

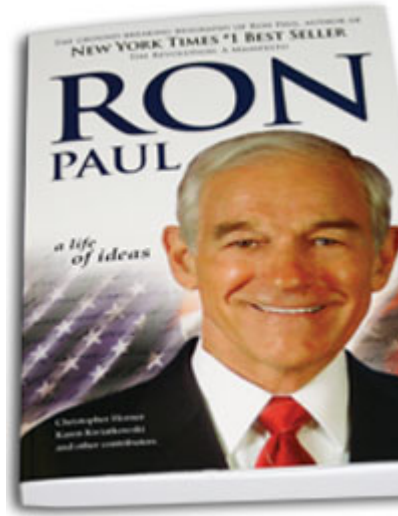


Written by [Steven J. DuBord](#) on December 29, 2008

Ron Paul: A Man of Ideas and Ideals

Ron Paul: A Life of Ideas, by Christopher Horner and Karen Kwiatkowski, Winnipeg, Manitoba: Variant Press, 2008, 256 pages, paperback.

"Great and good are seldom the same man," Churchill once pointed out, and with considerable justification. Seldom if ever do men of overweening ambition and titanic acquisitiveness — the monarchs, empire-builders, military prodigies, and captains of finance and industry so beloved of the historians who write the narrative of civilization — embody the gentler virtues. Such men are, as a general rule, not the meek, the peacemakers, and poor in spirit who (we devoutly hope) will someday soon inherit the Earth.



Once in a very great while, however, great and good do converge in the same soul. Every so often, like Frank Capra's fictional dark horse Senate appointee Jefferson Smith, some unassuming individual is thrust into greatness by unexpected events. Such were Cincinnatus, Joan of Arc, and many of the Founding Fathers. Such, in our day, is Congressman Ron Paul.

Not very long ago, Congressman Ron Paul was anything but a household word, except to those of us in an apparently shrinking minority of freedom's partisans who had followed the career of Capitol Hill's "Dr. No" for years. When he announced his candidacy in the 2008 presidential campaign, many of us who knew or knew of him were taken off guard by his meteoric rise to national prominence. The Ron Paul presidential campaign, though not a success in conventional political terms, was responsible for more "pinch me" moments than this author can recall. Who, prior to the "Ron Paul Revolution," would have seriously imagined witnessing a discussion of Austrian economics and the causes of inflation on CNN or the *Tonight Show*? Who could have foreseen a presidential candidate making the case for a revival of the constitutionally mandated declaration of war? What soothsayer could have predicted an Internet-based presidential campaign that raised huge sums of money from ordinary donors, allowing the doctrines of free-market economics and constitutionally limited government power to be broadcast far and wide? Who could have foreseen the mass appeal of promises to abolish the Federal Reserve and retract the claws of the global American empire? Well, not this writer, anyway.

With typical modesty, Congressman Paul himself believes that his ideas, not his persona, are the selling point. Freedom, he never tires of reminding audiences, is enduringly popular. Yet history's verdict on the popularity of freedom is ambiguous at best. The decline of personal liberty and the virtual abolition of constitutional limitations on government powers have not taken place in secret or without opposition. They have occurred, not because Americans have not resisted, but because they have not resisted enough.

Now, however, something is stirring on the national political landscape, if the movement associated



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with the Ron Paul campaign is any indicator. Thousands of Americans, especially those in the twenty-something demographic, have been cured of political apathy by the electric impact of Dr. Paul's message.

Not a moment too soon, the first book-length biography of the good doctor, *Ron Paul: A Life of Ideas*, by Christopher Horner, Karen Kwiatkowski, and a host of other contributors, tells the back story of the man behind the revolution, a best-selling book, and the Internet phenomenon. Although the biography has its editorial shortcomings (a font size and formatting reminiscent of a government document, for example), the book is a well-researched, intimate portrait of both the man and many of his most important ideas. Here can be found tautly written explanations of "Austrian" free-market economics (for those not conversant with the writings of von Mises and Rothbard), of the Constitution, of American military adventurism, and sundry other topics necessary to appreciate the basis for Dr. Paul's "radical" ideas.

In point of fact, there is nothing radical about Dr. Paul but the timing of his birth. Like the Roman statesman Cato the Younger, he is a man born out of time, the embodiment of an old-fashioned work ethic and love of personal liberty completely consonant with 19th-century America and American party politics (at least, prior to the watershed 1896 elections), but strangely out of sync with the arrogant statism now in vogue from sea to shining sea.

Politicos of both major parties and their legions of hangers-on have always professed horror at Dr. Paul's beliefs. That people can be trusted to spend their own money? Not to be thought of. That the free market is capable of regulating itself, including the type and amount of money available, without oodles of benign federal overseers to regulate, control, and restrict? Not on your life. That the Constitution — that outmoded scrap of paper — ought still to be the law of the land in every particular, and not merely when convenient? Please.

Yet for decades, Ron Paul, a lone voice in the hostile Beltway wilderness, has unswervingly espoused these beliefs and many others like them. In the '70s, the era when Keynesian (socialist) economics reached full fruition with the global abandonment of the gold standard, young Congressman Paul, the hard-money advocate, was met with derision. In the '80s, when the Great Economic Bubble began and the Reagan rhetoric created an illusion of limited government, Dr. Paul returned to his medical practice but made time to continue writing on liberty and also to run for president on the Libertarian Party ticket. In the '90s, he returned to Congress, where he has remained ensconced since 1996, despite determined efforts by Democrats and Republicans alike to unseat him. With the surprising prominence of his presidential campaign and an economic crisis that has fulfilled many of his dire warnings, Dr. Paul enjoys a newfound credibility among his political peers that may bode well for the future of the movement he helped to re-ignite.

The new biography also furnishes many fascinating details about the private life and personality of a man known to most by his nerdy on-camera persona. He is shown as deeply human and prone to human failings. Here are detailed some of the rifts and fallings-out between Dr. Paul and erstwhile friends and supporters. One betrayal, a six-figure embezzlement by a trusted subordinate uncovered on the eve of the 1988 presidential elections, threw his Libertarian Party candidacy into complete disarray and led to a criminal investigation and prosecution of one of his closest confidantes. Another, a bitter feud that persists to this day between Dr. Paul and one of his longest associates, began in a disagreement over the Iraq War; Congressman Paul refused to retain any staffer who supported the war, and the resulting rift made a genuine enemy out of a friend of many years.



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Here too is Ron Paul the all-American young man, a high-school track star and top-notch student who, after growing up and attending college in Pennsylvania, obtained a medical degree from Duke University Medical School and went on to deliver thousands of babies in his adopted state of Texas. On one occasion, he witnessed an abortion, and was so appalled at seeing the doctors throw the still-moving baby into the trash that he became a staunch opponent of abortion, a position he has never compromised, despite being at variance with many in the libertarian movement.

In a time of Big Government ascendant, Congressman Ron Paul is ample reason to believe that America's love affair with liberty is not over. With his dogged adherence to principle and personal incorruptibility, Dr. Paul is a relic of a more civilized age, when men of character rather than charisma were elevated to prominence in public service. As one detractor noted during his presidential campaign, Dr. Paul would have made a great president in the 19th century. But if the Ron Paul Revolution has been any indication, the 21st century may see others of Dr. Paul's ilk raised up to write the epitaph for the 20th century, the time when Big Government almost — but not quite — eradicated freedom and civilization.



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