
Comparing the Similarities in the Ideas of Freedom Between John Winthrop and Thomas Paine

Freedom According to Winthrop and Paine

The United States is often seen as the epitome of freedom, but there is much debate as to what exactly we mean when we say we value freedom. Since the very beginning, when the colonies were first forming, many people have been explaining their own definitions of freedom, and subsequently their own visions for this country. On the way to the New World, John Winthrop, the first governor of Massachusetts, delivered his famous “City Upon a Hill” speech (“A Model of Christian Charity”). In it, he details his hopes for the future of their new community, emphasizing love and cooperation. It is a strongly religious text, referring frequently to God and to specific events in the Bible. Over a hundred years later, at the beginning of the Revolutionary War, Thomas Paine shared his thoughts on various aspects of the soon-to-be nation. One of his works is “African Slavery in America,” in which he condemns slavery. In “Common Sense,” he denounces monarchy and explains why the United States should be free of it. Paine also has a religious basis for his ideas. While Paine and Winthrop both highlight their belief that all humans are inherently equal and should treat each other justly to uphold the ideals of freedom, Winthrop embraces a clearly nonviolent stance of loving the enemy and accepting suffering in order to build a free community, though Paine affirms people’s right to take charge of their situation and take their freedom directly.

John Winthrop delivers his speech on the ship the *Arabella* in order to inspire his fellow pilgrims to form an exemplary community of love and cooperation when they reach their destination. His Puritan values are clear, especially in his emphasis on compassion. He proclaims that every man “is commanded to love his neighbor as himself” and that “every man afford his help to another” (Winthrop 2). All human beings are created equal, and should be treated as such. He will feel that their establishment is successful if its members are kind and helpful. He wants their community to honor God by exercising the values He prizes. Winthrop strengthens his argument with one of the main tenets not only of Christianity but of most major religions: the golden rule. He references Matthew 7:12, which declares “in everything do to others as you would have them do to you”. Winthrop’s plan for American freedom centers around this simple rule of compassion. If they are going to be free of the tyranny and persecution they experienced in Europe, they must extend basic kindness and respect to each other. They will contribute to successful community that is able to operate freely if there is a spirit of generosity and goodwill. Adherence to the golden rule is one of Winthrop’s main points, that he uses to illustrate his vision of freedom.

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Winthrop's emphasis on loving one another applies not only to those who act with compassion themselves, but to everyone. Freedom is important, but one way to achieve freedom in his opinion is to prioritize unity. Quoting Matthew 5:44, he says "Love your enemies... do good to them that hate you". It is a common theme in the Bible for people to show kindness in the face of hatred and even violence; mercy and gentleness are very important to Christianity. It is interesting to see how strict Winthrop is in his insistence on this point. Freedom for each person to do exactly what they want is not terribly important to him – what's crucial are his religious views. However, he believes that in order to be a "city upon the hill," a good example to everyone of how successful their venture in freedom is, they must show love to all humanity. He does not want to recreate an environment that will allow the same oppression that they are escaping. All people deserve equally good treatment. Winthrop's opinion when it comes to interacting with others is to form a "labor of love;" to do things for others since "the party loving, reaps love again" (Winthrop 5). He believes that it is important people do things to help each other, because it will foster a positive and helpful attitude. Winthrop hopes to create an environment that is peaceful and full of people engaging in the common good.

Paine also discusses the inherent equality of all people. He is in agreement with Winthrop that everyone is equal and therefore deserves to be treated well. In "African Slavery in America," he also references Matthew 7:12, ordering people to "do unto all men as they would be done by" (Slavery 2). With this take on the golden rule, he is reminding Americans not only to treat others as they would like to be treated, but also to think of this from the perspective of those they are dehumanizing. Americans are fighting for their freedom, and Paine is trying to convince them that all people deserve to be free. A better community will exist when everyone is looking out for the wellbeing of all those around them, and collectively helping the community. Winthrop and Paine both point out that some degree of inequality in terms of class and wealth will exist, but that this doesn't mean anyone should be treated differently. More than encouraging people to treat each other well, Paine is pleading for Americans to uphold Christian values of compassion and justice by allowing everyone to be free.

Paine differs from Winthrop in how he wants people to respond to unequal treatment; he encourages anyone suffering to do what they can to free themselves. Paine's focus on freedom means freedom for all. He asserts that "the slave, who is proper owner of his freedom, has a right to reclaim it" (Slavery 2). Paine finds it despicable that people could try to justify slavery, the theft of freedom and equality from fellow humans, using the Bible. In "Common Sense," Paine is arguing against monarchy, another unjust institution in his opinion, and quotes Judges 8:23, stating that no human being "shall rule over you... THE LORD SHALL RULE OVER YOU". Paine believed no man should have his life dictated by another, neither slaves by masters or Americans by an English monarch. Humans have an inherent right to freedom, and regardless of what some people may believe, everyone deserves to be afforded that right. He also talks in "Common Sense" about how monarchical governments are often guilty of picking and choosing

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which parts of the Scripture they will support. Paine argues that this is wrong, and it relates also to how people would support slavery by pointing out instances of slavery in the Bible, while ignoring the parts that tell of love and equality as well as disregarding the fact that the situation of the African slaves at the time was very different than that of Biblical slaves. In cases of independence from monarchy and of slavery, Paine advocated for Americans to take action and do the right thing. His firm belief in freedom shows his idea of America: a place where all humans are treated fairly and have the ability to stand up for themselves.

Though their overall ideas of freedom may be different, Winthrop and Paine clearly agree that people are created equal and must receive equal treatment. They both cite the golden rule as support for this, encouraging peers to remember to extend the Christian values of love, compassion, and generosity to others. However, beyond this, Winthrop and Paine differ in their beliefs in how people should act when faced with a breach in this rule. Winthrop emphasizes loving the enemy, still arguing with strong Biblical support. He believes that God wants first and foremost for them to “love [their] enemy” because a community of love will be just and merciful. His idea of freedom is to have peace and not to upset the natural order. Later, when the United States are closer to being formed as an independent nation, Paine expresses a more active stance. Based on the God-given rights of all people, he supports the fighting of oppression. Freedom to Paine means gaining for everyone autonomy from unfit authority, such as a king or a slave master. I agree more with Paine than Winthrop, though I think they both have important points. It is true that hatred and violence won't solve anything; even oppressive people deserve respect and kind treatment. However, this does not negate the fact that some people are suffering at the hands of others, and whenever this is the case, something must be done to change it. My idea of American freedom would see that our country is a place where anyone can be free, not just people who hold certain views or who are born with certain advantages.

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