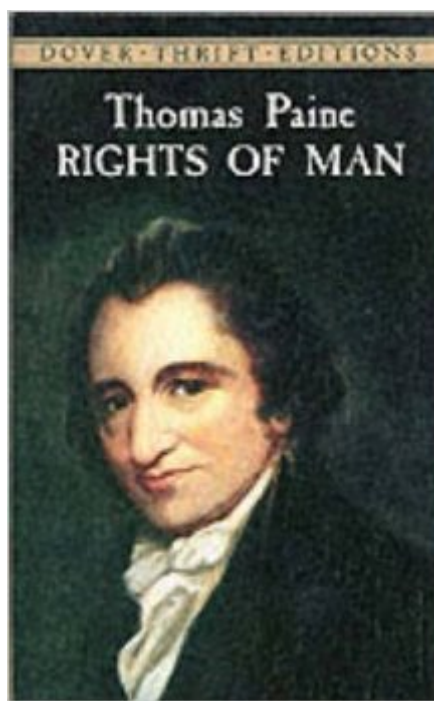


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Rights Of Man (Dover Thrift Editions)



Synopsis

One of the most influential writers and reformers of his age, Thomas Paine successfully publicized the issues of his time in pamphlets that clearly and persuasively argued for political independence and social reform. *Rights of Man*, his greatest and most widely read work, is considered a classic statement of faith in democracy and egalitarianism. The first part of this document, dedicated to George Washington, appeared in 1791. Defending the early events of the French Revolution, it spoke on behalf of democracy, equality, and a new European order. Part Two, which appeared the following year, is perhaps Paine's finest example of political pamphleteering and an exemplary work that supported social security for workers, public employment for those in need of work, abolition of laws limiting wages, and other social reforms. Written in the language of common speech, *Rights of Man* was a sensation in the United States, defended by many who agreed with Paine's defense of republican government; but in Britain, it was labeled by Parliament as highly seditious, causing the government to suppress it and prosecute the British-born Paine for treason. Regarded by historian E. P. Thompson as the "foundation-text for the English working-class movement," this much-read and much-studied book remains an inspiring, rational work that paved the way for the growth and development of radical traditions in American and British society.

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Customer Reviews

"Rights of Man" (1791-92) is Thomas Paine's famous response to Edmund Burke's "Reflections on the Revolution of France" (1790). Although it helps have read Burke's essay, a general background

is sufficient to understand and appreciate Paine's basic and groundbreaking arguments. Paine and Burke were originally allies; Burke not only supported self-rule for the American colonies, he also supported the emancipation of the House of Commons from monarchical control and the independence of both Ireland and India. Many of his allies, then, were bewildered by his fervent opposition to the French Revolution; Burke drew the line between territorial autonomy from a distant or aloof government and the total overthrow of existing monarchies and institutions. For Burke, humankind's real enemies were drastic change and "unsocial, uncivil, unconnected chaos," and he proved himself a staunch defender of the status quo, of precedent, and of gradual reform. Jerry Muller, in his recent--and superb--book "The Mind and the Market" asserts that Burke's denunciation of the French revolution is "the single most influential work of conservative thought published from his day to ours." (This, of course, depends on what one means by "conservative.") Yet Muller and likeminded historians inevitably cherry-pick Burke's more attractive economic and philosophical arguments and foreground Burke's critique, in Muller's words, "of the revolutionary mentality that attempts to create entirely new structures on the basis of rational, abstract principles." (Muller doesn't even mention Paine, much less the example of the United States.) Such a focus inevitably sidesteps Burke's brief for the supremacy of European monarchical institutions and of the landed aristocracy. And that's where Paine comes in.

Paine wrote RoM while in France, during the early years of the revolution, in response to an antirevolutionary pamphlet from his previous friend Burke. There is lots of polemics going on, and the crux of the matter is that Burke makes light of The Declaration of the Rights of Man, which was adopted by the French National Assembly in August 1789, after the storm of the Bastille. The Declaration, written by Lafayette with some input by Jefferson, is a brief and concise document. It became the preamble of the constitution of 1791. Here a shortened version.

1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good.
2. The aim of all political association is the preservation of the ... rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.
3. The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation. ...
4. Liberty consists in the freedom to do everything which injures no one else; ... These limits can only be determined by law.
5. Law can only prohibit such actions as are hurtful to society. Nothing may be prevented which is not forbidden by law, and no one may be forced to do anything not provided for by law.
6. Law is the expression of the general will. Every citizen has a right to participate personally, or through his representative, in its foundation. It must be the same for all, whether it protects or punishes. ...
7. No person shall be accused, arrested, or

imprisoned except in the cases and according to the forms prescribed by law. ...8.

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