

**NEW**  
**DIRECTIONS IN**  
**THOMAS PAINE**  
**STUDIES**

*Edited by*  
**SCOTT CLEARY &**  
**IVY LINTON STABELL**



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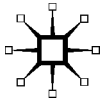
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*To my continual sources of inspiration*

*Tonia and Lucan*

*SC*

*To my family*

*ILS*

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# Introduction

*Scott Cleary*

In their review of the First International Conference of Thomas Paine Studies, held in celebration of Iona College's acquisition of the Thomas Paine National Historical Association Collection of artifacts, and the establishment of the college's Institute for Thomas Paine Studies, Betsy Erkkila and Ed Larkin remarked, "As a citizen of the world in an academic culture that has for so long oriented itself around national traditions, Paine's career and role became fragmented. Perhaps now, in this age of celebrating transnationality and interdisciplinarity, we can finally recover the fullness of Paine's career and contributions. The conference thus underscored how much work remains to be done to come to grips with Paine's remarkable career as a transatlantic revolutionary."<sup>1</sup> This volume, which is both a product of the conference but also a desire to move beyond it and transcend, if not demolish, the boundaries that Erkkila and Larkin have rightly recognized as impeding Paine scholarship over the past century, hopes to shape the means and methods by which our relatively new academic focus, and perhaps insistence, on interdisciplinarity and global learning unfolds several exciting new directions in Thomas Paine Studies.

But why Paine, and why Paine now? Named moral father of the Internet by *Wired* magazine in 1995, quoted by President Barack Obama in his historic first inaugural address of 2009, and claimed by all parties in an increasingly fractious American political climate, Thomas Paine is a man, it seems, whose time has come again. Or perhaps it never wasn't his time; his impact on American radicalism and secular humanism, global revolutionary thought, eighteenth-century prose, and various pop culture effusions such as films (*Death Race 2000*, 1975) and most recently Showtime's *Happyness* (2015), where the main character, played by Steve Coogan, is a frazzled, alienated middle-aged manager named Thom Payne. Yuval Levin recently

claimed in his *New York Times* bestselling book *The Great Debate* that thanks to Paine and his once friend, then famous adversary Edmund Burke, the very concept and performance of “right” and “left” in American politics exists. Paine has then filtered by a kind of osmosis into our collective and contemporary cultural understanding. His *Common Sense* and *Crisis* papers served as the intellectual and propagandistic engines of the American Revolution. His *Rights of Man* and *Age of Reason* stood as products of the French Revolution but more importantly harbingers of and manifestoes for a secular humanism and insistence on human rights that still are contested today. His *Letter to George Washington* and *Agrarian Justice*, which at once deconstructed the myth of George Washington not soon after it was raised and argues for income equality and government assistance to the poor, marked his continual presence in American politics long after he had become a citizen of the world. These texts have marked both Paine’s continued popularity as a political thinker, perhaps even philosopher, but also demarcated the lines outside of which he has stood as an accused atheist and radical, determinedly beyond the scope of American mythmaking. Paine’s life has likewise undergone various scrutinies that often bordered on calumnies. A trained staymaker, embattled excise officer, soldier, bridge builder, prisoner during the French Revolution, and expatriate American returning to America at Thomas Jefferson’s invitation in 1802, Paine generated conflict and outrage wherever he went, holding within himself a perspicacious ability to symbolize his ideas to allies and enemies alike. Refused the right to vote in the 1806 congressional elections by New Rochelle, NY electors who claimed he was no American, buried in 1809, and dug up in 1819 only to have his bones lost and scattered around the world, Paine’s life, in its disparate combativeness and murky dissipation, has both fed and starved the nationalistic academic silos that have grown around Paine scholarship.

Without Paine there is no America, nor many of the cultural markers that have defined various discourses since the American Revolution. Borne of a desire to say more about an important global figure and to dismantle nationalized manifestations of Paine into the American Paine, British Paine, and French Paine, this collection of essays is a starting point; a gesture toward the much larger field of Thomas Paine Studies that awaits scholars of multiple disciplines working within and beyond those disciplines. Indeed, these essays draw upon both the need to embrace and take seriously Paine’s self-proclaimed status as a global citizen, but also to engage an interdisciplinary group

of scholars in a larger conversation about Paine, his meaning, and the import of his ideas.

The first section of essays, *Thomas Paine and Modern Methodologies*, addresses directly one of the main problems Paine Studies has suffered from in the past century: the sharp disciplinary silos in which scholarship has taken place. Erkkila and Larkin's contention that "Paine scholarship is divided disciplinarily between historians, literary scholars, philosophers, and political scientists who often don't read each other's work" is the shibboleth of these new methodologies, which attempt not only to say something new about Paine, but actively demonstrate new ways of saying those new things about him. Raymond Irwin's qualitative analysis of Paine's works looks at the other side of Paine and authorship by assessing who has written what about Paine and how frequently. Leveraging digital methodological tools like web search engines and digital library catalogues, Irwin sketches a brief history of Paine scholarship, noting trends but more significantly the gaps in our disciplinary knowledges and acknowledgments of Paine. As it turns out "Paine the prolific writer lends himself to the publication of anthologies, commentaries, and document collections; Paine the controversialist is ideal for biography and contextualization in the extraordinary times of the late eighteenth century, thus becoming the starting point for any study of Paine." Yet as Irwin rightly notes, there are larger theoretical issues at play, namely the intersection of Paine, his writings, and the digital humanities. Irwin writes, "As more material has been digitized and access points have improved (e.g., the addition of sophisticated descriptors to bibliographic records and the design of user-friendly interfaces aimed at yielding precise returns), so have our capabilities to query large datasets and produce more accurate quantitative data to get at certain macro characteristics of scholarly literature." Himself a deft manipulator of various genres, from poetry to pamphlet and letter to essay, Paine's ease and malleability when it came to the literary forms his ideas took, and the media through which he communicated them, makes him as natural a figure as any to be a theoretical subject of digital humanities research.

Gary Berton, Smiljana Petrovic, Lubomir Ivanov, and Robert Schiaffino's essay takes many of those same digital methodologies and applies it to Paine and authorship. Attributing Paine's authorship has been easy in the case of his major works, but much less so in his less famous works, often published in newspapers. Major editions of Paine's works, ranging from James Carey's in 1797, Richard Carlile's