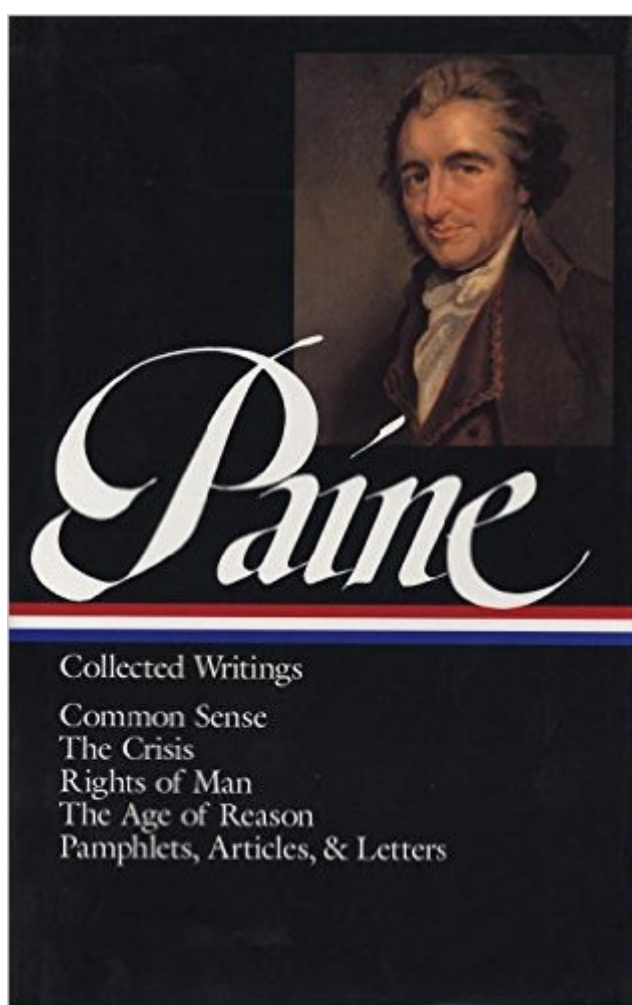


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Thomas Paine : Collected Writings : Common Sense / The Crisis / Rights Of Man / The Age Of Reason / Pamphlets, Articles, And Letters (Library Of America)



Synopsis

Thomas Paine was the impassioned democratic voice of the Age of Revolution, and this volume brings together his best-known works: *Common Sense*, *The American Crisis*, *Rights of Man*, *The Age of Reason*, along with a selection of letters, articles and pamphlets that emphasizes Paine's American years. "I know not whether any man in the world," wrote John Adams in 1805, "has had more influence on its inhabitants or affairs for the last thirty years than Tom Paine." The impassioned democratic voice of the Age of Revolution, Paine wrote for his mass audience with vigor, clarity, and "common sense." This Library of America volume is the first major new edition of his work in 50 years, and the most comprehensive single-volume collection of his writings available. Paine came to America in 1774 at age 37 after a life of obscurity and failure in England. Within fourteen months he published *Common Sense*, the most influential pamphlet for the American Revolution, and began a career that would see him prosecuted in England, imprisoned and nearly executed in France, and hailed and reviled in the American nation he helped create. In *Common Sense*, Paine set forth an inspiring vision of an independent America as an asylum for freedom and an example of popular self-government in a world oppressed by despotism and hereditary privilege. *The American Crisis*, begun during "the times that try men's souls" in 1776, is a masterpiece of popular pamphleteering in which Paine vividly reports current developments, taunts and ridicules British adversaries, and enjoins his readers to remember the immense stakes of their struggle. Among the many other items included in the volume are the combative "Forester" letters, written in a reply to a Tory critic of *Common Sense*, and several pieces concerning the French Revolution, including an incisive argument against executing Louis XVI. *Rights of Man* (1791–1792), written in response to Edmund Burke's attacks on the French Revolution, is a bold vision of an egalitarian society founded on natural rights and unbound by tradition. Paine's detailed proposal for government assistance to the poor inspired generations of subsequent radicals and reformers. *The Age of Reason* (1794–1795), Paine's most controversial work, is an unrestrained assault on the authority of the Bible and a fervent defense of the benevolent God of deism. Included in this volume are a detailed chronology of Paine's life, informative notes, an essay on the complex printing history of Paine's work, and an index.

Book Information

Series: Library of America (Book 76)

Hardcover: 906 pages

Publisher: Library of America; 1st edition (March 1, 1995)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1883011035

ISBN-13: 978-1883011031

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 1.1 x 8.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (1,072 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #225,472 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #161 inÂ Books > Politics & Social

Sciences > Politics & Government > Ideologies & Doctrines > Radicalism #564 inÂ Books >

History > Americas > United States > Revolution & Founding

Customer Reviews

Common Sense is one of the greatest articles of argumentation ever written. Paine was the finest pamphleteer of his age and was able to turn the discontents of the colonists and, especially, the intellectual leaders of the revolutionary movement into arguments that were easily understood by ordinary colonials and which inspired them to rally to the cause of independence. I first read Common Sense more than fifty years ago and remember well being impressed with Paine's ability to carry arguments and to anticipate those of his opponents before his tract even hit the street. Over the course of my lifetime, I was inspired by the author and became a pamphleteer of sorts myself. I always told my colleagues that I wanted to become a poor man's Tom Paine. But after reading the piece once again, I realize that almost all who aspire to follow in his footsteps, if not fill his shoes, are doomed to become but very poor copies of the original. Other reviewers have noted the fluidity of his writing; it reads as simply, directly and forcefully today as it must have nearly a quarter of a millennium ago. Obviously, one did not have to be a great reader to be swayed by the force of Paine's words or to be inspired to the side of those wishing to throw off the English yoke. I was struck by echoes of Paine in many great American speeches that were running through my mind as I read. A number of quotes from Robert F. Kennedy seemed to have been directly inspired by Common Sense, and I hastily looked them up and offer these two for your consideration: "It is not enough to understand, or to see clearly. The future will be shaped in the arena of human activity, by those willing to commit their minds and their bodies to the task.

In an unrelenting quest to understanding the history of the United States, one obscure name comes to mind, Thomas Paine. Paine helped establish the meaning of democracy and the "united" in United States. His two monumental works, COMMON SENSE AND RIGHTS OF MAN, provided the

philosophical and rhetorical building blocks that the founding fathers, such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, et al., would emulate with the writing of the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights. Many take for granted the origins of freedom and democracy in the United States, and as with many school history textbooks depict, Paine merely appears in a paragraph or two, and quickly disappears to historical oblivion. Nevertheless, when one reads COMMON SENSE AND RIGHTS OF MAN: AND OTHER ESSENTIAL WRITINGS OF THOMAS PAINE, there will be no doubt how significant his philosophical and political writings transformed the political structure of the colonies. Although this may sound somewhat romanticized, Paine's words ignited the energy for the colonists to free themselves from the tyrannical-monarchical leadership of England's King George III. With all the talk of Paine being a founding father, he may also be considered the father of revolution, American Revolution and French Revolution, and human rights. Without the inspiration from his friend Edmund Burke, author of REFLECTIONS ON THE REVOLUTION IN FRANCE, Paine may not have been able to write the pamphlet Rights of Man. Indeed, his power of the written word translated to revolutionary action, and Jeffersonian ideology. In clear and no nonsense language, Paine's perspective of the state of the colonies are elaborately told in COMMON SENSE.

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