

**The Effect of Liberty Tree by  
Thomas Paine on Colonial  
Americans and Their Views toward  
of Independence.**

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Thomas Paine was a very influential author in the 1700's and his writings were published and sold throughout the English Colonies. One of his lesser known works was a poem written on September 17, 1775. The poem was printed in July of the same year in the *Pennsylvania Magazine: or American Monthly Museum*. Liberty Tree was signed "Atlanticus" which was a pseudonym that was commonly used by Thomas Paine. Liberty Tree remained popular for many years after it was published. But sadly it has been lost to readers over the course of the over two hundred and thirty years since it was first published. This poem was pushed out of the spotlight the year after it was initially published when Thomas Paine published Common Sense which is arguably still his most popular and well known piece of literature.

Liberty Tree contains many instances of symbolism and metaphors about and references to colonial America and its colonization and search for liberty. This was written in the time just prior to the American Revolutionary War. Liberty Tree, at the time that it was first published was seen as justification for waging war on the English "Tyrants".

The first metaphor is the liberty tree which is representative of the colonists who came across the Atlantic Ocean and took root on this continent and then grew greatly as if they had been living there for many generations. The Poem says, "The celestial exotic stuck deep in the ground, like a native it flourished." This is a good representation for the colonists because they were considered exotic by the natives the North American continent when they arrived there. The colonists then proceeded to dig themselves in and make the colonies their home. This was a success as the poem indicates and the colonists flourished.

Soon after the news of the flourishing colonists reached Europe more and more people made the decision to leave their homes and come to the new colonies. They did this because they had heard about the immense opportunities that awaited them and of the

ability to start over in a new land where their past was a mystery to all. The poem says, “The fame of its fruit drew the nations around.” This excerpt illustrates the point that the colonies were well known across civilized Europe. In some instances organization would sell land in the colonies to people who were thousands of miles away in anticipation of their imminent departure for the colonies. In addition to the sales of land in the colonies many people and organizations were making arrangements to pay for a person’s ticket to the colonies in exchange for a predetermined amount of service that the new immigrant would do free of charge, a person that did this was called an indentured servant. This was usually lasted for about seven years.

The colonies had also earned a reputation as a peaceful and very tolerant place. Because of this reputation the colonies became a refuge for the disgruntled and persecuted peoples of Europe. These political and religious refugees came to the colonies in search of a place where they could practice or believe whatever they wanted. The colonies were the places they had been wishing for. This is represented in the poem when it says, “To seek out this peaceable shore.” The colonies were a refuge for many people that were trying to escape one thing or another by fleeing to a new land.

When it says, “Unmindful of names or distinctions they came.” It means that when the people came to the colonies they came in droves, the people on their way to the colonies did not concern themselves with learning about or judging all the different groups of people who were traveling along with them on a journey to the same destination. There was a certain atmosphere of tolerance and indifference toward all the other people coming to the colonies. This had the effect of encouraging more and more people to come to the colonies because it was a place where they would be accepted.

Once people had arrived in the colonies and had settled in to this new life they began to take pride in their home and to see the colonies as one unified force. Paine chose to make this point by saying, “With one spirit endued, they one friendship pursued, and their temple was Liberty Tree.” Paine was trying to say that the “one spirit endued” was the colonists spirit of a unity and pride in their new home. The “one friendship pursued” was the belief of the colonists that the colonies should become one unified force. Since this was not yet achieved Paine said it was “pursued”, and it was pursued by the colonists. All of the colonists were very proud of their new home and that sense of

pride is conveyed by Paine when he says, “their temple was Liberty Tree.” This line means that the citizens of the colonies treated their homes and colonies like a temple by keeping them in tip-top shape and cherishing them and what they have allowed them to accomplish and all the opportunity that they have brought to their citizens.

This went on for some time. The colonists were happy and content with their current status as an English colony. They did view their service to England as an honor to their colonies and themselves. They were vital to England as both trading partners and as soldiers. They willingly supplied England with timbers and tars which were both necessary in order for England to remain in possession of the world’s greatest navy and necessary for the maintenance of the world’s greatest navy. The colonists fought proudly in the name of England for the honor of their colonies and therefore the honor of their mother country. This is expressed in the poem when Paine writes, “With timber and tar they Old England supplied, and supported her power on the sea; her battles they fought, without getting a groat, for the honor of Liberty Tree.”

England had accumulated a massive national debt. In order to pay it off they decided to make the colonists pay for the debt through multiple taxes that were unwillingly imposed upon the colonists. England continued to abuse the colonies by imposing more and more taxes. The first of the English taxes that the colonists actually managed to get repealed was the stamp act which required the use of stamped paper in the production of all paper products from newspapers to playing cards. The stamp indicated that the tax had been paid. This act prompted the formation of groups like the “Sons of Liberty” who resisted the act, even resorting to violence.

To the average colonist these acts seemed to be a betrayal of the colonies by their mother country. The sentiment soon formed that the parliament and the lords and king were uniting to tear apart the colonies and to negate what progress the colonies had made. Paine writes that, “all the tyrannical powers, Kings, Commons and Lords, are uniting amain to cut down this guardian of ours.” This is not good for England because as they will soon find out, the colonies will not be pushed around and treated as if they are not truly citizens to the country that they had been faithfully serving for years.

The colonists tried to settle the conflict with England in a civilized manner. When that method was proven to be futile they decided that they must fight for their

rights that they deserved but were not being granted. Paine wrote, "From the East to the West blow the trumpet to arms." This shows that the colonies were serious about war and that they would not go down without a fight. The last two lines of Paine's poem are "Let the far and the near all unite with a cheer, in defense of our Liberty Tree." These lines are meant to be an inspiration to all of the colonists that were fed up with the current state of affairs. They suggest that their colonies and their way of life was under attack and needed to be defended from "the tyrannical powers, Kings, Commons and Lords" who was believed by the colonists to want to tear down the society and way of life that had been put in place in the colonies by their inhabitants. The final lines try and convey a sense of nationalism toward the colonists so that they will be logically and morally obligated to take up arms against England which was soon to lose its title as the mother country for the colonies.

This Poem takes on the task of relaying the history of the colonies which would later come to be known as the United States of America. The poem illustrates that the people living in the colonies really truly tried to make life as an English colonist work. That life was working until the English government began to treat the colonists, many of whom had come from England, as people who were somehow less than the people who were actually living in England. Liberty Tree was meant to portray the colonists as the victims of a great injustice, and to portray the government of England as the big bad villain that is only concerned with maintaining its tyrannical hold over the colonies.

It would appear that Liberty Tree had the effect that was Thomas Paine had hoped it would have. It seems that the poem successfully inspired a large portion of the citizens of the colonies to take a step back and realize what was really going on. After the colonists had taken this step back they would hopefully discover within themselves a sense that they had been betrayed by England, once they came to recognize this new awareness they would most certainly be willing to take up arms against the betrayers.

It is uncertain whether or not Liberty Tree actually was the motivation behind peoples yearning for independence Liberty Tree certainly did make a difference. It served as evidence in support of the revolutionary cause for which so many colonists fought and died. This poem was originally published in song form which made it easy to remember and easy to learn. It was important that the uneducated masses understand

why they were entering a seemingly un-winnable war. When set to a tune Liberty Tree became a convenient and easy way for the average colonist to justify war. The poem when in song version became an easy way to teach people about the history of the colonies and about the sequence of events which led up to a war against England.

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