

Teacher: Shauna Liverotti

Title: AP US History Instructor

FLVS Course: AP US History

Topic: Was Thomas Paine too much of a freethinker for the country he helped free?

Grade level: 9-12

(Enrichment activity for 3.06 AP US History)

FLVS Turning Points Grant Lesson/ Activity/Content	
Summary: <i>(A short 3-5 sentence summary of the Activity and how it will be delivered)</i>	Students and even historians often times mistake the political cartoon found in AP US History Lesson 3.06 (course versions eight and nine) to be Thomas Jefferson when in reality it is Paine when analyzing the cartoon. By reading this article on Paine, analyzing the political cartoon, and responding to the prompt of the lesson, students will gain a deeper understanding of the issues that the American public had with Paine.
National Standards for History Era: Link	Era 3 Revolution and the New Nation (1754-1820s)
State Standard(s): Link to SSS Link to Next Gen SSS	<u>Social Studies</u> SS.912.A.1.2: Utilize a variety of primary and secondary sources to identify author, historical significance, audience, and authenticity to understand a historical period. SS.912.A.1.1: Describe the importance of historiography, which includes how historical knowledge is obtained and transmitted, when interpreting events in history. SS.912.A.1.4: Analyze how images, symbols, objects, cartoons, graphs, charts, maps, and artwork may be used to interpret the significance of time periods and events from the past. (Note: Next Generation Standards for high school begin after The Civil War-this lesson will be used for an AP US History lesson designed on the national standards.) <u>Language Arts</u> LA.1112.4.2.2: The student will record information and ideas from primary and/or secondary sources accurately and coherently, noting the validity and reliability of these sources and attributing sources of information. LA.1112.6.4.2: The student will routinely use digital tools for publication, communication and productivity. LA.1112.3.2.2: The student will draft writing by establishing a logical

	<p>organizational pattern with supporting details that are substantial, specific, and relevant; and...(cut off on state webpage)</p> <p>LA.1112.3.5.1: The student will prepare writing using technology in a format appropriate to the purpose (e.g., for display, multimedia)</p> <p>LA.1112.6.3.1: The student will distinguish between propaganda and ethical reasoning strategies in print and nonprint media</p> <p>LA.1112.3.5.3: The student will sharing [sic] with others, or submitting for publication.</p>
Themes/Concept:	<p>Keywords: Deism, Quaker, French Revolution, free thinker, Federalist, Rights of Man, Second Great Awakening, Enlightenment, propaganda, <i>Common Sense</i>, <i>Letters to the citizens of the United States</i>, Lockean liberalism, classical republicanism, and Leveller radicalism, The American Crisis, Newtonian rationalism, The American Crisis, Mercy Otis Warren, William Pitt, atheist, psyche, free thinker</p>
Essential questions (2-5 questions) (What you want the students to know)	<p>Why did the attitude of The American public about Paine shift from the time of the publication of <i>Common Sense</i>?</p> <p>To what extent did religion play a role in early American social and political history?</p> <p>To what extent did the violence of The French Revolution impact American attitudes?</p>
Learning Goal(s): (What you want students to understand)	<p>Students will understand the shifting attitude that Americans held towards Paine from The publication of <i>Common Sense</i> to his “downfall” in American public life after the revolution.</p>
Launch Activity (Hook)	<p>(This activity is part of the course and relates to material found in the pre-reading found in Lesson 3.06 and in The Enduring Vision textbook Chapter 5</p>
Knowledge & Skills (People, Places, times and vocabulary-what the student should be able to do. What skills will they use?)	<p>This activity will engage students in analyzing primary source documents, critical thinking, and making inferences.</p> <p>Important concepts/vocabulary: Deism, Quaker, French Revolution, free thinker, Federalist, Rights of Man, Second Great Awakening, Enlightenment, propaganda, <i>Common Sense</i>, <i>Letters to the citizens of the United States</i>, Lockean liberalism, classical republicanism, and Leveller radicalism, The American Crisis, Newtonian rationalism, The American Crisis, Mercy Otis Warren, William Pitt, atheist, psyche, free thinker</p> <p>(Students will be provided with a companion guide of difficult terms found in the article)</p>

Lesson (The lesson itself; Procedure)

This assignment will serve as an enrichment activity for Lesson 3.06. The students are expected to do the pre-reading in the text and look at the lesson prior to completing the enrichment activity.

- 1. After doing the above students will be provided with an opportunity to read the article [w]as Thomas Paine too much of a freethinker for the country he helped free by... The teacher will provide a list defining challenging or unfamiliar vocabulary, terms and or concepts.*
- 2. Students will provide a two-three paragraph response to the title of the article on the course discussion board by following the guidelines of the rubric below. They will be required to use at least 5 of the highlighted terms in the text in their writing for either the initial post or the response.*
- 3. Students will also be required to provide a response to a fellow classmates post stating if they agree or disagree with the student and why. The response should be two-three paragraphs in length.*

Assessment Evidence:

Essay Grading Rubric

This assignment should be submitted as a BLANK ASSESSMENT in either Module 6. Successful students will receive an additional 50 points for this assignment. Student must respond in the student comment box with the date of the post and the name of the student that he/she responded to.

Requirements:	Possible Points:	Student Points:
The student writes one paragraph according to the discussion prompt. Paragraph should include a sound thesis statement supported by facts, not opinion.	20	
The student responds to at least one student. Response should argue or agree, with at least one piece of evidence, their thesis statement & should be respectful and considerate in the response posting. Five vocabulary terms should be used.	20	
The student lists the date of the initial posting and the name of the student	5	

to whom he or she responded.		
There are no spelling or grammar errors.	5	

Resources and instructional tools:

Course Discussion Board and article from *The New Yorker* magazine

The New Yorker Magazine Article:

Lepore, J. (2006, October 16). Was Thomas Paine too much of a freethinker for the country he helped free? . *The New Yorker*, Retrieved from http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2006/10/16/061016crbo_books?currentPage=all

Text:

Boyer, P. S., McNair, S., & Hawley, C. E. *The Enduring Vision* Advanced Placement Edition 6th Edition--2008 (online version). McDougall Little - Houghton Mifflin.

Course link

03.06 problems with great britain vex jefferson . (2007). Retrieved from http://learn.flvs.net/educator/teacher/frame.cgi?sfalangaliverot1*mpos=1&spos=0&option=hide_menu&slt=yGUf.k3UMVqnU*3069*http://learn.flvs.net/webdav/educator_apush_v9/index.htm

than a decade of taxes and nearly a year of war had not: that it was nothing less than their destiny to declare independence from Britain. “The cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind” was its astonishing and inspiring claim about the fate of thirteen infant colonies on the edge of the world. “The sun never shone on a cause of greater worth. ’Tis not the affair of a city, a county, a province, or a kingdom; but of a continent—of at least one-eighth part of the habitable globe. ’Tis not the concern of a day, a year, or an age; posterity are virtually involved in the contest, and will be more or less affected, even to the end of time, by the proceedings now.” Whether these words were preposterous or prophetic no one could say for sure, but everyone wondered: Who could have written such stirring stuff?

“People Speak of it in rapturous praise,” a friend wrote Adams. “Some make Dr. Franklin the Author,” another hinted. “I think I see strong marks of *your pen* in it,” speculated a third. More miffed than flattered, Adams admitted to his wife, Abigail, “I could not have written any Thing in so manly and striking a style.” Who, then? Adams found out: “His Name is Paine.”

Thomas Pain was born in Thetford, England, in 1737 (he added the “e” later, and was called “Tom” only by his enemies), the son of a Quaker artisan who sewed the bones of whales into stays for ladies’ corsets. He left the local grammar school at the age of twelve, to serve as his father’s apprentice. At twenty, he went to sea, on a privateer. In 1759, he opened his own stay-making shop and married a servant girl, but the next year both she and their child died in childbirth. For a decade, Pain struggled to make a life for himself. He taught school, collected taxes, and, in 1771, married a grocer’s daughter. Three years later, he was fired from his job with the excise office, his unhappy and childless second marriage fell apart, and everything he owned was sold at auction to pay off his debts. At the age of thirty-seven, Thomas Pain was ruined. He therefore did what every ruined Englishman did, if he possibly could: he sailed to America. Sickened with typhus during the journey, Pain arrived in Philadelphia in December, 1774, so weak that he had to be carried off the ship. What saved his life was a letter found in his pocket: “The bearer Mr Thomas Pain is very well recommended to me as an ingenious worthy young man.” It was signed by Benjamin Franklin. It was better than a bag of gold.

How an unknown and uneducated Englishman who had been in the colonies for little more than a year came to write the most influential essay of the American Revolution—no matter that he had once caught Franklin’s eye during a chance meeting in London—is a mystery not easily solved. Lockean liberalism, classical republicanism, and Leveller radicalism all can be found in Paine’s work, though how much he read Locke, or anyone else, is probably impossible to discover. His love for equality has been traced to Quakerism, his hatred of injustice to growing up next door to a gallows. Good guesses, but guesses all the same. In a rewarding new biography, “Thomas Paine: Enlightenment, Revolution, and the Birth of Modern Nations” (Viking; \$27.95), Craig Nelson argues that Paine soaked up the ideas of the Enlightenment, especially Newtonian rationalism, during the years he spent in London, and that may be the best explanation anyone ever gets.

“I offer nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense,” Paine wrote, but this was coyness itself: “Common Sense” stood every argument against American independence on its head. “There is something very absurd in supposing a continent to be perpetually governed by an island,” he insisted. As to the colonies’ dependence on England, “We may as well assert

that because a child has thrived upon milk, that it is never to have meat.” And hereditary monarchy? “Nature disapproves it, otherwise she would not so frequently turn it into ridicule by giving mankind an *ass for a lion*.”

Adams, who had been the colonies’ most ardent advocate for independence, refused to accept that Paine deserved any credit for “Common Sense.” “He is a keen Writer,” Adams granted, but he’d offered nothing more than “a tolerable Summary of the Arguments which I had been repeating again and again in Congress for nine months.” The longer John Adams lived, the more he hated Thomas Paine, and the more worthless he considered that seventy-seven-page pamphlet. By the end of his life, the ill-tempered former President would call “Common Sense” “a poor, ignorant, Malicious, short-sighted, Crapulous Mass.”

Thomas Paine is, at best, a lesser Founder. In the comic-book version of history that serves as our national heritage, where the Founding Fathers are like the Hanna-Barbera Super Friends, Paine is Aquaman to Washington’s Superman and Jefferson’s Batman; we never find out how he got his superpowers, and he only shows up when they need someone who can swim. For all that, Paine’s contributions to the nation’s founding would be hard to overstate. “Common Sense” made it possible to declare independence. “Without the pen of the author of ‘Common Sense,’ the sword of Washington would have been raised in vain,” Adams himself wrote. But Paine lifted his sword, too, and emptied his purse. Despite his poverty—he was by far the poorest of the Founders—he donated his share of the profits from “Common Sense” to buy supplies for the Continental Army, in which he also served. His chief contribution to the war was a series of dispatches known as “**The American Crisis**,” and printed in newspapers throughout the states. He wrote the first of them by the light of a campfire during Washington’s desperate retreat across New Jersey, in December, 1776. Getting ready to cross the frozen Delaware River—at night, in a blizzard—to launch a surprise attack on Trenton, Washington ordered Paine’s words read to his exhausted, frostbitten troops: “These are the times that try men’s souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it *now*, deserves the love and thanks of 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.” The next morning, the Continentals fought to a stunning, pivotal victory.

It’s hard to believe that anyone thought Adams could have written such lines. Paine wrote like no one else: he wrote for everyone. “As it is my design to make those that can scarcely read understand,” he explained, “I shall therefore avoid every literary ornament and put it in language as plain as the alphabet.” As a journalist, Paine wrote vigorously, and he wrote often, penning, in 1776, a series of essays in the *Pennsylvania Journal* refuting critiques of “Common Sense.” He also served as the editor of the *Pennsylvania Magazine*. “A magazine,” Paine believed, “is the nursery of genius.”

So gripping was Paine’s prose, and so vast was its reach, that Adams once complained to Jefferson, “History is to ascribe the American Revolution to Thomas Paine.” But history has not been kind to Paine, who forfeited his chance to glorify his role, or at least to document it: when, at the end of the war, Congress asked him to write the history of the Revolution, he declined. And the person who did write that history, Adams’s friend the Massachusetts poet and playwright **Mercy Otis Warren**, relegated Paine to a footnote—literally—in her magisterial three-

volume “History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution” (1805). By the time Paine died, in 1809, all the surviving Founders had renounced him. (Jefferson even refused to allow his correspondence with Paine to be printed. “No, my dear sir, not for this world,” he told an inquirer. “Into what a hornet’s nest would it thrust my head!”) And almost no one showed up to see him buried. As Paul Collins observes in “The Trouble with Tom: The Strange Afterlife and Times of Thomas Paine” (Bloomsbury; \$24.95), “There were twenty thousand mourners at Franklin’s funeral. Tom Paine’s had six.”

Disavowed by his contemporaries, Paine left little behind in his own defense; the bulk of his papers, including notes for an autobiography, were destroyed in a fire. Even his bones have been lost. (The sorry story of those bones—stolen, stashed, smashed, and, in the end, probably thrown out with the rubbish—is the subject of Collins’s transatlantic quest.) Paine enjoyed a brief revival in the nineteen-forties, after F.D.R. quoted “The American Crisis”—“These are the times that try men’s souls”—in a fireside chat in 1942, three months after the attack on Pearl Harbor; and an excellent two-volume set, “The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine,” edited by Philip Foner, was published in 1945. But Paine has never much enjoyed the esteem of academics, who, on the whole, have shared John Adams’s view of him, whatever the rest of America might think. In a review of “The Complete Writings” in *The Nation* in 1946, the eminent early-Americanist Perry Miller sneered, “The price of popularizing for contemporaries is temporary popularity.” In 1980, Ronald Reagan inaugurated a second Paine revival when, accepting the Republican Party nomination for President, he quoted “Common Sense”: “We have it in our power to begin the world over again.” In the wake of that revival, the Princeton historian Sean Wilentz agreed with Miller’s assessment; in *The New Republic* in 1995, Wilentz called Paine “hopelessly naïve.” Paine emerges in most academic accounts as a kind of idiot savant; savvy about adjectives but idiotic about politics. “Common Sense” is “a work of genius,” Bernard Bailyn concluded, but, next to men like Adams, Jefferson, and Madison, Paine was “an ignoramus.”

Thomas Paine left the United States in 1787. “Where liberty is, there is my country,” Franklin once said, to which Paine replied, “Where liberty is not, there is my country.” In England in 1791, he wrote the first part of “The Rights of Man,” a work he considered an English version of “Common Sense.” Defending the French Revolution from English critics, he argued that France had “outgrown the baby clothes of *count* and *duke*, and breeched itself in manhood.” Americans had weaned themselves of milk, and the French had put on pants; now it was time for the British to grow beards. “It is an age of revolutions, in which every thing may be looked for.” The next year, Paine wrote “Rights of Man, Part the Second,” his most important statement of political principles, in which he explained and insisted on natural rights, equality, and popular sovereignty. He went further: “When, in countries that are called civilized, we see age going to the work-house and youth to the gallows, something must be wrong in the system of government.” By way of remedy, Paine proposed the framework for a welfare state, providing tax tables calculated down to the last shilling.

The first part of “Rights of Man” sold fifty thousand copies in just three months. The second part was outsold only by the Bible. But British conservatives didn’t want to follow France, especially as the news from Paris became more gruesome. Paine was charged with seditious libel, and everywhere his ideas were suppressed and his followers persecuted. “I am for equality. Why, no kings!” one Londoner shouted in a coffeehouse, and was promptly sent to prison for a year and a

half. Meanwhile, William Pitt's government hired hack writers to conduct a smear campaign in which it was asserted, among other things, that Paine had committed fraud, defrauded his creditors, caused his first wife's death by beating her while she was pregnant, and abused his second wife almost as badly, except that she wasn't really his wife, because he never consummated that marriage, preferring to have sex with cats. Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, eat your hearts out.

"It is earnestly recommended to Mad Tom that he should embark for France and there be naturalized into the regular confusion of democracy," the London *Times* urged. In September, 1792, that's just what Paine did, fleeing to Paris, where he had already been elected a member of the National Assembly, in honor of his authorship of "Rights of Man." In France, he faltered and fell, not least because he spoke almost no French but mostly because he argued against executing Louis XVI, suggesting, instead, that he be exiled to the United States, where "he may learn, from the constant aspect of public prosperity, that the true system of government consists not in kings, but in fair, equal, and honourable representation."

Back in England, Paine's trial for "Rights of Man" went on without him; he was found guilty, and outlawed. "If the French kill their King, it will be a signal for my departure," Paine had pledged before he left for France, but now he had no choice: not only could he not return to England; he couldn't venture an Atlantic crossing to the United States, for fear of being captured by a British warship. Instead, he stayed in his rooms in Paris, and waited for the worst. As the Reign of Terror unfolded, he drafted the first part of "The Age of Reason." In December, 1793, when the police knocked at his door, he handed a stash of papers to his friend the American poet and statesman Joel Barlow. Barlow carried the manuscript to the printers; the police carried Paine to an eight-by-ten cell on the ground floor of a prison that had once been a palace. There he would write most of the second part of "The Age of Reason" as he watched other inmates go daily to their deaths. (In six weeks in the summer of 1794, more than thirteen hundred people were executed.)

When the United States government failed to secure his release, Paine at first despaired. Then he raged, writing to the American Ambassador, James Monroe, "I should be tempted to curse the day I knew America. By contributing to her liberty I have lost my own." Finally, after ten months, he was freed. But he left prison an invalid. Ravaged by typhus, gout, recurring fevers, and a suppurating wound on his belly, he never fully recovered. He convalesced at Monroe's home in Paris and, for years, at the homes of a succession of supporters. After Jefferson defeated Adams in the election of 1800, the new President invited Paine to return to the United States. He sailed in 1802.

"The questions central to an understanding of Paine's career do not lend themselves to exploration within the confines of conventional biography," Eric Foner observed in 1976, in "Tom Paine and Revolutionary America." No argument there. What with the burned papers, the lost bones, and Paine's role in three revolutions, not to mention tabloid allegations of wife-beating, it's hard to know how to write about Paine. Three new books wrestle with what has come to be called "The Problem with Paine." Collins's "The Trouble with Tom," an entertaining romp, belongs to an emerging genre of popular history that might be called necro-tourism: Tom Paine's bones, Einstein's brain, Houdini's hands. Paine's strange fate in American cultural

memory is the subject of Harvey J. Kaye's deeply researched and revealing "Thomas Paine and the Promise of America" (Hill & Wang; \$25). Nelson's "Thomas Paine" is the most conventionally biographical, though it's as much a primer on the Enlightenment as it is the story of the stay-maker from Thetford—and all the better for it.

Kaye calls Paine "the greatest radical of a radical age," Collins dubs him "a walking revolution," Nelson sums him up as "Benjamin Franklin unleashed," and although I always thought that Franklin was Franklin unleashed, all of them are right. But none of them explain Paine's recent resurrection. Kaye, tracing Paine's influence on everyone from Abraham Lincoln (who admired Paine's style) to William Lloyd Garrison (who was accused of wanting to "out-Paine Tom Paine") and Walt Whitman (who, Kaye says, "longed to be Paine"), attributes Paine's popularity in the past two decades to the purity of his ideals, including a record on slavery that sets him apart from the rest of the Founders: Paine neither owned slaves nor profited from the slave trade and, in 1774, wrote an impassioned anti-slavery essay. Kaye concludes, "We find no Founder more committed to the progress of freedom, equality, and democracy than Paine."

True enough. But Americans' fresh embrace of Paine can also be attributed to our having forgotten the very thing about him that contributed most to his obscurity in the first place: his uncompromising condemnation of all the world's religions. In "The Age of Reason," published in 1794 and 1795, Paine wrote, "All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian, or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit." Theodore Roosevelt once called Paine a "filthy little atheist," but Paine did believe in God; he just didn't believe in the Bible or the Koran or the Torah; these he considered hearsay, lies, fables, and frauds that served to wreak havoc with humanity while hiding the beauty of God's creation, the evidence for which was everywhere obvious in "the universe we behold." In "The Age of Reason," Paine offered his own creed:

I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life.

I believe in the equality of man; and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavouring to make our fellow-creatures happy.

But . . . I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish Church, by the Roman Church, by the Greek Church, by the Turkish Church, by the Protestant Church, nor by any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church.

"Paine's religious opinions were those of three-fourths of the men of letters of the last age," Joel Barlow observed, probably overstating the case only slightly. Paine's views were hardly original; what was new was his audience. While other Enlightenment writers wrote for one another, Paine wrote, as always, for everyone. His contemporaries believed that radical philosophical speculation—especially critiques of religion—was to be shared only with men of education (and, it was assumed, judgment). The poor could not be trusted with such notions; freed of church-based morality, they would run amok. Paine disagreed, profoundly. To say that he was vilified for doing this is to miss the point. He was destroyed.

Mark Twain once said, "It took a brave man before the Civil War to confess he had read 'The

Age of Reason.’ ” But that didn’t mean it wasn’t read. In 1797 alone, a single Philadelphia printer sold a hundred thousand copies. In Britain, sales of “The Age of Reason” outpaced even those of “Rights of Man,” though, since it was banned as blasphemous, it’s impossible to know how many copies were sold. The London printer Richard Carlile, who called his bookstore the Temple of Reason, was fined a thousand pounds for publishing it, and sentenced to two years in jail. (During an earlier trial on similar charges, Carlile had read aloud from “Rights of Man,” a ploy that allowed him to publish it again, as a courtroom transcript.) After Carlile’s wife fell into the trap of selling “The Age of Reason” to a government agent posing as a bookstore browser, she—and her newborn baby—followed her husband to prison. Eventually, in order to avoid exposing anyone inside the bookstore to further prosecution, there appeared in the Temple of Reason an “invisible shopman,” a machine into which customers could drop coins and take out a book, about which Collins writes, “It is sobering to think that the freedom of the press once depended upon a mechanism now used to vend Mars bars.”

But “The Age of Reason” cost Paine dearly. He lost, among other things, the friendship of Samuel Adams, who seethed, “Do you think that your pen, or the pen of any other man, can unchristianize the mass of our citizens?” Even before Paine returned to the United States, in 1802, **Federalists** used him as a weapon against Jefferson, damning the “two Toms” as infidels while calling Paine a “loathsome reptile.” Ministers and their congregants, caught up in the early stages of a religious revival now known as the **Second Great Awakening**, gloried in news of Paine’s physical and mental decline, conjuring up a drunk, unshaven, and decrepit Paine, writhing in agony, begging, “Oh, Lord, help me! Oh, Christ, help me!”

Some of that fantasy was founded in fact. Even at his best, Paine was rough and unpolished—and a mean drunk. In his tortured final years, living in New Rochelle and New York City, he displayed signs of dementia. (Scurrilous rumors about cats aside, Paine’s behavior throughout his life appears erratic enough that Eric Foner wondered if he suffered from crippling bouts of depression; Nelson offers a tentative diagnosis of bipolar disorder.) At home, he was besieged by visitors who came either to save his soul or to damn it. He told all of them to go to hell. When an old woman announced, “I come from Almighty God to tell you that if you do not repent of your sins and believe in our blessed Savior Jesus Christ, you will be damned,” Paine replied, “Pshaw. God would not send such a foolish ugly old woman as you.”

Admirers of Paine’s political pamphlets have tried to ignore his religious convictions. In 1800, a New York Republican Society resolved, “May his Rights of Man be handed down to our latest posterity, but may his Age of Reason never live to see the rising generation.” That’s more or less how things have turned out. So wholly has “The Age of Reason” been forgotten that Paine’s mantle has been claimed not only by Ronald Reagan but also by the Christian Coalition’s Ralph Reed, who has invoked him, and the North Carolina senator Jesse Helms, who in 1992 supported a proposal to erect a Paine monument in Washington, D.C. Nor have **liberals** who embrace Paine, including the editors of TomPaine.com, had much interest in the latter years of his career. Maybe that’s what it means to be a lesser Super Friend: No one cares about your secret identity. They just like your costume.

Historians, too, have tried to dismiss “The Age of Reason,” writing it off as simplistic and suggesting either that Paine wrote it to please his French jailers or that, in prison, he went mad.

This interpretation began with Mercy Otis Warren, who called “The Age of Reason” “jeune,” and concluded that, in prison, Paine had “endeavoured to ingratiate himself.” Nelson, too, makes much of “the Terror’s devastation of Paine’s **psyche**.” (Only a miraculous if temporary recovery or the mania following depression, Nelson suggests, made it possible for Paine to write his last great work, “Agrarian Justice,” the very next year.)

But Paine considered his lifelong views on religion inseparable from his thoughts on government: “It has been the scheme of the Christian Church, and of all the other invented systems of religion, to hold man in ignorance of the Creator, as it is of Governments to hold man in ignorance of his rights.” Writing about kings and subjects in “Common Sense,” he wondered “how a race of men came into the world so exalted above the rest, and distinguished like some new species.” In “The Age of Reason,” he used much the same language to write about priests and prophets: “The Jews have their Moses; the Christians their Jesus Christ, their apostles and saints; and the Turks their Mahomet, as if the way to God was not open to every man alike.” He wrote “Common Sense,” “Rights of Man,” and “The Age of Reason” as a trilogy. “Soon after I had published the pamphlet ‘Common Sense,’ in America,” he explained, “I saw the exceeding probability that a revolution in the system of government would be followed by a revolution in the system of religion.”

Just because Paine was wrong about the coming of that revolution doesn’t mean we ought to forget that he yearned for it. In 1805, John Adams railed that the latter part of the eighteenth century had come to be called “the Age of Reason”: “I am willing you should call this the Age of Frivolity . . . and would not object if you had named it the Age of Folly, Vice, Frenzy, Brutality, Daemons, Buonaparte, Tom Paine, or the Age of the Burning Brand from the Bottomless Pit, or anything but the Age of Reason.” Yet even Adams would not have wished that so much of Paine’s work—however much he disagreed with it—would be so willfully excised from memory. “I know not whether any man in the world has had more influence on its inhabitants or affairs for the last thirty years than Tom Paine,” Adams admitted, adding, with irony worthy of the author of “Common Sense,” “Call it then the Age of Paine.”

Adams wrote those words, in 1805, as if Paine were already dead. A few months later, a neighbor of Paine’s came across the old man in a tavern in New Rochelle, so drunk and disoriented and unkempt that his toenails had grown over his toes, like bird’s claws. While Adams, at his home in Quincy, busied himself reflecting on the Age of Paine, Paine hobbled to the polls in New Rochelle to cast his vote in a local election. He was told that he was not an American citizen and was turned away. So much for the rights of man. Three years later, as the seventy-two-year-old Paine lay dying in a house in Greenwich Village, his doctor pressed him, “Do you wish to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?” Paine paused, then whispered, “I have no wish to believe on that subject.” ♦

Read more:

http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2006/10/16/061016crbo_books?printable=true#ixzz0oTpdeVyC

Link to the TAH Grant

This topic was covered in a recent National Humanities Center webinar with Dr. Ryan K. Smith on Deism and The Founding of The United States.

<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/ows/seminars/revolution/deism/index.htm>