

Thomas Paine

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THOMAS PAINE

SOCIAL
AND
POLITICAL THOUGHT



Gregory Claeys

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出版者:Routledge

出版时间:1989-11-14

装帧:Paperback

isbn:9780044450900

"There can be no doubt that Gregory Claeys..has written by far the best study so far of the thought of Tom Paine...Claeys shows that he was a more significant political theorist than is usually admitted...This is a satisfying and authoritative book." - Journal of The Historical Association Thomas Paine is the most comprehensive and incisive study of the social and political thought of one of the most important political writers of the modern era; it is also the first account to consider Paine with due seriousness as a political thinker. Gregory Claeys concentrates on Paine's most influential work (and one of the best-known political tracts of all time) the Rights of Man. He is careful, however, to place this work in the context of the evolution of Paine's thinking from his early American writings, and against a background of natural law and rights writings, republicanism and radicalism, and Paine's Quaker and deist beliefs. The book has three major strengths. First, it brings together debates amongst historians about Paine's American and European works and periods, and demonstrates the underlying consistency in Paine's thought. Second, Gregory Claeys considers at length the British reception of the Rights of Man, the immense controversy the text engendered, and the successful efforts to stifle the growth of the radical parliamentary reform movement that it inspired. Third, the characterization and discussion of Paine's ideas is considerably more sophisticated than any existing analysis, and presents in effect a completely new view of Paine that will serve as the standard interpretation.

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