

Radicals in Early American History

Roger Williams, Ethan Allan,
Thomas Jefferson, and Thomas Paine

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Abstract

The focus of this work is to explore how certain individuals caused fundamental change in early American society through their own ceaseless efforts. All of their actions came as a result of their radical thinking. Each one was motivated to oppose the status quo and for this reason, worked to bring about a revolutionary shift in power-- away from the monarchical/religious establishment-- into the hands of the people.

Chapter One includes an overview of the Reformation and its aftermath, including the Puritan exodus from England to the American colonies. Roger Williams was part of the exodus experience and he was the first colonist to advocate separation of church and state, and later established Rhode Island for those seeking liberty of conscience.

Chapter Two briefly reviews the Great Awakening and its impact on colonial society including Ethan Allen's family. Allen would later confront two powerfully entrenched institutions— wealthy landowners of New York and established Calvinist Christianity.

Chapter Three discusses Thomas Jefferson's coming of age during the Enlightenment and its impact on him as a life-long proponent of freedom from state coercion in religious matters which includes his masterpiece, the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom.

The final chapter highlights the life experiences of Thomas Paine which inevitably led him to colonial America, and how his radical forty-six page pamphlet inspired a Revolution.

“Hold Forth Liberty of Conscience”

Some of history's most compelling personalities are its radicals, those individuals who challenged the status quo, and altered destiny with their innovative ideas and actions. Roger Williams, Ethan Allen, Thomas Jefferson, and Thomas Paine are classic examples of radicals in early American history. Although each had a decidedly different background they shared in common a determination to confront entrenched religious institutions, bureaucracy, and the popular world view that dominated the mind set of their contemporaries. In so doing they changed the course of history and advanced the cause of freedom which we enjoy to the present day.

Indeed, we have become so accustomed to the separation of church and state that we often fail to appreciate how our freedom from state compelled religious adherence was won. It can be riveting to contemplate the fact that in colonial America when Roger Williams advocated liberty of conscience in matters of religion, he was considered a dangerous extremist by the magistrates of the Massachusetts Bay colony. He braved banishment in 1636 rather than submission to what was, in his view, unjust religious authoritarianism (Garner 89). By studying his life we can respect Williams as a visionary, a man ahead of his time who despite forbidding circumstances, established a haven for persecuted religious minorities.

Roger Williams was born (1603) in London and was baptized into the Church of England. He attended Cambridge University and was ordained into the ministry in 1628. While serving as chaplain on a private estate he met and married Mary Bernard in 1629.

In order to more clearly understand the context of Williams' experience, it will be helpful to review the development of the Reformation and its aftermath. In 1517 when a priest named Martin Luther tacked his Ninety-five Theses to a church door in Germany no one could have anticipated the staggering consequences his act of defiance would set into motion. At that time, all Europe's Christians were united in their Catholicism and religion was the dominating influence in the lives of nearly everyone. A power struggle ensued between Luther and the hierarchy in

Rome and when Luther refused to submit he was excommunicated. Angered by the Church's treatment of Luther and disgusted by the corruption within the Church, many clerics in northern Germany and Scandinavia joined Luther's protest and sought to reform Christianity. This movement became known as the Protestant Reformation (Divine 24).

England, too, broke its ties with Rome in 1534 when Henry VIII declared himself head of the Church of England which Henry kept Catholic in ritual, but Protestant in doctrine (23). Rome countered the Reformation with extensive leadership provided by Ignatius Loyola and his organization, the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). Italy, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, and France remained Catholic (Gaustad 2). Some historians suggest that it can be "helpful to view Protestantism and Catholicism as warring ideologies, bundles of deeply held beliefs that divided countries and families much as communism and capitalism did during the late twentieth century" (Divine 25).

Other reformers followed Luther, including John Calvin, who preached that salvation was predetermined for only those whom God selected. The individual was powerless in the face of God's decision. These clerics who determined "the course of religious reform in England, Scotland, and the early American colonies--mounted an even more strident campaign against Catholicism" (24).

In 1603, James I became England's king. James handled religious matters much as Henry had done, declaring himself head of the Church of England. Many Protestants, who had never been satisfied with religious compromises, began to agitate (Gaustad 11). They thought their Church should not have any trace of Catholic ceremony or tradition. Those who removed themselves from the English Church were called Separatists, and those who sought to reform the Church from within became known as Puritans. Both groups were strongly influenced by the teachings of John Calvin (10).

Meanwhile in 1607, Britons were wildly celebrating the first permanent English settlement in America established at Jamestown, Virginia. The intense response to Jamestown among the British was generated by something beyond national pride. From the time Henry severed ties with Rome, Protestantism gradually fused into the British "national identity" (Divine 25). "Anti-Catholicism filled the very air that one breathed in England. 'Papist' tarred any proposal or person so labeled, and 'jesuitical' became a synonym for the cunning, deceitful, and totally untrustworthy" (Gaustad 10). Therefore, the earliest advocates of

colonization in the New World stressed the need to establish “a Protestant bulwark against Catholic Spain” (Wright 73).

The seventeenth century was an era of “militant chauvinism” and religious zealotry (Divine 25). Treason was considered a less damning offense than heresy and exactness of theology more needed “than either science or sanitation” (Gaustad 8). In England, the practice of burning men and women at the stake had not been abandoned. The Puritans were disappointed that King James did not intend to implement their agenda of reform. The king was angry about the Puritans’ refusal to conform religious worship practices to the Book of Common Prayer. He ordered the bishops to strictly “enforce conformity” (Gaustad 12). With this, the Separatists (commonly known as Pilgrims) left England in 1620 and established the colony at Plymouth. The Puritans, however, intended to stay in England and reform the church (Divine 43).

Charles I was crowned king in 1625 and he immediately made it clear that religious dissent would not be tolerated. Charles elevated William Laud to the status of bishop. Laud’s appointment served to notify all dissenters that the full power of the church and state would be used to suppress them. “Persecution intensified as absolutism grew ever stronger” (19).

Some Puritans thought they might be able to protect themselves by taking advantage of the government’s policy that encouraged colonization. Seizing the opportunity, these religious dissidents formed the Massachusetts Bay Company and a charter was issued by the king. They set sail for America in March, 1630 and before the year was out nearly 2,000 people had joined the first settlers of Massachusetts Bay (Divine 45).

By this time, Roger Williams had adopted the Puritan ideology and this decision changed the course of his life. Mary and Roger Williams joined the exodus from England and arrived in America in February, 1631. Here the measure of Roger’s non-conformist thinking would become evident. When Roger was asked to be the minister for the parish in the village of Boston he declined the offer.

Williams’ character was such that he could not be influenced by outside forces--promising or threatening--to act against the dictates of his own inner guide. He said, simply, that he would never “act with a doubting Conscience” (26). Williams had come to the conclusion, apart from mainstream Puritan thought, that complete separation from the Church of England was a necessity. He contended that it would not be honorable “to pledge loyalty to an institution that one intended

to remake.” He explained that he “could not be both in the Church of England and at the same time busily engaged in its undoing” (Gaustad 25).

Williams also objected to a practice that almost all colonists accepted without question. Magistrates were authorized to enforce the commandments that prohibited blasphemy and idolatry and such offences were entirely within the “realm of religion,” said Williams. The directives to “love God,” shun idols, and remember “the Sabbath,” were matters for the conscience of the individual and should be of no concern to the “sheriff.” After all, this was New England--not Old. Boston took a dim view of this outlook (26).

Williams left for Salem anticipating more understanding from Separatists there, but officials in Boston quickly intervened. Although they had fled religious persecution in England, the Puritan leadership, nevertheless, demonstrated that they would not tolerate dissent within their own ranks (Divine 47). John Winthrop, governor of Massachusetts Bay, sent a cautionary word of advice to Salem regarding Roger Williams. Winthrop asserted that the clergy and the magistrates needed to work together for the security of Massachusetts in a hostile environment. Unity among all authority figures was a must for their mutual survival, Winthrop maintained, and Williams might prove troublesome. (Gaustad 27).

Recognizing that the authorities wanted to restrain him, Williams decided to leave Massachusetts Bay for Plymouth. He reasoned that since the founders of Plymouth were Separatists, they would understand the validity of his arguments which were so similar to many of theirs. He obtained a position as assistant pastor in a Plymouth church, 1631. During this time, Roger established friendships with the native people that would prove literally life-sustaining in the coming years (27).

Williams had become acutely interested in the native people living in the region, called the Wampanoag and Narraganset. Williams observed them, befriended them, and learned to speak their language. He started taking notes for his first book, the focus of which would be “anthropology and linguistics” and to a much lesser extent theology (Gaustad 28).

In his book, *The Key into the Language of America*, Williams protested the English tendency to think in terms of “the Indians’ barbarity and their own superiority.” He contrasted how the Natives were more courteous to one another and even toward strangers than the English often were. He admired Native

hospitality—never failing to offer travelers a place to stay. Yet, “Jews and Christians on the other hand, ‘have sent Christ Jesus to the Manger.’ ” Williams also praised Native respect for nature, noting they had no watches or clocks, but were guided by the sun, which the English seemed to “unthankfully despise” (29).

In his next book, *Christenings Make Not Christians*, Williams challenged the entire Christian establishment on their “monstrous and most inhuman conversions ” imposed upon Natives which he believed were not true conversions in reality. “*To have dominant cultures or powerful nations determine the religion of a powerless people was to learn nothing from the history of the ancient or European world.*” Such abusive practices were not carried out by true Christians, Williams insisted, but by those imposing “Christendom, a polluting mixture of politics with religion” (30). Williams protested that failure to recognize this simple truth had cost “the blood of thousands in civil combustions in all ages...” Indians were, in fact, suffering “persecution” in the guise of “evangelism” (31).

The essence of Williams’ deeply held conviction was that “*religion must be kept free of politics, and conversion free of armies and courts.*” He observed that the past was rife with instances of the use of force in religious matters, “but so did never the Lord Jesus bring any unto his most pure worship.” He had come to the conclusion that “a national church was by definition a political church.” Williams’ fond hope was to see the new American settlements grow into shining examples of authentic Christianity seeking only “righteousness” rather than “political patronage and power” (31).

All of Williams’ concerns undoubtedly caused uneasy discourse among the settlers, but they did not raise the alarm that his next book did. Although the title of this book is unknown-- because it is lost to history-- nonetheless Williams’ theme can be easily discerned because so many tracts opposing and disparaging the lost book were written and still exist. In this work, Williams demanded to know how Christian kings could be in the habit of giving grants of land that was not theirs to give. The land was rightfully the Indians until some agreement was reached with them or compensation was made to them. Williams was soon called to account for his opinions (32).

Williams had decided, in the meanwhile, to move back to Salem-- though his reasons for doing so remain unclear. This meant that he was under the jurisdiction of Massachusetts Bay. The magistrates called upon him to affirm his loyalty to the king and this Williams did. He was then sternly advised to keep quiet and to read

the Bible (34).

The magistrates must have known they were asking the impossible of Roger Williams-- he, verily, would not remain quiet. All male residents of Massachusetts Bay were, by the age of sixteen, required to take a loyalty oath to the governor and close the pledge with "so help me God." But what if the male in question was not a believer? Such an oath would force him to take the Lord's name in vain, and that would be sacrilegious Williams charged. The magistrates believed their patience had been tried once too often. They would have their justice at last (35).

In October, 1635, a grim order of the General Court read, "Whereas Mr. Roger Williams, [...] hath broached & divulged diverse new & dangerous opinions," and had questioned the authority of both the Church and State, and had failed to repent any of the said offenses, would by order of the Court, be required to leave Massachusetts Bay. Williams was allowed six weeks to prepare his departure. When he became ill, the deadline was extended (38).

Williams had also been ordered to refrain from any attempt to persuade others to his "dangerous opinions." Williams stopped his public preaching, but continued to speak freely in his own home. When the authorities in Boston heard that he was not keeping silent, the court was reconvened. It was decreed that Williams must be sent back to England at once before he led souls astray. The captain of a ship bound for England was asked to go to Salem and get Williams (45).

Friends alerted him as to the court's decision and Williams decided to leave Massachusetts Bay. He knew that in England he would have to answer to the unrelenting Archbishop Laud. Williams reasoned that under the circumstances he would get more understanding from the Natives than from his fellow Englishmen.

On a bitterly cold day in January, 1636, Williams left his family, friends, and the jurisdiction of Massachusetts Bay. He continued southward to get beyond Plymouth Bay, as well. Williams' inclination to trust in his friendship with the Natives proved decisive. They came to his aid and for fourteen weeks he lived with them and thus assured his survival. When at last he arrived at Narragansett Bay in Rhode Island territory he decided to stop. He would stay, only if he could come to an agreement with the Natives. This was the place Williams would name Providence (46).

Soon Mary and friends from Salem came to join Roger. Williams had made an agreement with Narraganset leaders Canonicus and Miantonamo. During spring planting, Wampanoags and Narragansets gave assistance to the new settlers bringing seed and food. Williams began to build a house and eight other families would make Providence their home (48).

The settlement continued to grow and Williams decided to incorporate the township in 1638. Reflecting the radicalism of its founder, the official town document is explicit in declaring that the laws of the town applied to civil matters only. By 1640 the growing town had adopted “twelve articles of agreement” for government. One of the agreements simply stated that Providence would, as it had from the outset, “*hold forth Liberty of Conscience.*” The principle which Roger Williams had striven for so diligently was now the law of the land in a place called Providence (49).

Williams’ settlement had become a magnet for others seeking religious freedom. He determined to go to London and secure a charter. This would gain Providence legal status among the other colonies (57). Williams also intended to hire a printer in London. He had much that he wanted to express, explain, and question--Boston would no longer allow a word of his work in print (58).

Williams arrived in London in the summer of 1643. A civil war was in progress involving various religious factions. Williams, the relentless advocate of the radical idea of separating religion from politics, anonymously published a pamphlet, *Queries of Highest Consideration*, which was directed to Parliament. In this work he discussed the reigns of England’s past monarchs and noted how each one demanded forced conformity in religious worship which Williams said was in fact, “*spiritual rape.*” He implored the Parliament to “*never commit that rape, in forcing the consciences of all men to one Worship...*” He reminded that “*religious warfare is the chief disturber of civil peace, the chief murderer of men, women, and children.*” “Although leaders profess to seek more light,” he charged, “in fact they persecute and suppress those from whom new light might come.” (68).

Williams continued that there was much in the Old Testament about religious laws for a nation. Then he asked readers if they were “followers of Moses or Christ?” He reminded that Jesus left no directive to form a “National holy Covenant, and consequently... a National Church” (66). The descendants of the Reformation should be warned by the many thousands of Catholics and Protestants killed in wars over religion. Dogma “*backed by the power of the state, produce*

only one result: oceans and oceans of blood”(67). Finally regarding persecution, Williams asked for any example of Jesus persecuting anyone.

The final work published by Williams during this trip was *The Bloody Tenant of Persecution, for cause of Conscience*. Here Williams asserted what was a remarkably radical idea for his time, namely that in religious matters “*mere toleration was not a worthy goal: only freedom would suffice,*” and that this freedom would not be real unless it was extended unequivocally to those “Paganish, Jewish, Turkish, or Antichristian.” He asked readers to consider if Jesus came to London, which religion would Christ endorse. Every reader would think his or her own. What weapons would Jesus request to use in his campaign? Of course one and all knew they would not be “weapons of steel” but those “instruments of persuasion and love” (71).

Other radicals for freedom would follow the trail blazed by Roger Williams. More than one hundred-forty years would pass before the Constitution of the United States would enshrine the principle Williams wrote into his township agreements for Providence—Liberty of Conscience. More than the mere passage of time would transpire throughout the next century. Minds would be gradually enlightened, and religious reformers would continue to proclaim to speak in the name of God. Civil governments would continue their entanglements with the clergy controlling the masses. Yet, within a relatively brief time-span eighteenth century radicals would step forward to challenge the powerful and demand an end to the repressive church-state relationship. They would advocate freedom from religious conformity.

“The Gods of the Hills”

Religion continued to hold a dominating influence over the lives of most everyone in the American colonies as the eighteenth century dawned. Yet there was, too, a growing sense of restlessness. Prosperity and growth sparked thoughts of new beginnings and possibilities. Philosophy had aroused resistance, in some, to controlling authorities both civil and ecclesiastical. As John Adams recalled in a letter (1818) to Thomas Jefferson, “The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people; a change in their religious sentiments, of their duties and obligations...” According to Adams, this “radical change [...] was the real American Revolution” (Bailyn 160).

In New England, Ethan Allen changed the hearts and minds of many. His active resistance to a powerful elite in New York was pivotal in the founding of Vermont. This part of Allen’s life is generally known. Conversely, his outspoken disdain of religious dogma and superstition, that exemplifies Adams’ assertion to Jefferson, remains obscure. Both aspects of Allen’s character are compelling. The brash, irrepressible adventurer taking on New York’s power elite, and the philosophical backwoodsman, confronting the all-pervasive Calvinist dogma. The former trait won a state called Vermont and the latter produced the first book of its kind in America, *Reason the Only Oracle of Man*. As we explore these aspects of Allen’s personality, we can respect his determination to overcome personal obstacles and setbacks; we can appreciate the timeliness of his exhortation to be guided by the use of reason. We may even be inspired to actively resist threats to the separation of church and state in our own time.

As we have seen, the Reformation jolted the stability of Europe like a massive earthquake. Its aftershocks lasted for generations, and even extended into the American colonies. Though not of the same magnitude, a religious revival swept through early eighteenth century America and nearly everyone was caught up in the aftermath, including the parents of Ethan Allen.

The earliest stages of the revival were set into motion by a prominent Calvinist minister, Jonathan Edwards of North Hampton, Massachusetts. Edwards was alarmed because many heretical ideas were infiltrating his congregation. Chief among the heresies was Arminianism, the belief that “man could save himself, placing human agency on a par with God’s will (Bellesiles 16). Edwards vehemently denounced Arminianism and called his flock to repentance. He began making furious sermons throughout New England to remind one and all of “the

sovereignty of God, the depravity of man, and the necessity of experiencing a sense of election if one would be sure of his salvation” (Wright 93). Edwards’ terrifying harangues drove many listeners into a state of hysteria with a few actually committing suicide (92).

In the midst of the turbulence, Joseph and Mary (Baker) Allen’s first child was born on January 10, 1738 in Litchfield, Connecticut. The joyful parents named their son Ethan because the name signified firmness and strength. The revival had reverberated through Litchfield and the Allens needed firmness and strength (Bellesiles 16).

Though Jonathan Edwards was effective, his fire and brimstone admonitions would soon be surpassed when Anglican clergyman George Whitefield arrived in the colonies in 1739. Everywhere the mesmerizing minister went, faithful flocks gathered. Under Whitefield’s influence, many believers collapsed into emotional frenzies. They “openly wept and confessed their sins; many fell into faints and some groveled on the floor” (Wright 93). This religious movement in which people were literally entranced out of their senses, has been ironically named the Great Awakening.

Indeed, some ministers began to express concern about the excesses of the evangelists (94). Religious revivalists countered by “condemning the clergy who did not share their ‘enthusiasms for the outpouring of spirit...’ ” (95). Congregations throughout New England separated into factions. Those favoring revivalism were called New Lights and those who opposed were known as Old Sides (96).

The Great Awakening had many unforeseen consequences. Although the doctrine of the religious revivalists was conservative and traditional, their methods were considered extreme by many. The churches of New England and Virginia “suffered heavy blows to their prestige from the Great Awakening and the resultant secessions from the local churches” (Gipson 11). It is doubtful that Edwards or Whitefield ever anticipated that their efforts would ultimately “...increase the spirit of religious individualism and resistance to external authorities” (Wright 95).

Like many other New England towns, Litchfield split over the Great Awakening. Although almost everyone held Calvinist beliefs, the New Lights “attacked liberals like Joseph Allen for taking too favorable a view of human ability, playing down original sin and undermining the church of visible saints...”

(Bellesiles 16). In turn, Allen and other Old Sides were suspicious of "...the enthusiasms and self-righteousness of the evangelicals" (16). Holding the minority view within their church, the Allen family decided to move to the new town of Cornwell, Connecticut (18).

By 1753 the Allens had eight children, Mary and Joseph raised their family in the spirit of "religious rationalism." Joseph stressed the value of the "religious experience" but he rejected "the evangelicals' limitation on human agency, which held that those who had not yet felt the power of conversion were hopeless before an angry god" (19). He also repudiated the concept of original sin and believed that God's salvation was for everyone equally (19).

Young Ethan showed a promising intellect and like his father "he began early in life to dispute and argue on religious matters" (16). Joseph determined to send Ethan to college. To better prepare his son for higher learning, Joseph sent Ethan to study under the supervision of a relative, Jonathan Lee, who was a minister and devoted Calvinist. Ethan's formal education ended abruptly when his father died suddenly in 1755. Returning to Cornwell, Ethan assumed his father's responsibilities on the family farm. (6).

A few years later (1761) Ethan Allen met Thomas Young, a medical doctor and student of Enlightenment philosophy. Young detested the Calvinist view of a "grim [...] irrational and vindictive" god. He embraced deism with its "great clockmaker god" and a logically understandable view of the universe. Allen greatly enjoyed Young's library, its shelves filled with Greek and Roman classics and Enlightenment works. At last Allen could nourish his intellectual and spiritual appetite (15)

In the meantime Allen heard from his cousin, Jonathan Lee, who was concerned about Ethan's denial of the doctrine of original sin. Lee asserted to Allan that "without original sin there would be no need for atonement, or Christ, or indeed Christianity."

Upon reflection, Allen concluded that Lee was right. Allen had come to a radical conclusion-- "there was no need for Christianity." To expand his position Allen argued that "he could not accept that just because Adam and Eve ate an apple, their 'un-offending offspring' should earn 'the eternal displeasure of God.' Could a just God 'sentence their human progeny [...] to everlasting destruction?' " Allen contended that the "false representation of the deity's nature was 'the very basis on

which Christianity is founded, and is announced in the New-Testament to the very cause of why Jesus Christ came into this world' ” (16).

While Allen evidently relished philosophizing, most of his time and energy was spent running the family farm. Allen was looking for a way to advance his family's fortunes, and he saw an opportunity in the nearby town of Salisbury. A hill there contained iron ore, and Allen envisioned a furnace to smelt the ore. Making potash was one of the few industries in New England, and iron kettles were in demand. Allen bought the hill, built the furnace, and was soon operating “the first major iron furnace in Connecticut” (16).

With the profits from the furnace Allen bought a store in Salisbury and a big house on a hill. Since he was twenty-four years old and now financially secure, Ethan thought the time was right to start a family of his own. Allen decided to marry his long-time friend Mary Brownson.

Though Allen was married, he had by no means settled down. His personality remained as confrontational as ever. In 1764, inoculation with smallpox was illegal in Connecticut. Allen had confidence in “enlightened scientific methodology” and thought the banning of inoculation was based on superstition, and was, therefore, irrational. He decided to get the smallpox injection from his physician friend, Thomas Young. Instead of meeting with Dr. Young privately, Allen chose to get the vaccination on a Sunday in front of the meeting house of Salisbury. He was immediately threatened with prosecution by his cousin, Jonathan Lee. Showing no sign of backing down, Allen publically made several untoward comments about, “Beelzebub, hell, and ‘every little insipid Devil’ and was tried for blasphemy.” The result of the trial is lost to history, but whatever the outcome, Allen was becoming a social outcast in Salisbury (21).

Allen had another problem with community relations. His physical strength was renowned, and he had a reputation for taking the law into his own hands, settling disputes with brute force. By 1765, Allen had decided to sell his iron furnace to George Caldwell, but there was an apparent misunderstanding with the terms of the sale. Allen had expected more “up front cash” and became infuriated when the buyer was uncooperative. Soon Allen found himself in front of a magistrate to answer the charge that: “Ethan Allen, did in a tumultuous and offensive manner, with threatening words and angry looks, [...] assail and actually strike the person of George Caldwell of Salisbury, aforesaid, in the presence and to the disturbance of His Majesty's good subjects.” Allen paid his fine of ten

shillings. Within a month, Allen was back in court facing nearly the same charge. This time, when Allen agreed to leave town, the complaint was dropped.

Ethan took Mary and their newborn son Joseph to Northampton, Massachusetts. With the money he had made from the sale of his iron furnace Allen bought a lead mine.

This venture was not a success and Allen ended up in debt. Living in Northampton was a cousin, Joseph Allen, who was a man of means and he gladly came to Ethan's aid.

Besides wanting to help his cousin materially, Joseph wanted to save Ethan's soul. With this in mind he lent Ethan his collection of the sermons of famed Northampton minister, Jonathan Edwards (22). Ethan studied them and expressed admiration for Edwards' evident love of nature, but he was shocked by the "dark pessimism of Edwards' vision, with his portraits of an angry and vindictive god and the torments of damnation which seemed to await the majority of humanity." Allen made his views known in the local taverns. While he lampooned Edwards' religious views, he also praised Edwards for having the courage to boldly state what he believed to be the truth. Allen next chided the townspeople for abandoning their minister and forcing him into exile. Northampton folks were still feeling chagrined over the aftermath of the Great Awakening, and several ministers asked Ethan to refrain from discussing the matter. Allen did not comply with their wishes and soon a town meeting was held. Ethan and his family were asked to leave Northampton in July, 1767 (23).

The family returned to Salisbury and moved in with Ethan's brother, Heman.

Great sorrow befell the Allen clan when Ethan's sister Lydia died. At her funeral the elder Mary Allen suffered a stroke and Ethan carried his mother back to the house. He had been very close to Lydia and her loss coupled with his setbacks and failures weighed heavily on his mind. Although during this time of tribulation while the outlook appeared bleak, Allen never lost confidence in his ability to find a new direction for himself and his entire family. This time Allen looked northward and decided on a path that "led him into the Green Mountains of northern New England" (24)

Looking for some tranquility, Allen and his brother Levi set out on foot northbound toward the Green Mountains. They hunted and trekked over old trails

that led to Canada, making friends with the natives along the way. Ethan soon got the idea to invest in this area that was then known as the New Hampshire Grants (27).

The Grants region had been the site of an on-going controversy over land rights. The dispute was “between New Hampshire and New York over the territory that is now Vermont.” In 1664 England’s King Charles II had issued a grant to the Duke of York “that included ‘all the lands from the west side of the Connecticut River to the east side of Delaware Bay’ ”(Doyle 3). However, early in the 1740s, agents of the British Crown including the “Royal Council, royal attorney and solicitor general” decreed that the region “west of the Connecticut River” was New Hampshire’s territory. New Hampshire’s governor, Benning Wentworth, began issuing land grants to settlers in 1749, and a dispute with New York ensued (Bellesiles 28).

New York appealed directly to the king based on the 1664 grant and in 1764 the king issued a Royal Proclamation which decreed that the Connecticut River was “the eastern boarder of New York.” New York officials quickly asserted that the grants issued by New Hampshire were nullified and settlers would have to pay New York a fee, or face eviction. Settlers holding New Hampshire grants balked at the idea and resisted paying the fees to New York (31).

In the meanwhile, Allen made the decision to move his entire family to the Grants. On May 29, 1770 Ethan bought a grant to land in Poultney and a week later in Castleton. Within a year most of the Allen clan had joined Ethan, including cousins Remember Baker and Seth Warner. The entire family now had a stake in the destiny of the Grants (33).

Late in 1779, two New Yorkers found settlers living on land for which the Yorkers held title. The settlers assured the Yorkers that they were in possession of a grant from New Hampshire for the land in question. The Yorkers were not impressed and they served the settlers with an eviction hearing notice.

The minute Allen heard of the case, he was on his way to Portsmouth to meet with the new governor, John Wentworth. The governor thought the Grants issue was a hopeless case for New Hampshire, but he nonetheless suggested that Allen talk with Jared Ingersoll, one of Connecticut’s most prominent lawyers. Allen followed through with the suggestion and Ingersoll agreed to represent the settlers.

Allen and Ingersoll arrived together in New York on the day of the trial. They discovered that New York's Attorney General, John Kempe, and the plaintiffs' lawyer, James Duane, both held deeds in the disputed area, as did both of the presiding judges (81). Even though the settlers held titles that predated those of the plaintiffs, the court ruled against the settlers. Allan was outraged at what he saw as the "corruption and hypocrisy" of the New York court system. The court was a tool of the rich and the poor farmers didn't stand a chance. Indeed, Allen charged that the court was "serving the specific economic interests of a small 'junto of land thieves.'" Allen then assured the settlers on a crucial point--the court would not be able to enforce the ruling.

Perhaps recognizing the validity of Allen's point that they might have problems with enforcement, Kempe and Duane paid a visit to Allen. They offered him cash and land if he would come over to their side. Allen responded with one of his legendary remarks: "The gods of the hills are not the gods of the valley" (82). Allen intended to become the champion of the settlers in the Grants against the wealthy landlords of New York.

The action of the New York court brought Allen immediate fame in the Grants. He called for a meeting in a local tavern and pledged to defend the New Hampshire Grants titles with force if necessary. The attendees formed an "extralegal militia company" and chose Allen to lead it as "Colonel Commandant" (82).

From then on every time officials from New York tried to evict a holder of a New Hampshire Grants title they were foiled by the Green Mountain Boys. Although their manner was wild and rough, there was never any bloodshed in the resistance and no one died. Allen and his gang used shame or threats against their adversaries.

Allen and the Green Mountain Boys proved to be a formidable force. In frustration New York offered a sizable reward for the capture of Allen. With typical bravura, Allen had wanted posters printed offering a much smaller sum for the capture of New Yorkers, Duane and Kempe. Duane recognized that Allen's action "went beyond mockery, as he wrote later, by this time the New Hampshire Grants had " 'assumed the Importance of an independent State.'" (98).

In the meantime, while the separatists of the Grants continued to resist New York's authority, other colonists were resisting imperial control by the English

Crown.

When British regulars fired on American farmers at Lexington, the Green Mountain Boys decisively turned their resistance in a new direction.

Analyzing the situation, Allen thought the outcome of the Lexington and Concord events showed that the power of the British over the colonies was a veneer. The real power was in the hands of the people (114). He called a meeting at Bennington and it was decided to “side with family and neighbors back in Connecticut and Massachusetts.” The Green Mountain Boys chose Ethan Allan to lead them into battle. With this decision Allen “leader of a local insurgency,” was now a military commander (115). At once Allen focused his attention on Fort Ticonderoga on Lake Champlain.

Allen had realized that who ever held the fort would control the region. He volunteered his services to the Boston Committee of Correspondence. The Boston Committee conferred with the Hartford Committee and Allen was directed to take the fort.

More than the other colonies, the Grants were prepared for military action. The Green Mountain Boys were an organized force and “they took pride in the label ‘rebels.’ ” (118). Only seventy-two hours later they were positioned to move against the fort. Just before dawn on May 10, 1775 The Green Mountain Boys were on the western shore of Lake Champlain (116) Allen inspired his men telling them they were the “scourge and terror of all arbitrary power.” He continued, “you who will undertake voluntarily will poise your firelocks.” Allen led the charge and climbed through a breach in the wall. The Green Mountain Boys had caught the British napping and the commander surrendered the fort to Allen. This was the first British possession captured by Americans in the Revolutionary War (118).

Allen thought the time was right to press the attack on the British. He began formulating plans to capture Montreal. Though a few of the participants were unable to execute their part of the plan Allen, nevertheless, pressed on. He was overwhelmed, captured by the British, and held prisoner for more than two years (127). After the Revolution, Allen wrote a book describing his experiences and it became an immediate best seller.

During those two years, the Green Mountain Boys continued their exploits in the Grants just as though Allen was directing them. Throughout 1776-77, the

Grants experienced a striking political change. “The Green Mountains came to exemplify as few other places the highest ideals of republicanism...” (131). In January, 1777, the New Hampshire Grants declared its independence from New York (135). As Allen later recorded, “They were a people between the heavens and the earth, as free as is possible to conceive any people to be; and in this condition they formed government upon the true principles of liberty and natural right” (131).

After Allen’s release from British captivity, he became active in Vermont politics. But he longed for a private life and once retired he had time to pursue philosophy. Allen wrote *Reason the Only Oracle of Man*, comparable to “other eighteenth century rationalist works” opposing organized religion and advocating religion based on natural law (223). Allen had come to the conclusion that the great philosophers held an even more distinguished position in history than founders of nations. He was so determined to share his ideas that he sold large tracts of land in order to raise the funds to have his work published. Indeed, “Allen’s commitment” to philosophy “can be measured by trying to locate a contemporary political leader devoting several years to a work rejecting mainstream religious beliefs and offering a uniquely personal view of humanity’s place in the cosmos” (222).

In his book, Allen expressed the view that Jesus was a “moral philosopher” whose teachings were not followed by most Christians (223). This inconsistency was the responsibility of the clergy, Allen maintained. By “shrouding” an understanding of the creator beneath a cloud of mythology and superstition ‘creedmongers’ thereby won “ministerial authority, wealth, and titles” for themselves (225).

Clerics were also aware, Allen thought, of the human inclination to invent “‘scarecrows’ with which to frighten themselves.” Based on his own experience, Allen knew that many warriors would engage in all manner of combat unflinchingly, “yet flee in terror from some ‘supernatural whirligig.’ ” And more often than not, politicians teamed up with churchmen in manipulating “this psychology of fear to their own purposes” (244).

Allen was convinced that organized religion had been “a negative historical force.” To escape the penchant of the clergy to manipulate, Allen thought individuals could, through the use of reason, “discover the laws of a deity who is perfectly rational” (225). One’s ability to reason, not mystical revelations, should

be utilized to comprehend the “laws of nature” and the laws of God, which Allen contended were one and the same. (226).

Allen argued that the various perceptions of the deity were based on cultural, as well as, individual differences. “The Pagan, Jewish, Christian, and Mahometan countries” have various revelations, each thinking their own belief system true. Allen advised his readers to discount them all and to think for themselves. By thinking for themselves people would begin the process of transforming “theology into a science...” (226).

Allen was an advocate of “natural religion” because it was not “dependent on a culturally determined text” and was accessible by all thinking people. Allen thought a logical way to discern God’s will was to examine and contemplate nature. He emphatically maintained, “The knowledge of nature is the revelation of God.” (28). The creator’s beneficence was manifested in “the air we breathe, the light of the sun, and the waters of the murmuring rills, ... and well it is that they are given in so great profusion that they cannot by the monopoly of the rich be engrossed from the poor” (229).

Reason the Only Oracle of Man was published in November, 1785. Allen considered the book “the most important work of his life,” and asserted that he felt compelled by a “sense of duty” to attempt to spare people from suffering under the control of a “ghostly Tyranny” (222). *Reason* was not as well received as his previous work. Ministers denounced Allen from the pulpits. They did not discuss the content of the book, they simply condemned it as the misguided rambling of an infidel. One distressed Christian complained that the book was the kind of thing the people of Rhode Island would enjoy and mused that Rhode Islanders would soon be “worshiping Ethan Allan for Mahomet” and claiming *Reason* as their Koran (240).

Allen recognized that he had become an anathema to the clergy, but they were not his target audience. Allen relished being known as the “frontier philosopher;” he regarded *Reason the Only Oracle* as a legacy of his radical thinking (239), and Vermont as the legacy of his radical actions (241).

Although Ethan Allen passed into history on February 17, 1789, Vermont’s history and Allen’s place in it are alive and well. However his warning about the psychology of fear wielded by clerics and politicians for their own benefit seems almost dead and forgotten. As our country wages a war with strong sectarian

overtones, perhaps Allen's admonition to reject clerical and political manipulation and to think for ourselves deserves to be resuscitated and given a new lease on life.

“Truth Can Stand By Itself”

The conjoined power of church and state represented a clear and present danger to rationalist thinkers of the eighteenth century. This was the power that had condemned philosopher Giordano Bruno to the fire in 1600, sentenced Galileo to confinement in 1633, banished Roger Williams in 1635, executed twenty people in Salem, Massachusetts for witchcraft in 1692, and countless similar crimes. By the late 1700s this dark force was facing its most significant challenge to date from Revolutionary Americans. Leading the intellectual charge for freedom from church-state oppression was Thomas Jefferson.

In Jefferson's view established churches had imposed, through dogma and superstition, a tyranny of fear on the human mind which had crippled humanity's progress for more than a thousand years. Jefferson chose to counter this reality with education, science, the use of reason—in a word, enlightenment—protected under the force of law. As we study this facet of Jefferson's life we can more fully comprehend the value of our heritage and the priceless legacy of the separation of church and state.

Jefferson's lifetime commitment to rationalism commenced at the College of William and Mary where Jefferson began his advanced education in 1760. His principal teacher was Dr. William Small, the only non-clergy member of the faculty. Small was a professor of mathematics and it was through this teacher that Jefferson recalled getting his “first views of the expansion of science, and of the system of things in which we are placed.” Small's teaching method never included references to religious dogma and was strictly scientific in nature. Jefferson surmised that Small's method “probably fixed the destinies” of his life. The student-teacher relationship soon developed into a lasting friendship (Peterson 12).

By 1762, Jefferson had completed his studies at college and he decided to pursue a law career. Small introduced Jefferson to George Wythe, a prominent attorney in Virginia, and an eminent legal scholar. Wythe was highly regarded for his extensive knowledge of English and Roman law. Moreover, without benefit of formal education, he had learned to read Greek and Latin and was a devoted enthusiast of the classics (14). His mode of instruction and approach to the law was wholly scientific and Wythe also deepened Jefferson's appreciation of the classics. The two formed a friendship that would endure for many decades. In 1767, having studied law for five years, Jefferson was admitted to “the bar of the

General Court” (20).

Sometime during those years of study, Jefferson became devoted to the philosophy of the Enlightenment. The Age of Enlightenment was characterized by confidence in the power of reason and innovative thinking particularly in the political, religious, and educational spheres. Historian and scholar, Merrill Peterson, declared that Jefferson was one of the Age’s “authentic geniuses” (46) and that the fundamentals “of enlightened thought were so thoroughly assimilated in Jefferson’s mind that he cannot possibly be understood apart from them” (47).

The first priority of enlightened thinkers was to question everything. Nothing was too sacred to be examined in the light of scientific knowledge. The purpose of the inquiry was to uncover the “natural order of things.” Philosophers wondered if the laws of the physical universe could be applied in “the moral and social realms.” They concluded that the laws of nature were “universal, harmonious and beneficent,” but had been hidden from the people for more than a millennia under a mountain of authoritarian dogma and religious superstition (47).

Jefferson was convinced that although humanity had been estranged from nature for centuries, people could now feel comfortably “at home with it.” He wholeheartedly concurred with the philosopher Paul Henri d’Holbach’s assertion that “man is unhappy only because he does not know nature.” The consensus among enlightened thinkers was that an individual could attain happiness by coming to know nature and living in harmony with it. As Peterson explained, the majority of “enlightened thinkers agreed that individual happiness, far from being a selfish propensity, was founded in social affections. Thus the pursuit involved an active and humanitarian commitment to the well-being of others.” Owing to his Enlightenment heritage, Jefferson would later proclaim the “pursuit of happiness” as an unalienable right (48).

Jefferson also shared with his philosophical peers an abiding sense of kinship and connection with the ancient Greeks and Romans. The classical era was “essentially humanistic” because it was “essentially naturalistic.” The monumental achievements of the pagan civilizations provided a wealth of ammunition for enlightened thinkers’ battle against “dogma, bigotry, and superstition.” Their grand expectation was to emulate and wherever possible improve upon the classical ideal and to rekindle the light of reason extinguished throughout the “Dark Ages ” (49).

While it is true that Jefferson and his counterparts rejected Christian doctrine, he was not an atheist. As an infant he had been baptized into the Anglican faith, but during his years at William and Mary, Jefferson decided that since Christian dogma was not reasonable it could not be credible. He had read several deist philosophers and in particular, Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, who advised that one should be dubious of a religion that relied upon “revelation” and demanded faith whenever doctrine was contrary to reason (Sanford 12). Jefferson was convinced that God existed as creator and that the creator was revealed to people through the laws of nature. Jefferson considered himself a “convert to deist natural religion” and agreed with Bolingbroke’s assertion that there was a “tacit alliance between priests and atheists against true religion” (Peterson 51).

Those who advocated deist natural religion sought a determinant of morality apart from the fire and brimstone “claims of Christianity.” As they often did, eighteenth century intellectuals looked back to Greece and Rome for guidance. Jefferson was knowledgeable of the various philosophic schools and he noted that while the schools were all in competition, they unanimously exhorted, “follow nature” (49). As his personal choices, Jefferson favored both the Epicurean and Stoic ideal. The Epicurean goal to have a pleasant and happy life, Jefferson thought, was attainable through following the Stoic standard of self-discipline (54).

Modern philosophers also provided ideas for moral guidance. Francis Hutcheson’s “moral sense” theory held that people are “equipped with an inner sense of right and wrong.” This idea strongly appealed to Jefferson because he had observed that people feel happy when they are doing good deeds. He reasoned that the good feelings are generated because “nature hath implanted in our breasts a love of others, a sense of duty to them, a moral instinct, in short, which prompts us irresistibly to feel and succor their distresses” (55).

Jefferson was determined to live a life that exemplified the Enlightenment ideals that he cherished. In 1769, Jefferson was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses. This was also the year he began building on his hilltop property which he named Monticello, Italian for little mountain. The view from the site was breathtaking. Peterson noted that Jefferson had undoubtedly been influenced by his reading of Edmund Burke’s *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*. In this work, Burke had distinguished “between beauty in the classical sense of harmonious form and the sublime with its evocations of the boundless, the incomprehensible, the awesome in nature which [...] communicated feelings of exaltation and power to the beholder” (24). Unable to

find an architect, Jefferson began studying the subject and decided to design the house himself. He was able to achieve a “visible statement” reflecting both ideals that Burke had described with the classic beauty of his house on a setting with a view of the sublime (24).

As Jefferson worked on his house, he was also being drawn into the revolutionary political events that were occurring and would propel him to national leadership. His role in the founding of the United States has been most aptly described by Peterson: “No other founder had a longer or larger influence on the life and hopes of the New World prodigy than Thomas Jefferson. Rising to fame as a leader of colonies in revolt against an empire, he embodied the nation’s aspirations for freedom and enlightenment...” Peterson then explained that by usage of the term “enlightenment” he intended to “emphasize Jefferson’s thrust beyond nationality to the cosmopolitan fraternity of science and philosophy, his commitment to the civilizing arts, to education, to progress, to rationality in all things...” Indeed Jefferson was an unwavering participant “in the eighteenth century campaign to enlist man in the cause of nature and nature in the service of mankind” (ix).

One of Jefferson’s most important enlightened works was The Virginia Statute of Religious Liberty. Although the bill is an impassioned assertion of “Enlightenment principles” it has been “lost in the shadow” of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution (Ferguson 146). Late in his life, when Jefferson wrote his own epitaph, he listed the statute second among the three accomplishments that he wanted to be known for. This statute was something more than mere legislation, it was “an eloquent manifesto of the sanctity of the human mind and spirit” (Peterson 134).

The Church of England had been established in Virginia for over a hundred years. “Buttressed and safeguarded by many laws both local and English [...] the Anglican Church functioned as an arm of the government.” Anglican ministers, rituals, and beliefs possessed a position of privilege as every other sect was “subject to varying degrees of restraint...” Support was “exacted” from both members and non-members alike. By 1776, Jefferson considered this to be an untenable situation and he determined to pull up the church “establishment by its roots” (133). He presented a basic question: *“Has the state a right to adopt an opinion in matters of religion?”* His answer was a resounding no. He insisted that the rightful power of government was to be used to restrain harmful deeds, *“It does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods or no god. It neither picks my pocket, nor breaks my leg”* (137).

Jefferson would accept no compromise on religious freedom. Some used the term toleration, but Jefferson said that the idea of toleration implied a favoritism of one creed while making allowances for others. He demanded complete freedom of conscience in religious matters without legal restraints or coercion of any kind. Others expressed concern over the consequences to moral order if religious belief was not compelled. To those fears Jefferson replied, "millions of innocent men, women and children, since the introduction of Christianity, have been burnt, tortured, fined and imprisoned; yet we have not advanced one inch toward uniformity. What has been the effect of coercion? To make one half the world fools and the other half hypocrites." He was completely repulsed by the centuries-old practice of state coercion in religious matters. "*It is error alone which needs the support of government,*" he asserted, "*Truth can stand by itself*" (138).

Jefferson held a dim view of the clergy in general (Sanford 25). By 1777 Jefferson had the power to overthrow the unholy alliance between church and state. The statute he wrote proclaimed: "*That to compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions he disbelieves is sinful and tyrannical...that our civil rights have no dependence on our religious opinions...that truth is great and will prevail if left to herself; that she is the proper and sufficient antagonist to error...*" (Writings 42-3). The act became law in 1786. Jefferson was in France at the time and the passage of this act, more than any other, "enforced the reality of the American Revolution on the enlightened heads of Europe." Jefferson rejoiced, ...to see the standard of reason at length erected, after so many ages during which the human mind has been held in vassalage by kings, priests and nobles; and it is honorable for us to have produced the first legislation [which] has had the courage to declare that the reason of man may be trusted with the formation of his own opinions. (Peterson142)

For the rest of his life Jefferson continued to be an unwavering proponent of science, education, and government free of ecclesiastical encroachments. He once wrote to a friend, "I have sworn an oath upon the altar of God, eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man" (Sanford 2).

“The Mind Once Enlightened”

Considering the increasingly tense climate that began to emerge between England and her American colonies in the second half of the eighteenth century, it is easy to see how Ethan Allen and Thomas Jefferson were drawn into the revolutionary experience. It is extraordinary, however, to ponder how it came to pass that a down-on-his-luck Englishman arrived in America with radical ideas in mind and pen in hand, soon prompted a Revolution.

At the conclusion of the French and Indian War, (a conflict between France and England over control of the trans-Appalachian region) England found itself facing a staggering debt. Members of Parliament thought it would be reasonable to impose taxes on American colonial products as a means of generating revenue. Parliament passed the Revenue (Sugar) Act in 1764. The immediate response from America was an impassioned, “No taxation without representation!” While patriot colonists resisted, Parliament persisted and finally the dispute came to armed conflict at Lexington and Concord in April, 1775. Yet there was no clarion call for independence among the patriots.

Indeed, delegates to the second Continental Congress all signed the Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms (July 6, 1775). While the document delineated a host of grievances, it made no mention of independence, but instead expressed a wish for reconciliation. As writer Scott Liell pointed out, in less than a year’s time, a paradigm shift occurred in how Americans viewed themselves and their relationship with England. The catalyst that provoked this astonishing transformation can justifiably be attributed to one man, Thomas Paine, and his forty-six page pamphlet, *Common Sense*.

Paine was not a born and bred American. He was an Englishman who was unable to continue his formal education beyond grammar school, had failed in his business as a stay-maker, and was later dismissed from his job as a customs officer. Nevertheless, he came to be recognized and honored by people like John Adams who wrote, “I know not whether any man in the world has had more influence on its inhabitants or affairs for the last thirty years than Thomas Paine” (Liell 12).

Paine’s story began in Thetford, England on January 29, 1737; he was the only son of Mary Cocke and Joseph Pain (Thomas later added the e to his last name). Joseph earned his living as a corset-maker, yet Mary and Joseph hoped for

a brighter future for their son than he might have as a craftsman, so Thomas was enrolled in a grammar school at the age of six. Their expectation was that their son would someday study medicine, the law, or become a clergyman (27).

Even in those early years, Thomas showed a strong aptitude for writing, especially poetry. Though Thomas was an attentive student, he was unable to master the Latin required for advancement, and his formal education ended after grammar school (28).

Thomas then began a stay-maker apprenticeship under his father's supervision. The elder Paine was a Quaker and although Quakers were not being actively persecuted, there was still state discrimination against them. They could not vote, hold public office, nor attend "state universities such as Oxford and Cambridge." Some historians attribute Thomas' later "advocacy of abolition, religious tolerance, and universal suffrage" to his early witness of discrimination (30).

After a few years in his father's shop, Thomas ran off to sea. This decision might have had a fateful outcome were it not for his father's intervention. As Liell explained, the adventuresome lad had signed up to join the crew of a privateer ship called the *Terrible*. But in the meantime, his father had rushed to London, located his son, and was able to persuade him to return home. Shortly after the *Terrible* set sail, it encountered a French vessel and the two engaged in battle (the Seven Years War was in progress--- England and Prussia vs. France and Austria, over their colonial possessions). After the furious fighting had ended, only seventeen members of the *Terrible's* crew had survived with more than one hundred fifty lost (31).

Safely back in Thetford, Paine labored another year as a journeyman in his father's shop. Still, he longed to venture out on his own again, and soon moved to the coastal village of Sandwich where he opened his own business in 1759. Paine worked hard to establish himself in the craft his father had taught him. He was skilled at his trade, but proved to be a poor businessman and his enterprise failed. Downhearted and discouraged, Paine closed his shop and planned to leave town in search of a new job opportunity (33).

Three years later Paine was employed by the British government as a collector of excise taxes. With his persuasive writing and speaking style he soon gained recognition and became well-known within the community. Several of his

articles and poems were published in local papers (36).

In 1772 many in England were suffering economic hardship and government employees were no exception. Paine's fellow excise officers asked him to write a petition for a salary increase and he agreed. Impressed with the outcome, his colleagues subsequently asked Paine to go to London and argue their case before Parliament (38). This plea for a raise was ultimately rejected and Paine quipped that the King petitioned "Parliament to have his own salary raised 100,000 pounds, which being done, everything else was laid aside." Though failing to win a pay raise, Paine's stay in London had life-changing consequences.

Paine had become friends with the excise board's commissioner, George Lewis Scott. Like many people in the Age of Enlightenment, Scott and Paine shared an abiding interest in mathematics and science. Scott particularly enjoyed discussing philosophical questions with his distinguished circle of friends. He brought Paine into this group which included renowned historian Edward Gibbon, famed writer Samuel Johnson, and most significantly for Paine, Benjamin Franklin. The latter two became fast friends (40).

When Paine returned home in April, 1774, he was terminated from his position with the excise service. He was bitterly disappointed and asserted his conviction that the dismissal was "an arbitrary and petty act of retribution against a loyal servant" (42). A few years later a British commentary bemoaned the fact "that the dismissal of this one customs officer may have cost Great Britain her colonies."

Paine returned to London, and with the apparent urging of Franklin, Paine decided at once to journey to America. Franklin provided letters of introduction in which he referred to Paine as "an ingenious young man." In October, 1774, Paine boarded the *London Packet* and set sail for North America (43).

In the meantime, the first Continental Congress was meeting in Philadelphia to map out a unified strategy of resistance against the latest round of British revenue mandates—otherwise known as the Intolerable Acts. Parliament had imposed these in retaliation for American "defiance of previous acts." The delegates quickly agreed to declare the Intolerable Acts unconstitutional "and agreed to impose economic sanctions against the British until they were repealed." They composed and ratified a document declaring their rights and promised "to reconvene in May of 1775 to assess the progress of their dispute"(48).

Within weeks of the adjournment of Congress, the *London Packet* was anchored in the harbor of Philadelphia. However, no one disembarked because a typhus epidemic had erupted aboard the ship and nearly eighty percent of the passengers were sick. A doctor was summoned and his decision was to leave everyone aboard until they either recovered or died. Fortuitously, though Paine was unconscious, the letters of introduction he carried from Franklin were discovered. Because Franklin was held in high regard, at the doctor's orders, Paine was placed in a rowboat and brought ashore.

It took Paine six weeks to recover, and while he recuperated, he pored over local papers and became engrossed in the political situation. While still confined to bed, Paine wrote a political essay that showed a remarkable "grasp of the central grievances driving the colonists' dissatisfaction." Paine noted that the colonists, by resisting the various revenue acts had, "thrown off the jurisdiction of the British Parliament" and were even becoming "disaffected to the British Crown" (49).

Once fully recovered, Paine was writing for a new periodical, the *Pennsylvania Magazine*. He adopted several pseudonyms as he contributed articles on a wide variety of subjects including science and history (50). In his essay, *An Occasional Letter on the Female Sex*, he wrote that, "Man with regard to [women], in all climates, and in all ages, has been either an insensible husband or an oppressor." He continued that, "...man, while he imposes duties upon women, would deprive them of the sweets of public esteem, and in exacting virtues from them, would make it a crime to aspire to honor" (Ferguson 179). He also condemned the slave trade and wrote a stinging rebuke of those who "complain so loudly of attempts to enslave them, while they hold so many hundred thousand in slavery" (Liell 54). Within a span of only two months the subscription list to the new magazine grew "from 600 to over 1,500." Paine had joined a chorus of colonial voices who spoke through the written word (51).

Pamphlets were "the most important and most effective medium of political advocacy in the eighteenth century" (57). John Dickinson's *Letters of a Pennsylvania Farmer* expressed a popularly held view regarding the relationship of Britain and the American colonies. Dickinson asserted an objection to the Townshend Acts (1767) "a series of duties levied upon American trade for the purpose of raising revenue for the crown." The prevailing view among colonists was that the British government was entirely within its rights to regulate and profit from American trade. But opposition was aroused by the Townshend Acts

because they were imposed solely to raise revenue, “not to maintain the balance of trade” (60).

Within the system of mercantilism the colonies were bound to provide English manufacturers the raw materials they needed to make their finished products, which were in turn, sold back to the colonies. Colonists were prohibited from selling raw materials on the open market and were limited to English sources for all manufactured products. By and large the colonists accepted imperial trade restrictions, but regarded revenue acts as “destructive to the liberties of these colonies” (61). The essence of the colonial dilemma reflected in the literature of the period was that the colonists were “challenging” and “reaffirming” British authority simultaneously (62).

This conflicted mind set precluded any decisive move toward independence. Indeed, historian Bernard Bailyn noted that, “...they hesitated to come to a final separation even after Lexington and Bunker Hill. They hesitated, moving slowly and reluctantly, protesting ‘before God and the world that the utmost of [our] wish is that things may return to their old channel’ ” (Bailyn 142). It would remain for a new arrival to the American scene to break the paralyzing pattern of colonial “habituated thought” (Liell 19).

Paine began the outline of *Common Sense* in October, 1775. He knew that changing the collective colonial mind would be a formidable task because as he noted, “*their attachment to Britain was obstinate, and it was, at the time, a kind of treason to speak against it.*” Indeed, Edmund Burke’s assertion, regarding America held that, “English privileges have made it all that it is; English privileges alone will make it all that it can be” (66). As Paine saw it, the basis of the problem stemmed from the traditional concept “of established government as the ultimate source of all rights, law, and justice” (62). With *Common Sense*, Paine challenged tradition and custom using Enlightenment rationale, because as he had confidently proclaimed, “The mind once enlightened cannot again become dark.” (11).

Paine began his assault on colonial assumptions within the first sentence of the Introduction to his work declaring that, “...a long habit of not thinking a thing *wrong*, gives it a superficial appearance of being *right*, and raises at first a formidable outcry in defense of custom.” Then he immediately enlarged the scope of the argument by declaring, “The cause of America is in great measure the cause of all mankind,” because colonial grievances were, “...not local, but universal...”

Ignoring imperial-colonial legalisms, England was accused as the sole transgressor. “The laying of a Country desolate with Fire and Sword, declaring War against the natural rights of all Mankind, and extirpating the Defenders thereof from the Face of the Earth, is the Concern of every Man to whom Nature hath given the Power of feeling...” (Paine 11).

As he developed his argument for independence, Paine empathized with his readers by saying, “I know it is difficult to get over local or long standing prejudices...” But he assured them that with patient examination they would see the English constitution contained the “base remains of two ancient tyrannies, compounded with some new republican material.” There remained, “monarchical tyranny in the person of the king,” and in the House of Lords were “the remains of aristocratical tyranny...” Only in the “persons of the commons” and their “virtue depends the freedom of England” (16).

Next Paine lampooned the British monarchical system stating, “There is something exceedingly ridiculous in the composition of monarchy...” He called into question the opposing notions of checks and balances and divine right of kings. “*How came the king by a power which the people are afraid to trust, and always obliged to check?* Such a power would not be the gift of a wise people, neither can any power, *which needs checking*, be from God...” (17).

Paine broadened his attack against the British system into a scathing examination of monarchy in general by challenging the readers to ponder “...how a race of men came into the world so exalted above the rest, and distinguished like some new species...” He assured them that the concept of monarchy “is worth inquiring into, and whether they are the means of happiness or of misery to mankind.” Paine cited Holland as supporting evidence stating, “Holland without a king hath enjoyed more peace for this last century than any of the monarchical governments in Europe” (19). He charged that hereditary succession “is a degradation and lessening of ourselves...” and “is an insult and imposition on posterity.” Paine continued that, “For all men being originally equals, no *one* by *birth* could have a right to set up his own family in perpetual preference to all other for ever...” (22). Paine’s final summation against the system asserted that:

In England a king hath little more to do than to make war and give away places; which in plain terms is to impoverish the nation and set it together by the ears. A pretty business indeed for a man to be allowed eight hundred thousand sterling a year

for, and worshiped into the bargain! Of more worth is one honest man to society and in the sight of God, than all the crowned ruffians that ever lived (27).

Paine then moved to an analysis of the alleged benefits of British protection. He contended that America had no enemies, except through being attached to England. "France and Spain never were, nor perhaps never will be our enemies as *Americans*, but as our being *subjects of Great Britain*." He refuted the idea of England as the parent country asserting, "Even brutes do not devour their young, nor savages make war upon their families..." Then he proclaimed "Europe, and not England is the parent country of America" (29).

Paine next called to mind the suffering of Boston under siege, "...that seat of wretchedness will teach us wisdom, and instruct us for ever to renounce a power in whom we can have no trust." He chided those who tended to "look somewhat lightly over the offences of Britain..." Bringing the "doctrine of reconciliation" under the spotlight he demanded, "...tell me, whether you can hereafter love, honor, and faithfully serve the power that brought fire and sword into your land?" Bringing the angry rhetoric to a fever pitch he asked if readers had lost a loved one at the hands of the British. He declared, "...if you have, and still can shake hands with the murderers, then are you unworthy the name of husband, father, friend, or lover, and whatever may be your rank or title in life, you have the heart of a coward, and the spirit of a sycophant" (31). Paine states unequivocally that independence alone will "keep the peace of the continent and preserve it inviolate..." He assured the concerned reader that the long history of peaceful coexistence of the colonies would endure without governance from England. He concluded his masterpiece with suggestions for self government.

Common Sense went on sale January 10, 1776 "and was an immediate runaway hit" (Liell 16). Benjamin Franklin recognized Paine's work as having "a great effect on the minds of the people" (133). George Washington had never acknowledged the possibility of independence in writing until January 31, 1776. Later he said that Paine's "sound doctrine and unanswerable reasoning" greatly strengthened his confidence in the cause of independence.(134). Thomas Jefferson held that the "sudden shift of Virginians away from Britain and toward independence was the direct result of *Common Sense*" (136). It is amazing to realize that one person's idea about the possibility of independence, put into the format of a forty-six page pamphlet, could change the destiny of a nation and its people.

Conclusion

I think it has been a truly rewarding experience to get to know some of the most remarkable people in American history. Their experiences can even be more meaningful to us if we notice the parallels to our present circumstances. It is very clear that the founders did not establish a Christian republic, indeed they worked to disestablish churches from their colonial governing power.

Our founding documents make no mention of Jesus, the Bible, or Christianity, they are deliberately secular. Jefferson's use of "Nature and Nature's God" in the Declaration of Independence is an indication of deistic principles and of his admiration of the Enlightenment ideal to respect natural law. Our rights "to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" exist because we are human beings, not because they are bestowed upon us arbitrarily by some monarch or churchman.

This study has been inspiring as well, for only when we understand the full value of our heritage will we make the effort to uphold it. It came with a cost and maybe it will only be preserved by those willing to give of themselves as those early radicals did. It is much easier to preserve what we already possess, than it will be to recover a heritage that is lost.

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