

Thomas Paine <Common Sense> 1776

“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.”

Thomas Paine <The Rights of Man> 1791

"The fact is too notorious to require any instances to prove it, that the subjecting the weaker sex to the tyranny of the stronger, is not only founded in injustice, but is likewise a palpable usurpation on the rights of man. . . . It is a perversion of terms to say that a charter gives rights. It operates by a contrary effect — that of taking rights away. Rights are inherently in all the inhabitants; but charters, by annulling those rights, in the majority, leave the right, by exclusion, in the hands of a few. . . . In the early ages of the world, according to the scripture chronology, there were no kings; the consequence of which was, there were no wars; it is the pride of kings which throws mankind into confusion."

“Man did not enter into society to become worse than he was before, nor to have fewer rights than he had before, but to have those rights better secured. His natural rights are the foundation of all his civil rights. But in order to pursue this distinction with more precision, it will be necessary to mark the different qualities of natural and civil rights. A few words will explain this. Natural rights are those which appertain to man in right of his existence. Of this kind are all the intellectual rights, or rights of the mind, and also all those rights of acting as an individual for his own comfort and happiness, which are not injurious to the natural rights of others. Civil rights are those which appertain to man in right of his being a member of society.”

“Every age and generation must be as free to act for itself in all cases as the ages and generations which preceded it. The vanity and presumption of governing beyond the grave is the most ridiculous and insolent of all tyrannies. Man has no property in man; neither has any generation a property in the generations which are to follow.”

Which human rights issues does Thomas Paine mention in these paragraphs? Do these issues still exist today?

What does Paine believe is the purpose of humans entering society? How does he distinguish between natural rights and civil rights? Do you agree with his views?

Paine emphasizes the freedom of action for each era and generation, rather than being bound by the actions of previous generations. Do you agree with his views?