



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on March 28, 2023

Happy Birthday, Paul de Rapin: A Forgotten Influence on the Founding Fathers

His multi-volume chronicle of the history of England was included by James Madison in the first Library of Congress, and those very volumes were found in the personal libraries of not only Madison, but of George Washington, John Adams, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, and many other Founding Fathers. Yet, his name is nearly unknown to us today — even to professors of U.S. History.

This influential, but forgotten, author is Paul de Rapin.

Paul de Rapin, also known as Paul de Rapin-Thoyras (March 25, 1661 - April 25, 1725), was a French historian and writer. He is best known for his major work, *The History of England*, which was published in multiple volumes in the early 18th century.

Rapin was born into a noble family in the south of France, and he spent much of his life traveling throughout Europe. He settled in England in 1688, and became a naturalized British citizen.

Historian John W. Tyler wrote of Rapin:

The first historian to bring objectivity to an account of the English Civil War was, as Voltaire observed, a foreigner. A Huguenot driven out of France by the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, Paul de Rapin de Thoyras sought refuge in both Holland and England. A soldier, he accompanied William III to England in 1688 and served in the English Army in Ireland before finally settling in Holland in 1707. There he began work on a ten-volume *L'Histoire de l'Angleterre* [*The History of England*] (1724-1727).

In addition to his historical writings, he also wrote poetry and worked as a translator.

The last volume of *The History of England* was published in 1727, 24 years before James Madison was born in 1751. It is considered one of the most important English histories of the 18th century, and it was widely read and influential in its time, cited often by our own Founding Fathers and the men whose books they read. Rapin's *History* covers the history of England from the Roman conquest to the Glorious Revolution of 1688, and is known for its clear and straightforward style. It was a regular reference for the men of the Founding Generation during their early years of studying history.

Today, with the history curriculum of most schools in the United States having fallen under the influence, if not the direct control, of the federal educracy, Rapin's book is not read in American schools and his name has been erased from the books read by American school children. Perhaps reading a few



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selections from his books will instantly reveal why we don't read Rapin anymore.

Regarding the Danger of Party Politics:

The mutual animosity of the two parties was so violent, civil war, that they soon came to blows, each preferring his private; to the public interest....

If I sometimes seem to incline to one side it is because I have no reason to vary from the truth, and am persuaded that the King and Parliament were both very much in the wrong, though not always on the same occasions....

Petty tyrants, sought to destroy the king, so as to possess the throne. These malcontents would join together for the destruction of the people, and the people, unable to unite themselves, were plunged deeper into lawlessness and confusion....

Often, parties place a man on the throne, not that he may reign, but that they, themselves, might rule secretly in his name....

When Northumberland was divided into factions, they paid little attention to what happened to the people, now they only watched and waited for opportunities to defeat their rival factions....

Regarding How Small Occurrences Can Lead to Large Events:

So true it is, the greatest Events spring sometimes from Things that appear at first of very little Consequence.

Regarding the Trustworthiness of Historians:

Historians have been contented with relating some certain facts, which just serve to carry on the thread of history....

One must not be surprised to find so great contrariety among the historians concerning events so remote from our time; when even the authors that write of what has passed in our days, very rarely agree in facts, which by their late date, might easily be known....

He therefore that undertakes to write [history] must endeavor to discover the truth in even the most partial historians, and be extremely careful to avoid the continual snares they lay for their readers, for the sake of the cause they maintain. One must know what was their aim in writing, the system they followed, and the artifices they made use of to engage in their principles such as make but few reflections in reading a history, and are ... easily drawn into the prejudices of the historian they are perusing.

Regarding Every Man's Right to End Tyranny:

According to the scriptures, it is lawful for every man, feeling an inward motion from God, to rid his people of a tyrant....

Tyrants are those usurpers who think the people ordained only to satisfy their desires and their unreasonable appetites....



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When the rulers become tyrants, the people become slaves.

It is obvious why our Founding Fathers read and referred to Rapin's *The History of England* so often. As young men, they read his stories and they learned from them of the dangers to liberty posed by parties, the tendency of historians to make up stories to fit their prejudices, and the obligation of all free people to resist and remove tyrants, lest they become their slaves.

Maybe if we read the books our Founding Fathers read, we will be inspired to do what our Founding Fathers did and throw off the chains of tyranny and restore self-government to this people. And should we ever think the battle is too hard and the odds too great, let's remember these words of Paul de Rapin and take courage:

Our strength often increases in proportion to the obstacles imposed upon it.



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