

...Dreiser/Paine, from page 7

proud of this scientifically conceived comparison. Not least, on the last page of *America*, Dreiser cites the opening of *Rights of Man*:

*For as Tom Paine pointed out, what our sage, Archimedes, said in the dawn of civilization about the mechanical powers may be applied to reason and liberty: "Had we a place to stand upon we might raise the world." America plus our constitution is certainly a place to stand on to raise democracy into being. Let us save America and democracy by not joining in this foreign blood-bath, but rather by showing the world in our own example how democracy can work.*

Although Dreiser's words may have been wrong in the short run as he soon discovered, they are nonetheless largely correct in the long one.

Interestingly, at least one critic was cognizant of the similarities between the ideas of Paine and Dreiser. In a review of *Tragic America* for the *Public Ledger* (January 23, 1932), Philadelphia, J. Irwin Boyd commented:

*In the early days of America, a book like this would be given prolonged and excited discussion, as was Thomas Paine's "The [American] Crisis." It might also give its author a decided shove toward an unknown and unhonored grave, such as Paine eventually filled.*

Unlike Paine, Dreiser embraced the principles of communism: he was eventually admitted to the party shortly

before his death. (Let us briefly note that a number of Dreiser's contemporaries--W.E.B. Dubois, Ernest Hemingway, Sinclair Lewis, Upton Sinclair, John Steinbeck, Thomas Wolfe, and Richard Wright--belonged to the Communist-sponsored League of American Writers.) It has been suggested that Dreiser's acceptance was a reluctant one since he was perceived to be too independent for the likes of the party leaders. Maybe that is because his writings express a deep, ultimately American veneration for the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution--such as in the following sentence from *America is Worth Saving*:

*We in America have no time to waste arguing about Russia's plan. We need an American plan; and we have it--in our Constitution and Declaration of Independence. We also need, to carry out our plan, a spirit--call it the "pioneer spirit" if you like. But the fallacy of all the present talk about the "pioneer spirit" is that this spirit and the private monopoly system are mutual contradictions. ...Only the ordinary men and women of America can make the fight that has to be made.*

Fitting words, indeed, for our own era of too-big-to-fail banks, Citizens United, corporatized religion on our 237th Fourth of July.

*Frances Chiu, a TPF board member, is faculty at the New School University. She publishes in peer-reviewed journals as well as The Occupied Wall Street Journal and Occupy.com. She is writing a monograph on Rights of Man for the Philosophy Guidebook series of Routledge Publishers (UK).*