



Protecting the Equal Rights  
of Nonreligious Americans

## Testimony from the Secular Coalition in Support for a Thomas Paine Memorial

Mr. May and members of the Commission, the Secular Coalition for America strongly endorses the proposal to place a statue of Thomas Paine on federal land in the District of Columbia. The Secular Coalition comprises 20 large and small organizations that advocate for separation of church and state and for good government. We know someone who shared those values when we see him, and so a memorial to Thomas Paine definitely deserves our support and yours.

If Thomas Paine wasn't exactly a founding father, he was definitely a founding thinker. He immigrated here in 1774, having lived under the Monarchy and the Church of England. In 1776 he wrote his most famous work, *Common Sense*, a pamphlet that explained in layman's terms why the Colonies should support a war for independence from England. It also made the case that with independence we would have the opportunity to establish a representative government, a revolutionary idea in and of itself. *Common Sense* was so popular in the Colonies that if it were selling today, proportionally it would sell 62 million copies.

Paine was with George Washington at Valley Forge and wrote his first installment of *The American Crisis*, which began, "These are the times that try men's souls: The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman." Washington had it read to the troops three days before they crossed the Delaware, defeated the British at Trenton, and regained momentum in the war.

Later in the war Paine traveled to France to raise money. As an avowed opponent of monarchies Paine traveled back to France in 1790 to help with the French Revolution. He was included on the Constitutional Committee charged with drafting a constitution for the emerging French Republic.

In 1791 Paine published *The Rights of Man*, a book attacking monarchies and inequitable social institutions. It sold nearly a million copies. He published part two a year later which detailed the benefits of a representative government and promoted social programs to remedy the rampant poverty among the English commoners through progressive tax measures.

His final work, *The Age of Reason*, advocated for a firm belief in a creator-God, a skepticism regarding most supernatural claims, the separation of church and state, an emphasis on the individual's right of conscience, and of course the use of reason in government and everyday life. These were ideas he had espoused for years, ideas which influenced those founding fathers who do have a memorial in Washington DC.

It is clear to us that Thomas Paine was a historically significant figure in both motivating the colonists and troops to fight the British Empire for independence and in spreading support for the idea of representative government in this country and around the world.

## The Secular Coalition for America



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American Atheists

American Humanist Association

Black Nonbelievers

Center for Inquiry and the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason & Science

Cultural and Secular Jewish Organization

Foundation Beyond Belief

Freethought Society

Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers

Secular Student Alliance

Society for Humanistic Judaism

Unitarian Universalist Humanist Association

American Ethical Union

Atheist Alliance of America

Camp Quest

Ex-Muslims of North America

Freedom From Religion Foundation

Hispanic American Freethinkers

Recovery From Religion

Secular Woman

The Clergy Project