

Liberty &
the American Revolution



COMMON SENSE;

ADDRESSED TO THE

INHABITANTS

OF

A M E R I C A,

On the following interesting

S U B J E C T S.

- I. Of the Origin and Design of Government in general, with concise Remarks on the English Constitution.
 - II. Of Monarchy and Hereditary Succession.
 - III. Thoughts on the present State of American Affairs.
 - IV. Of the present Ability of America, with some miscellaneous Reflections.
- A NEW EDITION, with several Additions in the Body of the Work. To which is added an APPENDIX; together with an Address to the People called QUAKERS.
- N. B. The New Addition here given increases the Work upwards of one Third.

Man knows no Master save creating HEAVEN,
Or those whom Choice and common Good ordain.
THOMSON.

PHILADELPHIA PRINTED.

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Liberty & the American Revolution

*Selections from the Collection of
Sid Lapidus, Class of 1959*

AN EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

WITH A PREFACE BY STEPHEN FERGUSON

A FOREWORD BY SID LAPIDUS

AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

Sean Wilentz



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FRONTISPIECE:

[THOMAS PAINE] *Common Sense* ...

A New Edition with several Additions. Philadelphia [1776].

Advertised for sale on February 14, 1776, just thirty-six days
after publication of the first edition.

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point of taxing. Liberty might be safe, or might be endangered in twenty other particulars, without their being much pleased or alarmed. Here they felt its pulse; and as they found that beat, they thought themselves sick or sound. I do not say whether they were right or wrong in applying your general arguments to their own case. It is not easy indeed to make a monopoly of the-

orems and corollaries. The fact is, that they did thus apply those general arguments; and your mode of governing them, whether through lenity or indolence, through wisdom or mistake, confirmed them in the imagination, that they, as well as you, had an interest in these common principles (pp. 15-17).

1776—*Annus mirabilis*

→ RICHARD PRICE. *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty, and the Principles of Government*, ... London, 1776.

Price (1723-1791), a dissenting minister, published works across a wide range of fields, including theology, demography, actuarial works, and political theory. He emphasized the right to self-government, especially the validity of different forms of self-government. Although he did not actively perpetuate the idea of social contract, many of his arguments are implicit in the theory. A political and philosophical radical, Price attempted to argue for an objective view of moral judgment, which led to a friendly pamphlet war with Joseph Priestley.

Writing in defense of the American patriots, Price distinguished between four types of liberty: physical, moral, religious, and civil. Emphasizing the importance of civil liberty, which he defines as the right to govern oneself, Price argues that in order to enjoy one's natural rights, a person must participate in the government of his own community, which must not be dependent on the will of another.

After all that has been written on the dispute with America, no reader can expect to be informed, in this publication, of much that he has not before known. Perhaps, however, he may find in it some new matter; and if he should, it will be chiefly in the Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty, and the Policy of the War with America; and in the Appendix (Advertisement, p. [iii]).

Our Colonies in NORTH AMERICA appear to be now determined to do and suffer every

thing, under the persuasion, that GREAT BRITAIN is attempting to rob them of that Liberty to which every member of society, and all civil communities, have a natural and unalienable right. The question, therefore, whether this is a reasonable persuasion, is highly interesting, and deserves the most careful attention of every *Englishman* who values Liberty, and wishes to avoid staining himself with the guilt of invading it. But it is impossible to judge properly of this question without correct ideas of Liberty *in gen-*

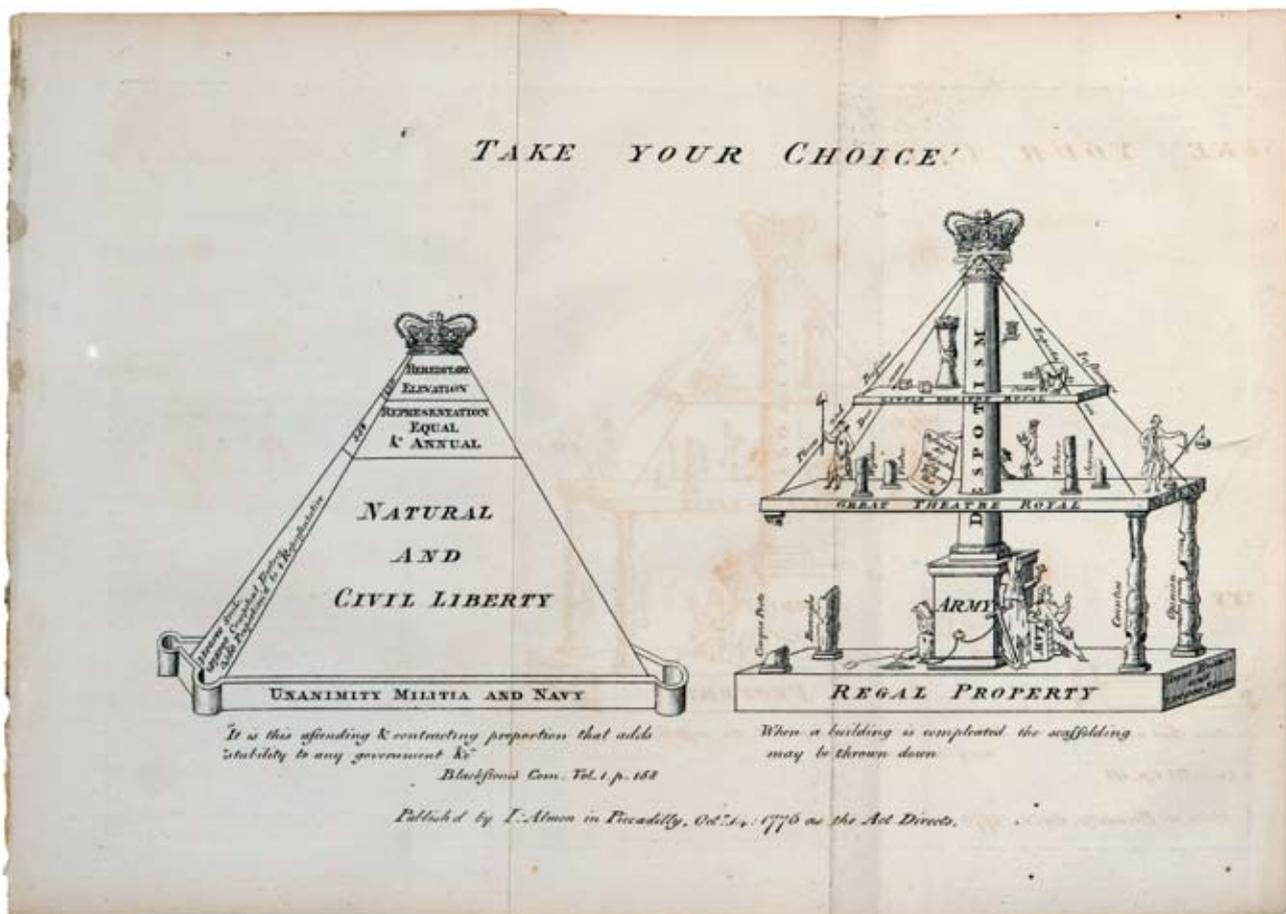
eral; and of the nature, limits, and principles of Civil Liberty *in particular* (p. [1]).

The Liberty of *America* might have preserved our Liberty; and, under the direction of a patriot king or wise minister, proved the means of restoring to us our almost lost constitution. Perhaps, in time, we might also have been brought to see the necessity of carefully watching and restrict-

ing our paper-credit: And thus we might have regained safety; and, in union with our Colonies, have been more than a match for every enemy, and risen to a situation of honour and dignity never before known amongst mankind.—But I am forgetting myself.—Our Colonies are likely to be lost for ever. Their love is turned into hatred; and their respect for our government into resentment and abhorrence (p. 70).

→ JOHN CARTWRIGHT. *Take Your Choice! Representation and Respect: Imposition and Contempt. Annual Parliaments and Liberty: Long Parliaments and Slavery.* London, 1776.

Following on Cartwright's appeal for American independence was advocacy of parliamentary reform, as laid out on the fold-out of this pamphlet:



→ [THOMAS PAINE]. *Common Sense; Addressed to the Inhabitants of America*, ... Philadelphia, 1776. "A New Edition." (See frontispiece.)

"Its effects were sudden and extensive upon the American mind. It was read by public men, repeated in clubs, spouted in Schools, and in one instance, delivered from the pulpit instead of a sermon by a clergyman in Connecticut." So wrote physician Benjamin Rush, Princeton class of 1760, about Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*. Paine (1737–1809) argued for the value of a republican society and a government without a monarch. Its circulation reached at least 120,000 copies at the time of the Revolution, and more than any other popular document, it fanned the revolutionary imagination.

To the revolutionaries, a loyal pamphleteer; to the loyalists, a rabble-rouser—Paine was in life, as in prose, ever balancing dichotomies. He apprenticed at twelve to his stay-making father, ran away at sixteen to crew on a glorified pirate ship, the privateer *William Death*. During subsequent years, Paine returned to stay-making, again abandoned it, took up the excise, was debarred from it, returned again to stay-making, and again returned to the excise. Finally, in 1774, Paine emigrated to America with a letter of introduction from Franklin, began work as an editor, and it was in the next year that he wrote this, his most famous pamphlet.

The cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind. Many circumstances hath, and will arise, which are not local, but universal, and through which the principles of all Lovers of Mankind are affected, and in the Event of which, their Affections are interested. The laying 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; of which Class, regardless of Party Censure, is the AUTHOR.

P.S. The Publication of this new Edition hath been delayed, with a View of taking notice (had it been necessary) of any Attempt to refute the Doctrine of Independence: As no Answer hath yet appeared, it is now presumed that none will, the Time needful for getting such a Performance ready for the Public being considerably past.

Who the Author of this Production is,

is wholly unnecessary to the Public, as the Object of Attention is the *Doctrine itself*, not the *Man*. Yet it may not be unnecessary to say, That he is unconnected with any Party, and under no sort of Influence public or private, but the influence of reason and principle.

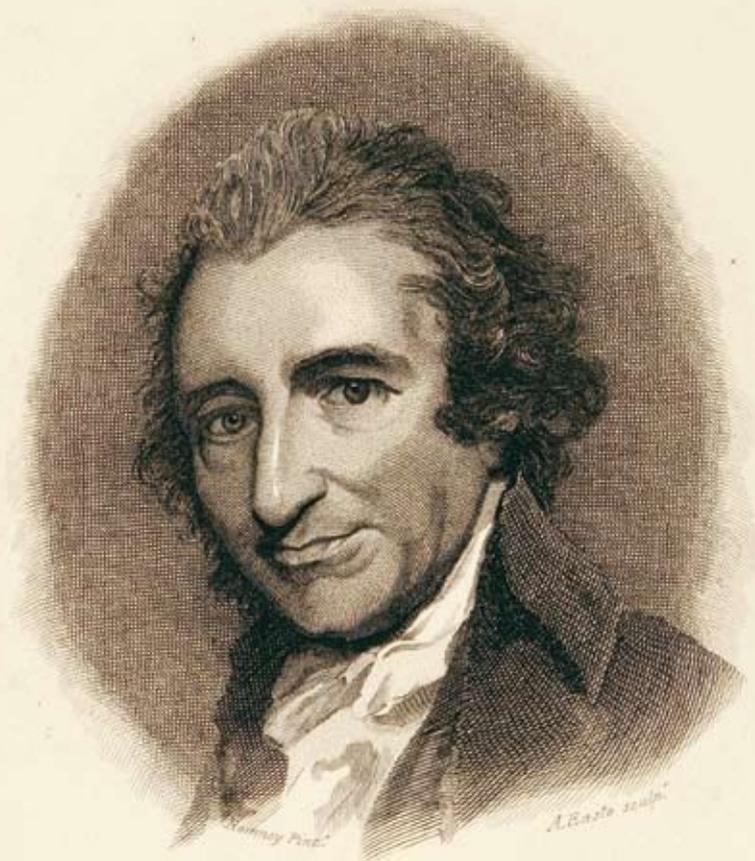
Philadelphia, February 14, 1776
(Introduction).

TO CONCLUDE, however strange it may appear to some, or however unwilling they may be to think so, matters not, but many strong and striking reasons may be given, to shew, that nothing can settle our affairs so expeditiously as an open and determined declaration for independance [*sic*]. Some of which are,

First. — It is the custom of nations, when any two are at war, for some other powers, not engaged in the quarrel, to step in as mediators, and bring about the preliminaries of a peace: but while America calls herself the

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COMMON SENSE.



67

Thomas Saine

Subject of Great-Britain, no power, however well disposed she may be, can offer her mediation. Wherefore, in our present state we may quarrel on for ever.

Secondly. — It is unreasonable to suppose, that France or Spain will give us any kind of assistance, if we mean only, to make use of that assistance for the purpose of repairing the breach, and strengthening the connection between Britain and America; because, those powers would be sufferers by the consequences.

Thirdly. — While we profess ourselves the subjects of Britain, we must, in the eye of foreign nations, be considered as rebels. The precedent is somewhat dangerous to *their peace*, for men to be in arms under the name of subjects; we, on the spot, can solve the paradox: but to unite resistance and subjection, requires an idea much too refined for common understanding.

Fourthly. — Were a manifesto to be published, and dispatched to foreign courts, setting forth the miseries we have endured, and the peaceful methods we have ineffectually used for redress; declaring, at the same time, that not being able, any longer,

to live happily or safely under the cruel disposition of the British court, we had been driven to the necessity of breaking off all connections with her; at the same time, assuring all such courts of our peaceable disposition towards them, and of our desire of entering into trade with them: Such a memorial would produce more good effects to this Continent, than if a ship were freighted with petitions to Britain.

Under our present denomination of British subjects, we can neither be received nor heard abroad: The custom of all courts is against us, and will be so, until, by an independance [*sic*], we take rank with other nations.

These proceedings may at first appear strange and difficult; but, like all other steps which we have already passed over, will in a little time become familiar and agreeable; and, until an independance [*sic*] is declared, the Continent will feel itself like a man who continues putting off some unpleasant business from day to day, yet knows it must be done, hates to set about it, wishes it over, and is continually haunted with the thoughts of its necessity (pp. 36–37).

Novth 27 1779
Read the above Thomas Paine

→ THOMAS PAINE. *The American Crisis*. [Philadelphia, 1776]. (The Lapidus Collection has Nos. 1–3.) (See image of No. 1 overleaf.)

Paine's first *Crisis* initially appeared in the *Pennsylvania Journal*, December 19, 1776. It was published during the days when Washington's troops, battle weary after defeats in New York, had retreated across the Delaware. It is said that Washington ordered it read to the dispirited soldiers. Six days later, Washington claimed victory at Trenton over the Hessian troops, who were hirelings of the British.

T H E
AMERICAN CRISIS,

NUMBER I.

BY THE AUTHOR OF COMMON SENSE.

TH ESE are the times that try men's souls: The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his 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. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: 'Tis dearness only that gives every thing its value. Heaven knows how to set a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed, if so celestial an article as *Freedom* should not be highly rated. Britain, with an army to enforce her tyranny, has declared, that she has a right (*not only to tax*) but "*to bind us in all cases whatsoever,*" and if being *bound in that manner* is not slavery, then is there not such a thing as slavery upon earth. Even the expression is impious, for so unlimited a power can belong only to God.

Whether the Independence of the Continent was declared too soon, or delayed too long, I will not now enter into an argument; my own simple opinion is, that had it been eight months earlier, it would have been much better. We did not make a proper use of last winter, neither could we, while we were in a dependant state. However, the fault, if it were one,

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 his 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. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly:—It is dearness only that gives every thing its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods: it would be strange indeed, if so celestial an article as FREEDOM should not be highly rated. Britain, with an army to enforce her tyranny, has declared, that she has a right (*not only to TAX*) but “*to BIND us in ALL CASES WHATSOEVER,*” and if being *bound in that manner* is not slav-

ery, then is there not such a thing as slavery upon earth. Even the expression is impious, for so unlimited a power can belong only to GOD (p. [1]).

If Britain cannot conquer us, it proves, that she is neither able to govern nor protect us, and our particular situation now is such that any connexion with her would be unwisely exchanging a half-defeated enemy for two powerful ones. Europe, by every appearance and information, is now on the eve, nay, on the morning twilight of a war, and any alliance with *George the Third* brings *France* and *Spain* upon our backs; a separation from him attach [*sic*] them to our side; therefore the only road to *Peace, Honour* and *Commerce*, is INDEPENDENCE (p. 54).

Beyond 1776

→ [THEOPHILUS PARSONS]. *Result of the Convention of Delegates Holden at Ipswich in the County of Essex, Who Were Deputed to Take into Consideration the Constitution ... Proposed by the Convention of the State of Massachusetts-Bay.* Newburyport, Mass., 1778.

Parsons (1750–1813) was instrumental in forming the Massachusetts constitution, the oldest functioning constitution in the world. A staunch federalist, he was a member of the Essex Junto, a group of lawyers and merchants who opposed the original Massachusetts constitution amid fears that it took a too-liberal approach to both civil and property rights. This document, also known as the “Essex Result,” came after a proposed constitution was soundly defeated in a popular vote. It showed that the people wanted more control over the writing of their constitution, and after following Parson’s recommendations, the Massachusetts constitutional convention managed to produce the first such document in history.

The freemen inhabiting the territory of the Massachusetts Bay are now forming a political society for themselves. Perhaps

their situation is more favorable in some respects, for erecting a free government, than any other people were ever favored