



Happy 300th Birthday, Richard Price! Wait — Who?

“Make way! Make way for the good Dr. Price!”

This is reportedly the familiar cry of farmers and tradesmen who would greet Richard Price every morning as he would pass by their stalls at the marketplace.

Today, on the 300th anniversary of his birth, there are PhDs in American history who have never heard of this man once known as the “Torchbearer of Liberty.”

Richard Price is a name that every American who loves liberty and wants to more fully understand the true value of “so celestial an article as freedom” should know and whose words should be taught to every child in every home in the country whose liberty Dr. Price praised so fully and so frequently.



Richard Price

Among our Founding Fathers, not only was the name of Richard Price known very well, but many of the leading lights of that noble generation knew him personally, eating dinner with him, listening to him deliver fiery sermons in support of human freedom, and carrying on years of correspondence with him. If for no other reason, our Founders’ immense respect and innumerable references to him make Richard Price worthy of our interest.

Born in Tynon, Wales, in 1723 in a farmhouse that had been home to his ancestors for over 200 years by the time he was born, Richard Price was raised in a family of devout faith. They were members of a denomination of Christianity known in history as “Dissenters.”

Dissenters were those who did not agree with the direction being taken by the Anglican Church when it was restored as the established church by Charles II. Many members of the Church of England, in fact, fled from their mother church and met together in defiance of the dictates of the political powers of the day.

In a book describing the atmosphere that dominated Great Britain in those days, G.M. Trevelyan wrote that the Puritans and other Dissenters developed a “political tradition ... of vigilant criticism of protest towards the powers that rule society and the State.”

During the reign of Charles II, Dissenters — including the Puritans, the Presbyterians, and others — were oppressed by laws passed by Parliament for that very purpose: denying Dissenters their religious liberty.

Richard Price’s parents were Dissenters who attended the congregation created by Reverend Samuel Jones in Glamorganshire, Wales, and Richard was raised in a home where protest against any power that limited liberty was a family tradition.

Reverend Jones and his parishioners, including the Price family, often met in a barn, being prohibited



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by Parliament from publicly meeting. While the laws restricting the activity of the Dissenters were sometimes not enforced strictly, at other times they were enforced with ferocity. Such ferocity once saw Samuel Jones imprisoned for a short time.

This suffering for the sake of the right to worship according to one's own conscience was a condition that would make a deep impression on the young mind of Richard Price and would set the course of his life.

When surveying the lives of our own Founding Fathers and the men that formed their thinking, we come to find that with few exceptions all of them clung tenaciously to the concept that wisdom was acquired by sincere study and genuine faith in God. Richard Price was such a man. He was not afraid of the heavy lifting required of those who would be leaders, whether in the 18th century or the 21st century.

During his four years at Coward's Academy, Richard studied Hebrew, Greek, Latin, philosophy, divinity, theology, the history of the Holy Land, algebra, trigonometry, physics, oration, logic, and "pastoral care," the art and science of being a minister of the gospel.

These are the very subjects that were studied by our Founding Fathers during their own education, and it would seem that anyone who wants to be a man of their mental power would do more than give lip service to such studies.

Are you starting to see the picture? Are you starting to appreciate why Richard Price was so influential on America's Founding Fathers?

Are you starting to sense why tyrants of any era would want to keep kids from learning about him and from reading the powerful words he wrote defending freedom and condemning despots?

There's no doubt that those devoted to restoring liberty to our people and protecting the free exercise of religion would be better prepared for such an endeavor by reading some of the sermons delivered by the Reverend Richard Price that prove that he was a flamethrower of freedom! Before we get into some of those sermons, let's look at how he came to call so many Founding Fathers his friend.

By the time he was 40 years old, Richard Price had written a shelf full of books on several subjects and a variety of religious tracts taking to task the established church and the politicians that propped it up. By 1767, Richard Price's reputation as a staunch supporter of liberty and talented writer had drawn many famous men into the orbit of his friendship, including David Hume, Lord Shelburne (the prime minister of England), and Benjamin Franklin.

Respect spread rapidly for Richard Price all over the island of Great Britain, across the English Channel to continental Europe, and across the Atlantic Ocean to America. Believe it or not, Richard's rise to worldwide fame began after he published a book about how to determine a person's expected lifespan and how to handle life-insurance costs based on those calculations. His work in this area was so well regarded that many American leaders pointed to Price's work as the best way for a country "to avoid sinking under a weight of debt."

That statement alone should be enough to convince parents and professors in a country that's currently over \$31 trillion in debt to teach children and students about Richard Price!

In fact, American political leaders were so grateful for the good work of Richard Price that on October 6, 1778, the Second Continental Congress passed the following resolution:



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“RESOLVED, that the Honorable Benjamin Franklin, Arthur Lee, and John Adams, Esqrs., or any of them, be ordered forthwith to apply to Dr. Price, and inform him that it is the desire of Congress to consider him as a citizen of the United States and to receive his assistance in regulating their finances; that if he shall think it expedient to remove with his family to America and afford such assistance, a generous provision shall be made for requiting his services.”

The resolution, offered by Henry Laurens of South Carolina, passed 6 to 3, with three states whose delegations were split.

Richard Price declined the offer, but wrote that he hoped that “British America may preserve its liberty, set an example of moderation and magnanimity, and establish such forms of government, as may render it an asylum for the virtuous and oppressed in other countries.”

In a separate letter sent to his friend Benjamin Franklin, Price asked that Franklin inform Congress “that Dr. Price feels the warmest gratitude for the notice taken of him, and that he looks to the American States as now the hope and likely soon to become the refuge of mankind.”

When the war between England and America started a couple of years earlier, Richard Price supported the states in their battle to defeat the forces of despotism. As the war continued and the breach between the colonies and their mother country became irreparable, Price clearly communicated his advocacy for the Americans.

Richard Price was such a strident proponent of American independence, in fact, that Congress hired him as a spy and he began sending secrets to the representatives of the states.

The case for considering Richard Price a starting player on the varsity squad of men who molded the minds of our Founding Fathers shouldn’t need much more evidence. For those who aren’t quite convinced, here a few powerful selections from his many influential works:

On Education:

Education will cause future generations to grow up virtuous and happy, and accelerate human improvement to a greater degree than can at present be imagined.

The end of education is to direct the powers of the mind in unfolding themselves; and to assist them in gaining their just bent and force. And, in order to do this, its business should be to teach how to think, rather than what to think.

But hitherto education has been conducted on a contrary plan. It has been a contraction, not an enlargement of the intellectual faculties; an injection of false principles hardening them in error, not a discipline enlightening and improving them. Instead of opening and strengthening them, and teaching to think freely; it hath cramped and enslaved them, and qualified for thinking only in one track. Instead of instilling humility, charity, and liberality, and thus preparing for an easier discovery and a readier admission of truth; it has inflated with conceit, and stuffed the human mind with wretched prejudices. [*Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution, and the Means of Making It a Benefit to the World* (1784)]

On Patriotism:



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The chief blessings of human nature are the three following:—Truth—Virtue—and Liberty.—These are, therefore, the blessings in the possession of which the interest of our country lies, and to the attainment of which our love of it ought to direct our endeavours. By the diffusion of knowledge it must be distinguished from a country of Barbarians: by the practice of religious virtue, it must be distinguished from a country of gamblers, Atheists, and libertines: and by the possession of liberty, it must be distinguished from a country of slaves.

Our first concern, as lovers of our country, must be to enlighten it.—Why are the nations of the world so patient under despotism?—Why do they crouch to tyrants, and submit to be treated as if they were a herd of cattle? Is it not because they are kept in darkness, and want knowledge?

Enlighten them and you will elevate them. Shew them they are men, and they will act like men. Give them just ideas of civil government, and let them know that it is an expedient for gaining protection against injury and defending their rights, and it will be impossible for them to submit to governments which, like most of those now in the world, are usurpations on the rights of men, and little better than contrivances for enabling the few to oppress the many.

Liberty is the next great blessing which I have mentioned as the object of patriotic zeal. It is inseparable from knowledge and virtue, and together with them completes the glory of a community. An enlightened and virtuous country must be a free country. It cannot suffer invasions of its rights, or bend to tyrants. [*A Discourse on the Love of Our Country* (1789)]

How about giving Richard Price a little birthday present by reading for yourself some of his inspired and inspiring works, all of which are available free online.



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