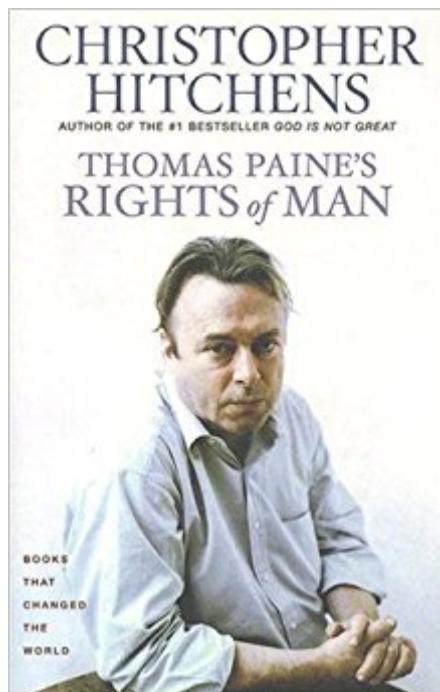


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Thomas Paine's Rights Of Man: A Biography (Books That Changed The World)



Synopsis

Thomas Paine was one of the greatest advocates of freedom in history, and his Declaration of the Rights of Man, first published in 1791, is the key to his reputation. Inspired by his outrage at Edmund Burke's attack on the French Revolution, Paine's text is a passionate defense of man's inalienable rights. Since its publication, Rights of Man has been celebrated, criticized, maligned, suppressed, and co-opted. But in Thomas Paine's Rights of Man, the polemicist and commentator Christopher Hitchens, at his characteristically incisive best, marvels at its forethought and revels in its contentiousness (The Times, London). Hitchens is a political descendant of the great pamphleteer, a Tom Paine for our troubled times. (The Independent, London) In this engaging account of Paine's life and times [that is] well worth reading he demonstrates how Paine's book forms the philosophical cornerstone of the United States, and how, in a time when both rights and reason are under attack, Thomas Paine's life and writing will always be part of the arsenal on which we shall need to depend. (New Statesman)

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Thomas Paine's critique of monarchy and introduction of the concept of human rights influenced both the French and the American revolutions, argues Vanity Fair contributor and bestselling author Hitchens (God Is Not Great) in this incisive addition to the Books That Changed the World series.

Paine's ideas even influenced later independence movements among the Irish, Scots and Welsh. In this lucid assessment, Hitchens notes that in addition to Common Sense's influence on Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence, Paine wrote in unadorned prose that ordinary people could understand. Hitchens reads Paine's rejection of the ministrations of clergy in his dying moments as an instance of his unyielding commitment to the cause of rights and reason. But Hitchens also takes Paine to task for appealing to an idealized state of nature, a rhetorical move that, Hitchens charges, posits either a mythical past or an unattainable future and, Hitchens avers, disordered the radical tradition thereafter. Hitchens writes in characteristically energetic prose, and his aversion to religion is in evidence, too. Young Paine found his mother's Anglican orthodoxy noxious, Hitchens notes: Freethinking has good reason to be grateful to Mrs Paine. (Sept.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Hitchens' sprightly Books That Changed the World volume arrives fortuitously, while his atheist screed God Is Not Great (2007) rides high on American best-seller lists. For Paine, though not precisely atheist (he was a deist), contributed vitally to nonbelief through his logical, materialist rejection of biblical literalism. Hitchens inserts scraps of Paine's religious criticism into an appreciation that primarily stresses Paine's advocacy of antimonarchical revolution and constitutional republicanism. Paine's most practically influential writing was the pamphlet Common Sense (1776), which inspired the American Revolution, but Rights of Man (1791–92) is his greatest work. It is largely a reply to Edmund Burke's severely critical Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790), and Hitchens discusses it as such, giving Burke his due but affirming Paine's greater liberalism and demonstrating his more accessible and engaging literary style. Though Hitchens eschews discussion of rights per se, including Paine's definition of them, he refreshingly notes his hero's great shortcoming: he didn't see that ideologically driven revolution would lead to tyranny. Olson, Ray

As usual, Hitch delivers a piece of history with a thoroughly researched and well thought-out background. You don't get this detail in high school text books, and that may be part of what's wrong with our country. We don't insist that our textbook historians put the action in the proper place in history, showing how people were living at the time and what their attitudes might be, and so we come to make judgements based on bad information. They provide "fact based on fiction", all too often, or depend on writers of "fiction based on fact" to fill out our knowledge. This book is "fact based on fact" - a true gem!

I think Christopher Hitchens is one of the recent masters of clear and concise English prose, delivered with consistent style and flair, and reflecting the insights of one of the brightest minds of our generation. Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson were among his heroes, and in this book, Hitchens paints of vibrant picture of Paine's contributions to public discourse in the time leading up to the American and French revolutions. It's a joy to read, and like all of Hitchens, informative and provocative in the best possible way.

I'm a big Hitchens fan, but I really wish some American history scholar had done this work instead of my favorite atheist. Hitchens drives home the point as he reads about the life and works of Thomas Paine, and where one does get a sense of Hitchens' own social values, one becomes curious why he didn't also Locke, Hobbes, Jefferson or even Benjamin Franklin. Even so, I do wish Hitchens had not passed on, or at least done more audio books with his own voice before succumbing to cancer. The work feels a bit of tone to me because it is Hitchens narrating a work of American history, but at the same time it is rather befitting both him and the work itself. It's one of those strange dichotomy's that has both at odds and synching with one another as the work unfolds. Give it a listen.

Hutchins immense knowledge and surgical intelligence are on full display here, giving one of history's famous but not truly known figures his due. Thomas Paine lived the demand for freedom -- a daring gadfly in England, an indispensable catalyst in America, a celebrated hero in France who then fell afoul of the Terror and spent two years in prison. He fell out with Jefferson over slavery not being abolished in the Constitution, then was abandoned by everyone else when he ultimately wrote a rationalist critique of all religion. A hero for our times -- somebody should make a movie....

Hitchens is more than a great writer: He has an acerbic personality with wit, humor, and a keen sense of human foibles and contradictions. He is also an intransigent atheist! Thomas Paine almost comes to life in this book by Hitchens. No one interested can ever know enough about Paine the man, the patriot, the pamphleteer. RIP Hitchens..

In conclusion for the history student's basic comprehension of our American heritage this book is a must. Tom Paine revolution creator

For a time I thought I was actually there

One of my favorite author's!

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