



Thomas Paine and the Promise of America

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Thomas Paine was one of the most remarkable political writers of the modern world and the greatest radical of a radical age. Through writings like *Common Sense*—and words such as "The sun never shined on a cause of greater worth," "We have it in our power to begin the world over again," and "These are the times that try men's souls"—he not only turned America's colonial rebellion into a revolutionary war but, as Harvey J. Kaye demonstrates, articulated an American identity charged with exceptional purpose and promise.

Thomas Paine and the Promise of America Details

Date : Published July 25th 2006 by Hill and Wang (first published 2000)

ISBN : 9780809093441

Author : Harvey J. Kaye

Format : Paperback 336 pages

Genre : History, Biography, Politics, Nonfiction, North American Hi..., American History, Military History, American Revolution

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From Reader Review Thomas Paine and the Promise of America for online ebook

Claire says

This is well written, riveting, essential history for all citizens of the USA.

Beli_grrl says

This is a good introduction to Tom Paine, but it is not a very thorough bio. The author's intent is to show Paine's influence on progressives through the history of the US rather than to give the reader a detailed bio of Paine or a detailed analysis of his work. I think I would have preferred the detailed analysis and bio. But this was pretty good too. My problem with it is that he gives most of the progressives who were influenced by Paine about 2 paragraphs, so you don't get much detail there either. He lists lots of fascinating people, but you just get a brief introduction to them and overview of them.

Ross says

Only the first 1/3 of the book was actually about the life and writing of Thomas Paine. The remainder was a history of various liberal, communist and socialist movements and writers in America that cited Paine as a source for their inspiration. I enjoyed the portion that was actually about Paine, but had no interest in any of the rest.

Linda says

The first 1/4 - 1/3 of this book is a biographical sketch of the autodidact Thomas Paine; the remainder of the book is a history of the American movements which were influenced by him -- and there were many.

It is interesting to note that Paine's influence was tremendous within months of his arrival in Philadelphia in 1774; he was adamantly opposed to privilege and rule by elites and so was thoroughly hated by the Adams/Hamilton/Federalist bunch. Within months of Paine's death in 1809, the Federalists had a biography written which attacked him as a drunk, dirty and an atheist. That image has been perpetuated throughout the centuries.

There is no monument to Paine in DC or in Philadelphia even though his words from Common Sense first called for a union of the colonies, independence from the British crown and democratic rule.

Paine later left the US and returned to his native Britain and then moved to revolutionary France while writing his later works: Rights of Man, Agrarian Justice, The Age of Reason and such. Because he opposed the death penalty (said that a new government should reject all methods that had been used by their previous oppressors to subjugate the people), he was sentenced to the guillotine and narrowly escaped.

Definitely a thought-provoking read: this book challenges the idea that the US has always been the champion of free thought, free speech and the free press.

Lindsay D says

What a slog. The first and last chapters were the only ones I enjoyed. The rest was just a broad-strokes re-cap of American history, listing various historical figures who liked/were inspired by Paine's works contrasted against those who didn't. Very repetitive.

Nanette Bulebosh says

I'm on something of a Thomas Paine kick, ever since hearing Kaye's wonderful interview with WPR's Kathleen Dunn a few weeks ago. I've also read Paine books by Christopher Hitchens and John Keane. I tried to read one about Paine's 'Common Sense' by Glenn Beck, but it was so stupid I couldn't read beyond the first few pages. Beck's view is disturbingly skewed. I'm quite certain Mr. Paine, an avowed religious skeptic, would be horrified to learn how his revolutionary treatise has been hijacked for a right-wing political pundit's nefarious purposes.

This book by Kaye is wonderful, though. "We have it in our power to begin the world anew," Paine wrote in "Common Sense." This is a good thing to remember as the country heads into an uncertain political future after the dramatic 2010 election.

Infromsea says

Read the first couple of chapters and then put this down.

The author does a nice job of detailing Paine's life and writing and then goes into a terribly long listing of every one who ever thought of or actually mentioned Paine in their writings or words. I really became confused at the purpose served by the last several chapters. If the author wanted to describe how common Paine's ideas are in society he could have done it in a couple of paragraphs, one chapter at most. There was no value in describing it in such minutia. I eventually skimmed the last couple of pages and read the final paragraphs as there appeared to be no end in sight from each and every reference to Paine ever made by anyone since his death.

I would not read this again or recommend it to anyone. I wanted to learn more about Paine and I accomplished that even though I'm not sure what the author was trying to accomplish with this book.

Thomas Kinsfather says

First off, Kaye and I have completely opposite political views. This is one reason I loved this book. Kaye reveals the history and reasoning behind his liberal political views. Half the book is on Paine, the other on the ripple Paine's thoughts left in history. Interesting and thought provoking.

Zohar - ManOfLaBook.com says

Thomas Paine and the Promise of America by Harvey J. Kaye is a biography about the famous English-American political activist during the American revolution. Mr. Kaye is an American historian currently working as the the Director of the Center for History and Social Change at the University of Wisconsin.

This is a biography, and assessment of the life of Mr. Paine, all in the context of the American Revolutionary War. The book also touches on how Mr. Paine's political philosophy changed our way of thinking, our country and even influences American politics to this day.

Thomas Paine's most famous work, Common Sense, a pamphlet written in 1775-1776 which advocates independence from Great Britain influenced many important people and an argument can be made that without it the revolution might not have happened. Paine's vision of democracy inspired many and frightened some, since his background as a working class individual spoke more to the masses than the aristocratic background of many of America's founding fathers.

Thomas Paine's work influenced many radicals during, and after, his lifetime. These radicals called for such extreme change such as ending slavery, women's equality, fair wages and so on. The book devotes almost half of it to the public perception and appreciation of Mr. Paine, sometimes decades and centuries after his death. As we all know at this point, Paine's "radical" views gained acceptance over the years and now became standard.

This is a well written, facilitating book about an influential political activist and philosopher. I found it fascinating that, despite being a best-selling author, Mr. Paine refused to profit from his political writings and donated his profits them to purchase mittens for General Richard Montgomery's troops.

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Debocracy says

America's revolutionary and progressive traditions are alive and well! Inspiring and informative.

Flow says

Good book, but I wish more than just the first half would've been dedicated to biographical text about Paine. Although the ripples Paine sent throughout American history are interesting, some more detail about the man himself would've been appreciated. It got me interested in revolutionary history with many "side trips" online about different events, and I plan to read Common Sense next.

The American Conservative says

'In a small way, this book attempts to do for the Left what *The Conservative Mind* did for the Right half a century ago. Back then, nothing seemed so un-American as conservatism, the political philosophy of a Metternich or a Bismarck rather than an Adams or a Madison. Even Sen. Robert A. Taft, "Mr. Republican," called himself a liberal. Today, tides of political fashion having turned, Harvey Kaye finds himself having to make the case that liberalism is no late transplant to these shores but has roots in soil as deep and old as the Revolution itself.'

Read the full review, "American Revolutionist," on our website:

<http://www.theamericanconservative.co...>

David Stephens says

When Ronald Reagan gave his farewell address in early 1989, he made reference to John Winthrop and his biblical phrase "a city upon a hill." However, he eschewed the context Winthrop used the phrase in—as a model Christian city in which all citizens had their proper places in society firmly dictated to them—and turned Winthrop into a "Freedom Man," a lost pilgrim whose success was determined solely by his hard work and initiative.

Harvey J. Kaye begins his book on Thomas Paine at a similar place—when Ronald Reagan echoed Paine's language, saying, "We have it in our power to begin the world over again." Kaye uses this anecdote not only to point out that once an idea, symbol, or phrase is out there in the cultural sphere, anyone can use it in any way even if it becomes antithetical to its original meaning, but also to argue that it is the true progressives who most closely follow in Paine's footsteps and should be the ones utilizing his language.

Beginning with his upbringing, Kaye gives several reasons why Paine was to become the revolutionary democrat that he became. His father was an artisan of modest means and the young Thomas had many early experiences witnessing the lives of the working poor, giving him more empathy for the destitute and downtrodden than many of the aristocratic Founding Fathers had. His father was also a Quaker and infused some of their religious ideals into his son, such as the rejection of religious authority, the refusal to pay tithes, and a more welcoming attitude toward women.

Paine was unsuccessful in a number of occupations before he came to America in the fall of 1774 and found his calling as an inspiring voice to rally the troops and stoke the call for independence. His first major work, *Common Sense*—still proportionally the best selling American document of all time—helped turn a country that still largely wanted to reunite with Britain into a country thirsty to be independent.

Kaye mostly succeeds in his attempts to set the record straight on Paine. (I found his attempts to show Paine's influence on Lincoln to be a bit forced.) He shows through a thorough, and, at times, tedious, reviewing of many individuals and organizations the long shadow that Paine has cast over the country. Prominent figures, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, and Eugene Debs as well as various labor unions, women's rights activists, and the Winter Soldiers in the Vietnam Veterans against the War among many others have all culled forth the words of Paine either directly or indirectly. In some circles, particularly more establishment-oriented ones and beginning with the Federalist John Adams, he never had much standing, but in others, he has persistently inspired.

Kaye also wrests Paine's intentions away from conservatives and libertarians. At times, his words could sound like he was against government in all forms. But since he believed that "God had provided the land as a collective endowment for humanity," he advocated for a tax on landed wealth and property to give back to the people who had been dispossessed of land. He was opposed to government when it became tyrannical; he was for it when it could provide succor and equality.

Gregory says

This book was part history of Thomas Paine and his times, and part history of how Thomas Paine has been both lauded and condemned throughout American history. Kaye identifies unapologetically with the Left, and so it is interesting to read an overview of American history from that perspective. We are so used to identifying with one side or the other that we forget that our "good guys" are the "bad guys" for the other side.

Kaye did a tremendous amount of research for this book. He seems to have tracked down every reference to Paine in our history! Really insightful, and shows how Americans of all stripes have used Paine for their own purposes.

Mark miller says

Contributing fundamentally to the American Revolution, the French Revolution, and the struggles of the British workers in the industrial Revolution, Thomas Paine was one of the most remarkable political writers of the modern world and the greatest radical of a radical age. Paine was America's greatest Revolutionary and it was he who sparked the torch of freedom. Thomas Paine proudly maintained that "America is the only country in the world how to treat religion," for "in America we consider the assumption of such powers as a species of tyrannic arrogance, and do not grant liberty of conscience as a favor but confirmed it as a right." At the same time he never lost sight of the dangers of class. Admonishing his fellow citizens-the well off in particular-not to forget that "in all countries where the freedom of the poor has been taken away, in whole or in part, that the freedom of the rich lost its defense," he insisted that "freedom must have all or none, and she must have them equally. Any of these words sound familiar? They should. His friends formed the Constitution of the United states based on his book "Common Sense". After the American Revolutionary war and the French Revolution he wrote "The Age of Reason" denouncing religion as a hoax the people of the U.S took away his citizenship. Though he died in America very few attended his funeral. No public dignitaries were present. The French woman Madame De Bonneville and her sons would recall: Contemplating who it was, what man it was, that we were committing to an obscure grave on an open and disregarded bit of land, I could not help feeling most acutely. Before the earth was thrown down upon the coffin, I placing myself at the east of the grave, said to my son Benjamin, "stand you you there, at the other end, as a witness for grateful America." Looking round me, and beholding the small group of spectators, I exclaimed as the earth was tumbled into the grave, "Oh! Mr Paine.! My son stands here as testimony of the gratitude of America, and I, for France!" This was the funeral ceremony of this great politician and philosopher!

To my son I read the lines of our hero by memory "These are the time that try men's souls:The summer soldier and sunshine patriot will, in this crisis shrink from the service of our country; but he who stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of every man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet

we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly-- 'Tis dearness only that gives everything its value."-Thomas Paine- the Spirit of world freedom.
