



Legislation Text

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Recognizing June 8, 2009 as Thomas Paine Day in Philadelphia in Appreciation of the Tremendous Influence of Paine's Life and Words upon the City of Philadelphia and the Nation on the Occasion of the 200th Anniversary of His Death.

WHEREAS, In the closing passages of his recent inaugural speech, President Obama quoted from Thomas Paine's essay *The Crisis*, written in 1776, intoning: "Let it be told to the future world, that in the depth of winter, when nothing but hope and virtue could survive, that the city and the country, alarmed at one common danger, came forth to meet and to repulse it." And thereby, Obama reminded us of the importance of and the inspiration we can continue to draw from the writings of Thomas Paine to this day; and

WHEREAS, Thomas Paine came to Philadelphia, which was the political and cultural center of America in 1774, with a letter of introduction from Benjamin Franklin, whom he had met in London; and

WHEREAS, He became the editor of the *Pennsylvania Magazine* in this City, as well as friends with a group of political radicals who were centered here; and

WHEREAS, Paine wrote to Benjamin Franklin observing that he could see the slave market from his apartment window and asked Franklin how it was that they could be talking about freedom and allow slavery to exist. And this experience, among others, prompted Paine to write *African Slavery in America* (1775), wherein he vigorously criticized the visible contradiction existing between the call for an independent citizenry and the practice of slavery; and

WHEREAS, Paine was one of the first members of the Pennsylvania Abolitionist Society, an organization which still exists here in Philadelphia today; and

WHEREAS, Paine changed what was essentially a tax revolt into a revolution for independence with the widespread dissemination of his pamphlet *Common Sense* (1776); and

WHEREAS, Paine was one of the first individuals to use the phrase, "United States of America" and when the revolution was flagging, in order to reinvigorate the struggle, wrote *The Crisis*, containing one of the most famous phrases in American history: "These are the times that try men's souls,"; and

WHEREAS, Paine and Franklin helped write the new constitution for the state of Pennsylvania; and

WHEREAS, In response to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on a Revolution in France*, Paine wrote not only a defense of the French Revolution, but one of the most vigorous calls for the overthrow of monarchy and aristocracy throughout the world; and

WHEREAS, In his eloquent attack on the political bureaucracy titled, *The Rights of Man* (1791), Paine re-phrased the concepts of civil rights and human rights under the terminology of "natural rights," insisting on their inherent due to each human being upon birth; and

WHEREAS, This was not the first time that Paine had risked charges of treason to defend, not only the rights of the nation to self-rule as in his, *Common Sense*, but likewise the rights of all men to rule themselves as in his, *The Rights of Man*; and

WHEREAS, In response to, *The Rights of Man* and its popularity among the public, the English government charged Paine with treason and sentenced him to hang, thereby prompting his swift flight to France, where Paine was elected to the Constituent Assembly and subsequently attempted to persuade its members that France should become the first country to overthrow the monarchy and the first country to do away with the death sentence; and

WHEREAS, Paine's last major work, *Agrarian Justice* (1797), took aim at the problem of poverty and proposed a variety of practical solutions, including the basic concept of Social Security, which was not put into effect in America until 1935; and

WHEREAS, Paine wrote, "The world is my country, all mankind are my brethren, and to do good is my religion," then spent the remainder of his life trying to spread freedom around the world. And this unbending dedication prompted his fellow countryman, the poet Joel Barlow to declare, "Without the pen of Paine, the sword of Washington would have been wielded in vein,"; and

WHEREAS, Even today, politicians, historians, poets, and citizens alike continue to draw from Thomas Paine's ideas and writings as a source of inspiration and debate two hundred years after his death on June 8, 1809; now therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE PHILADELPHIA CITY COUNCIL, Hereby recognizes June 8, 2009 as Thomas Paine Day, on the occasion of the 200th Anniversary of his death.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented as a sincere expression of this Council's recognition and appreciation.