



The Nature and Importance of True Republicanism Lemuel Haynes (1801)

Lemuel Haynes, born in Connecticut, was the son of a white mother and a black father whose identities are uncertain; Haynes was the surname of the white family in whose home he grew up as an indentured servant. He became a Congregational minister and is credited with being the first African American ordained by a Protestant denomination (but there were unordained black preachers in the United States during the same period). Throughout his ministerial career, Haynes served overwhelmingly white congregations. He preached this sermon to a congregation in Vermont on the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Note Haynes's references to enslaved Africans as oppressed people, to indigenous Americans as hostiles during the American Revolution (in which Haynes had fought), and to the anticipated expansion of US territory.

[“The effects of despotism”]

[A] free republican government has the preference to all others, in that it tends to destroy those distinctions among men that ought never to exist. All men are born equally free and independent and have certain inherent and unalienable rights, to use the language of our own constitution, which coincides with the holy oracles (Acts 17:26). The more this can be maintained, the nearer it answers the original perfect draft. If God saw such a state of society was most favorable to men, it ought still to be maintained. [...] Palm upon an aspiring mortal the flattering titles of King, Prince, Lord, etc., merely because he was born under a more splendid roof or lay in a softer cradle than his neighbor, has more gold in his chest, and his farm is wider at both ends, or what through mistake has a higher parentage, he will [...] only value himself on his being able to tyrannize over others and [will] look down on his own species with contempt. This at once throws the balance of power into the wrong scale and enervates the bands of society. This has been the fruitful source of domination and bloodshed which has denominated this world as Aceldama; this has kept Europe at war, with little cessation, for more than nine centuries, and its influence has been felt in the happy climes of North America. Blessed be God! the bloody flag could not be established on our shores; and while others are falling victims to the hard and cruel hand of tyranny, we enjoy peace, far from the din of war and the hideous habitations of cruel oppressors.

There cannot be a greater source of evil to mankind than to imbibe wrong sentiments about true greatness. [...] When men are made to believe that true dignity consists in outward parade and pompous titles, [...] they look up to others as above them and forget to think for themselves, nor retain their own importance in the scale of being. [...] The propriety of this idea will appear strikingly evident by pointing you to the poor Africans among us. What has reduced them to their present pitiful, abject state? Is it any distinction that the God of nature hath made in their formation? Nay—but being subjected to slavery, by the cruel hands of oppressors, they have been taught to view themselves as a rank of beings far below others, which has suppressed, in a degree, every principle of manhood, and so they become despised, ignorant, and licentious. This shows the effects of despotism and should fill us with the utmost detestation against every attack on the rights of men, while we cherish and diffuse, with a laudable ambition, that heaven-born liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.

Should we compare those countries where tyrants are gorged with human blood to the far more peaceful regions of North America, the contrast would appear striking. On the whole, does it not appear that a land of liberty is favorable to peace, happiness, virtue, and religion and should be held sacred by mankind?

[*“Necessary means to maintain our liberties”*]

[...] A few directions were promised as necessary means to secure or maintain our liberties and independence. The fate of the once noble republic of Rome and many others—what took place in the interregnum of eleven years and four months in England, between the reigns of Charles First and Second—may show that ’tis more than possible that such a precious diamond may lose its luster and undergo a total extinction. [...]

The neutrality of these states ought to be held sacred [...] “Leave off contention before it be meddled with” was the advice of one of the wisest princes. The infection is dangerous; by it we shall be apt to imbibe the ferocity of warriors, become inhuman, and involve ourselves in the general faction. Let us stand and behold other nations at war with emotions of pity, while to us the laurel of peace sits regent on the throne and sweetens every enjoyment. That we have hitherto been preserved from taking an active part in foreign contentions demands a tribute of thanks to him who has raised up instruments and blessed their judicious endeavors. Let us be what these words import: *free and independent states*.

As a further means to maintain our rights and immunities, we should beware of discord among ourselves. That a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand is a divine maxim and confirmed by long experience. Union in every society is essential to its existence. Everything of a petulant and party spirit ought carefully to be avoided. [...] Foreign powers envy our tranquility; they abhor republicanism, as by it their craft is in danger. They wish in every possible way to separate us, that we may fall an easy prey to their pride and avarice. Next to maintaining our independence, let us cultivate a laudable union among ourselves, and this will render us invincible to every rival.

[...] It would be an unpardonable error should I forget to mention that which, after all, is the great and only source of felicity, peace, and prosperity among men: I mean religion. A republican government has its basis in this. Can we form a more noble idea of piety and Christianity than what is comprised in the words *benevolence* and *true patriotism*? To love God and one another, and to seek the happiness and good of the universe, involves everything that is great, noble, virtuous, and excellent. [...] No sooner did Samson trespass on the rules of religion and morality than he became a weak, menial slave and did grind in the prison house. Pride, dissipation, and impiety have crumbled empires in the dust and buried their names in everlasting oblivion. A sacred regard to holy institutions is necessary to secure the divine favor and protection and to maintain the order of society. Those words of inspiration cannot too often be repeated and are worthy to be written in indelible characters on the fleshy tables of our hearts: “Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.” [...]

[*“America, the glory of the whole earth”*]

Hail, happy era! that broke the galling yoke and taught the freeborn sons of Columbia to assert

their birthrights. This auspicious day—never, never to be forgotten—will be held in the highest veneration to generations yet unborn. This is the day that fair liberty purified the once contaminated regions of North America and illuminated our country with its exhilarating beams! This is the day fatal to tyrants; its influence will extend to the remotest comers of the globe and tell the groaning sons of despots that they may be free. This is the day that will form a surprising and important epoch in the annals of history and be viewed with pleasing astonishment to remotest ages. [...]

May America ever retain her dignity and grow in esteem on the true basis of merit—be a scourge to tyrants, a retreat for the oppressed. May her civil, military, and religious operations ever conspire to promote peace, piety, and prosperity, and introduce those happy days when the danger of war shall be too remote to disturb our repose or wound the tender feelings of the soul. [...] May we not almost predict that this will be the blissful region that will introduce the golden age, or peaceful kingdom, that shall break in pieces all the haughty empires of the world, and so America become the glory of the whole earth. The prospect grows upon our imagination and fills the soul with anticipating joy! Oppression, tyranny, and domination are the mystical Euphrates that must be dried up, that the beams of this rising morning may illuminate our globe. [...]

Our independence was purchased at a dear rate: more than a hundred thousand fell in the important struggle. [...] The disconsolate widow, the bereaved parent, and the weeping orphan can still relate the mournful disaster. To buy our freedom, the generous warrior has forsaken the inviting charms of domestic life, has distinguished himself in the field of battle and become a victim to the king of terrors. Many of our once ruddy youth have fallen in the inhospitable desert and been a prey to savage barbarity. [...] Many of you can remember those days of tribulation, being driven from your habitations, and were disturbed with the frightful haunts of bloodthirsty savages through the silent watches of the night!

Let us never forget the remarkable divine goodness towards us in the times of distress. Our lives, our all, hung in suspense; but the Lord, who is the scourge of tyrants, the friend of liberty, hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad. We were comparatively small—our troops undisciplined and unaccustomed to the hardships of war; our military stores scarcely sufficient for a single combat; a formidable enemy to oppose, whose arms had commonly proved victorious [...] May we not say with the utmost propriety, “If it had not been the Lord who was on our side when men rose up against us, then they had swallowed us up quick when their wrath was kindled against us.” [...] Nothing short of a kind of miraculous interposition has brought us hitherto. With the warmest emotions of heart, let us erect an altar of praise to him who is the author of our independence and to whom we are still to look for its support. [...]

Explore every comer of the globe for an equal asylum; tired in the fruitless chase, you would most eagerly seek the refreshing shades of happy Columbia. Still, it is a land of improvement; we are not to conclude that the fair tree of liberty hath reached its highest zenith. May we not add to its luster by every new and valuable acquisition? But we should keep in mind the principles and end of government: that it is to curb the passions of men, to suppress vice and immorality, to build up society, and to establish religion in the world. [...] Should the Fourth of July be ever promotive of peace, friendship, and religion, the word INDEPENDENCE will have a commanding influence and be more durable than pillars of marble.

Source: Lemuel Haynes, *The Nature and Importance of True Republicanism with a Few Suggestions Favorable to Independence* [...] ([Rutland, VT]: William Fay, [1801]), <https://archive.org/details/lemuelhaynesspeech>. Rutland Historical Society Special Collections, via the Internet Archive. Tagged with the Creative Commons Public Domain Mark 1.0 Universal.

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These edited excerpts from Haynes's sermon are intended for *teaching* purposes only. For *research* purposes, you should consult, quote, and cite the source publication listed above.



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