to an Enlightenment view of the natural order of the world. It anticipates a Hegelian view of history and Marx's class-war idea. It is encouraging that he accepts, unlike most socialists, the right to have private property, provided that it has been gained by one's own labour and not inherited. His acceptance of war as a means to gain justice for the poor but not as a means of dynastic extension anticipates much later thinking; he is strongly influenced by the French and American Revolutions. Marx is clearly anticipated when Paine regards work as the one thing that the peasant is able to sell as a commodity. Interestingly, those who oppose Paine are from the same classes as those who vote Tory today – the merchants and manufacturers whose rights are threatened, and those who believe in a mystical church-state relationship. Parliament must represent taxpayers and not be hereditary; a man does not inherit ability from his father. Hereditary government is an extension of the Norman Conquest. Where laws are bad, it is better to obey them and struggle to have them changed than to flagrantly break them. He reckons that the monarchy will disappear within seven years because the American constitution is abundantly, obviously better. He regards America as an example, as was Athens, of the ideal polis. Sadly we still have a House of Lords and an emasculated but expensive monarchy and America is probably a bad example of democracy in that large interests such as multinational companies manipulate the politics of that country so that it does not represent the interests of ordinary people and its world dominance is a threat to peace and to life itself. He saw state intervention as something that should be kept to a minimum - men are able to organise their affairs by themselves. In this he anticipates the 'withering away of the state' idea and is opposed to the increasing intervention by the state which has become a feature of both socialism and capitalism. Maybe his view of man, based on Genesis, was too optimistic.

I was not taught anything in school about this great man. He was very much ahead of his time on slavery, poverty, all the rights of mankind. Read his writings and appreciate a true patriot.

very helpful for kids in college

Incredible work! Still relevant in the 21st century!

This volume contains all of the principal works of the great mind of Thomas Paine. Although

technically not one of the Founding Fathers of the US, his thoughts on liberty and the purpose of government have influenced the world. He lived in a time when democracy was in its infancy and so much of his views are particular to the newly formed governments of the US and France. But still an interesting insight into politics. He can generally be considered a libertarian. The most famous works in the volume are *Common Sense*, *Rights of Man* and the *Letter to the Addressers of the Late Proclamation*. The texts are sufficiently annotated and there's a chronology of his life. If politics are your thing and you want to read about the forming of America, this is your book - it shows Paine's politics at their finest. One word of warning - this isn't an easy read. Paine is often wordy and rambly. Often his texts have account ledgers - which is understandable for the time they were written but today break the flow of the work. The writing is dense and his points could have been made in half the number of pages. If this doesn't deter you, you'll find an inspiring read about the rights and responsibilities of people and government towards each other.

This is a must read for all Americans. There is something in here for all of us, very common sense.

Although it is wordy, this collection of works is as relevant today as it was in the late 1700's.

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