

Name: _____ Period: _____ Date: _____

United States History



Thomas Paine

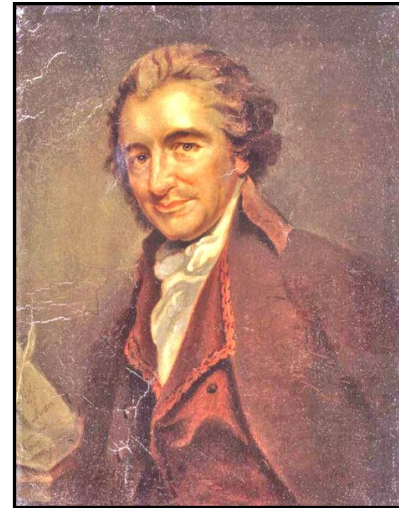
Thomas Paine's pamphlet, *Common Sense*, motivated the colonists to fight against England. It inspired the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. *Common Sense* was a best seller that changed the world forever.

Paine rose from humble beginnings in England. He experienced failure and disappointment as a corset-maker, seaman, teacher, and tax collector for the King. In London, Benjamin Franklin convinced Paine that better opportunities awaited him in the colonies. Paine, 38, arrived in 1774. He quickly became editor of *Pennsylvania Magazine*. He published *Common Sense* in 1776. It sold 150,000 copies—one for every ten people in the reading public.

“ 'Tis Time to Part”

Three of Paine's most influential ideas were those of liberty, natural rights, and republican democracy. In the idea of liberty, Paine gave the colonists a noble reason for the War for Independence. Heavy British tariffs made the colonists angry. But not many people were willing to risk their lives to avoid paying taxes. Paine persuaded the colonists that the future of humankind depended on the establishment of a new country based on the principles of liberty and equality.

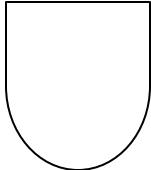
Paine believed that people possessed a natural right to govern themselves. He explained the concept in bold language that stirred people. When their



natural right to decide what kind of country they wanted was violated by a tyrant, people had a right to fight back, Paine said. The notion of natural rights inspired the first paragraph of the Declaration of Independence.

Paine also made the idea of a republic, or representational democracy, acceptable. In the Roman Empire, the first republican democracy, tyrants took over. The republican form of democracy had been considered corrupt since then. Paine explained that a large, democratic country could be governed effectively only as a republic. People would elect the wisest and best men as their representatives. The men would debate and decide on important issues. Paine paved the way for the republican form of government embodied in the U.S. Constitution.

To discredit his ideas, British pamphlets called Paine an alcoholic. Although many people believed this, historians disproved it when they discovered he was a Quaker. Paine's language may seem wordy to us today, but he was the revolutionary voice of his era.



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1. Why was *Common Sense* considered a best seller of its time?

2. What argument persuaded the colonists that it was worth risking their lives fighting against Great Britain?

3. How did the idea of "*natural rights*" stir up people?

4. What is a republican form of government?

5. **DRAWING CONCLUSIONS:** Why did the British distribute pamphlets claiming that Thomas Paine was an alcoholic?
