Biography
Benjamin Franklin
1706 - 1788

Eighteenth-century American produce a number of towering versatile personalities, but none with the creative range of Benjamin Franklin. A summary of his career reads like one of Walt Whitman's catalogs of occupations: printer, publisher, journalist, essayist, scientist, philosopher, merchant, educator, inventor, politician, diplomat. "Everything," remarked Herman Melville ironically, "but a poet." Franklin possessed the kind of energy that wishes to improve nearly every aspect of life, and he combined that energy with a restless empirical, pragmatic mode of thinking that would become a stereotypical of the national character. That he also raised himself, as he says in the opening paragraph of his Autobiography, from "poverty and obscurity" to "a state of affluence and some degree of celebrity in the world" further enhances the distinctive American quality of his astounding career.

Franklin was born in Boston in 1706, the fifteenth child of a soap and candle maker. The early "poverty" in which he claims to have been raised may be more accurate than the "obscurity." As a respected member of the Boston community and the prestigious Old South Church, Josiah Franklin numbered among his friends many leading Boston figures, including the illustrious Samuel Sewall, whom young Franklin met at home prayer meetings. Showing signs of precocity, Franklin was sent to the Boston Grammar School, where he characteristically rose to the head of his class. The expenses of the large Franklin family, however, prevented his continuing in a college preparatory curriculum, and he was removed to a private school established to teach future tradesmen the necessary skills of "writing and arithmetic." At ten, Franklin left school altogether to help in the family business, but disliking it, was officially apprenticed two years later to his half brother James, who had recently set up a printing shop in Boston. Franklin made, as he says, "great progress" in this trade and particularly enjoyed the access it gave him to books and booksellers.

Although Franklin may have turned out to be "everything but a poet," he nevertheless began his literary career with "two occasional ballads" that he single-handedly penned, printed, and peddled. But after his father ridiculed these performances and informed him that "verse makers" were generally "beggars," Franklin prudently turned his efforts to the development of a prose style that he claims in his Autobiography "has been of great use to me in the course of my life and was a principal means of my advancement." In 1722, the year after his brother founded the iconoclastic newspaper The New England Courant, Franklin wrote a series of humorous essays and submitted them to the Courant under a pseudonym.
Franklin let his brother in on the author's identity, but this disclosure added to the growing tension between master and apprentice. The relationship ended bitterly the next year; Franklin violated the terms of indenture and ran off to begin a new life in Philadelphia.

He found work in Samuel Keimer's small, ill-equipped printing shop but did not stay for long. The governor of Pennsylvania, Sir William Keith, at the suggestion of Franklin's brother-in-law, decided to assist the young printer by sponsoring a trip to London, where he could master the trade, buy the latest equipment, and make important business contacts—all necessary if he were to run his own shop. When he reached London, Franklin learned all he could not to rely on Keith's promises. Undiscouraged, he quickly found employment in a famous London printing house, where by day he perfected his craft and by evening made the acquaintance of some noted writers, scientists, and philosophers.

Franklin returned to Philadelphia in 1726 and began working as a merchant's clerk. When his employer died the following year, he had little choice than go back to Keimer's printing shop. He determined to make a success of himself by adhering to a meticulous schedule of work and self-improvement and by methodically attending to every detail of daily existence with a rigor that would have pleased his Puritan forebears. Over the next three years, Franklin purchased and revitalized a newspaper (The Pennsylvania Gazette), opened a stationer's shop, and was appointed public printer of Pennsylvania. In 1730, he married Deborah Read, whom he had first noticed the day he made his awkward entrance into Philadelphia as a runaway apprentice. Between 1733 and 1744, he founded a fire company, established America's first circulating library, was appointed deputy postmaster general of the colonies, launched a magazine, organized the American Philosophical Society, invented the popular Franklin stove, and drew up a proposal for what would become the University of Pennsylvania.

In 1732, Franklin began Poor Richard's Almanac, a somewhat parodic annual compendium of weather predictions, folk wisdom, poetic snippets, recipes, medical advice, proverbs, moral anecdotes, and useful information on how to make money and save time for people who had little of either. By 1748, Franklin had made enough money to leave the management of his various businesses in other hands so that he could concentrate his energies in two areas, science and politics, each of which earned for him an international reputation. He had begun to conduct experiments in electricity in 1746, and five years later the first of many editions of Experiments and Observations on Electricity was published in London. Franklin had an eye for the theatrical side of science; in 1753 he performed his highly publicized kite experiments, which established the electrical nature of lightning and ensured his election to the Royal Society of London. Not one to ignore the practical
application of a theoretical insight, Franklin recommended in 1753 that "pointed rods" be used on buildings to prevent damage from lightning, a suggestion soon implemented throughout the world. For painters and poets of the late eighteenth century, the bolt of lightning served as an image of political liberty. As a result of his experiments, Franklin became the embodiment of human enlightenment.

From his proposal for colonial unification at the Albany Congress in 1754 to his stirring speech at the Constitutional Convention in 1787, Franklin played a pivotal struggle for colonial independence and the building of a new nation. In 1755 and 1756 he lent his business skills to help General Braddock obtain transportation and supplies during the French and Indian War. As a colonel of Militia, he supervised the construction of forts in Pennsylvania. Between 1757 and 1762 he served as agent for the Province of Pennsylvania in London.

Franklin returned to Philadelphia in 1775 to serve as a delegate to the Second Continental Congress and as a member of the committee appointed to draft the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson reportedly explained that Franklin was not asked to write the document because he could not have resisted the urge to include a few jokes. Franklin sailed for Paris as a congressional minister to the Court of Louis XVI, where he secured crucial support for his homeland. He charmed Parisian society with his wit and warmth, unsuccessfully proposed marriage to Mme. Helvetius, a prominent widow (Franklin's wife had died in 1774).

In 1781, Franklin was sent to France to negotiate a peace treaty with Great Britain, which he signed, with John Jay and John Adams, two years later. While in Paris, he resumed his interest in science: He investigated the claims of Mesmer's experiments in animal magnetism, wrote Maritime Observations and On the Causes and Cure of Smokey Chimneys, and enthusiastically looked into the Montgolfier balloon ascensions. He resigned his diplomatic post in 1785 and returned to Philadelphia, where he served in the state government before being elected president of the Pennsylvanian Society for the Abolition of Slavery and a delegate to the Constitutional Convention. In 1788, "afflicted with almost constant and grievous pain," he retired altogether from public life.

On his second visit to England, during a leisurely week in August 1771, Franklin began his memoirs. He got as far as his marriage in 1730 when political responsibilities forced him to discontinue. He did not resume the task until urged by friends during a stay at Passy, a Paris suburb, to complete what one friend thought would be an "efficacious advertisement" for a new nation. Franklin complied, but this time he did not, (as he had in the opening section of the memoirs) address his writing to his son William, who had since taken up the Loyalist cause. Instead, he omitted family anecdotes and concentrated on his public career.
and the regimen he devised to ensure success and happiness. In 1788, back in Philadelphia, he completed another large installment and, just a few weeks before he died, added yet a fourth section, taking his career up until 1759. The uncompleted Autobiography passed through a number of unauthorized and unreliable editions until the original manuscript was discovered in France in 1868.

Activities

Classroom Assignment:
Answer the following questions on your own and be prepared to explain your answers to the class.
1. What did Franklin do to improve every day life?
2. Why did Benjamin Franklin recommend that pointed rods be used on buildings?
3. Which of Franklin's achievements do people still benefit from today?
4. Why was Benjamin Franklin sent to France?
5. Franklin did not help in the writing of the Declaration of Independence. What was it about his writing style that excluded him from participating?
6. Imagine that time machines exist and prepare an interview of ten questions for Benjamin Franklin.

Homework Assignment:
Benjamin Franklin was a writer, but also famous for other things. Research his life and achievements and be prepared to give an oral report.

Literary Work

from "Information to Those Who Would Remove themselves to America"

Many Persons in Europe, having directly of by Letters, express'd to the Writer of this, who is well acquainted with North America, their Desire of transporting and establishing themselves in that Country; but who appear the have formed, thro' Ignorance, mistaken Ideas and Expectations of what is to be obtained there; he thinks it may be useful, and prevent inconvenient, expensive, and fruitless Removals and Voyages of improper Persons, if he gives some clearer and truer Notions of that part of the World, than appear to have hitherto prevailed.

He finds it is imagined by Numbers, that the Inhabitants of North America are rich, capable of rewarding and dispos'd to reward, all sorts of Ingenuity; that they are at the same time ignorant of all the Sciences, and, consequently, that Strangers, possessing Talents in the Belles-Lettres, fine Arts, &c., must be highly esteemed, and so well paid, as to become easily rich themselves; that there are also abundance of profitable Offices to be disposed of,
which the Natives are not qualified to fill; and that, having few Persons of Family among
them, Strangers of Birth must be greatly respected, and of course easily obtain those Offices,
which will make all their Fortunes; that the Governments too, to encourage Emigrations from
Europe, not only pay the Expence of personal Transportation, but give Lands gratis to
Strangers, with Negroes to work for them, Utensils of Husbandry, Stocks of Cattle. These
are all wild imaginations; and those who go to America with Expectations founded upon them
will surely find themselves disappointed.

The Truth is, that though there are in that Country few People so miserable as the
Poor of Europe, there are also very few that in Europe would be called rich; it is rather a
general happy Mediocrity that prevails. There are few great Proprietors of the Soil, and few
Tenants; most People cultivate their own Lands, or follow some Handicraft or Merchandise;
very few rich enough to live idly upon their Rents or Incomes, or to pay the high Prices given
in Europe for Paintings, Statues, Architecture, and the other Works of Art, that are more
curious than useful. Hence the natural Geniuses, that have arisen in America with such
Talents, have uniformly quitted that Country for Europe, where they can be more suitably
rewarded. It is true, that Letters and Mathematical Knowledge are in Esteem there, but they
are at the same time more common than is apprehended; there being already existing nine
Colleges or Universities, viz. Four in New England, and one in each of the Provinces of New
York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia, all furnish'd with learned Professors;
besides a number of smaller Academies; these educate many of their Youth in the
Languages, and those Sciences that qualify men of the Professions of Divinity, Law, or
Physick. Strangers indeed are by no means excluded from exercising those Professions; and
the quick Increase of Inhabitants everywhere gives them a Chance of Employ, which they
have in common with the Natives. Of civil Offices, or Employments, there are few; no
superfluous Ones, as in Europe; and it is a Rule establish'd in some of the States, that no
Office should be so profitable as to make it desirable. The 36th article of the Constitution of
Pennsylvania, runs expressly in these Words; "As every Freeman, to preserve his
Independence, (if he has not a sufficient Estate) ought to have some Profession, Calling,
Trade, or Farm, whereby he may honestly subsist, there can be no Necessity for, nor Use in,
establishing Offices of Profit; the usual Effects of which are Dependence and Servility,
unbecoming Freemen, in the Possessors and Expectants; Faction, Contention, Corruption,
and Disorder among the People. Wherefore, whenever an Office thro' Increase of Fees or
otherwise, becomes so profitable, as to occasion many to apply for it, the Profits ought to be
lessened by the Legislature."
These Ideas prevailing more or less in all the United States, it cannot be worth an Man's while, who has a means of Living at home, to expatriate himself, in hopes of obtaining a profitable civil Office in America; and, as to military Offices, they are at an End with the War, the Armies being disbanded. Much less is it advisable for a Person to go thither, who has no other Quality to recommend him but his Birth. In Europe it has indeed its Value; but it is a Commodity that cannot be carried to a worse Market than that of America, where people do not inquire concerning a Stranger, What is he? but, What can he do? If he has any useful Art, he is welcome; and if he exercises it, and behaves well, he will be respected by all that know him; but a mere Man of Quality, who, on that Account, wants to live upon the Public, by some Office or Salary, will be despis'd and disregarded. The Husbandman is in honor there, and even the Mechanic, because their Employments are useful. The People have a saying, that God Almighty is himself a Mechanic, the greatest in the Universe; and he is respected and admired more for the Variety, Ingenuity, and Utility of his Handy-works, than for the Antiquity of his Family. They are pleas'd with the Observation of a Negro, and frequently mention it, that Boccarorra (meaning the White men) make de black man workee, make de Horse workee, make de Ox workee, make ebery ting workee; only de Hog. He, like de hog, no workee; he eat, he drink, he walk about, he go to sleep when he please, he libb like a Gentleman. According to these Opinions of the Americans, one of them would think himself more oblig'd to a Genealogist, who could prove for him that his Ancestors and Relations for ten Generations had been Ploughmen, Smiths, Carpenters, Turners, Weavers, Tanners, or even Shoemakers, and consequently that they were useful Members of Society; than if he could only prove that they were Gentlemen, doing nothing of Value, but living idly on the Labour of others, mere fruges consumere nati, and other wise good for nothing, till by their death their Estates, like the Carcass of the Negro's Gentleman-Hog, come to be cut up.

With regard to Encouragements for Strangers from Government, they are really only what are derived form good Law and Liberty. Strangers are welcome, because there is enough room for all, and therefore the old Inhabitants are not jealous of them; the Laws protect them sufficiently, so they have no need of the Patronage of Great Men; and every one will enjoy securely the Profits of his Industry. But, if he does not bring a Fortune with him, he must work and be industrious to live. One or two Years' residence gives him all the Rights of a Citizen; but the government does not at present, whatever it may have done in former times, hire People to become Settlers, by Paying their Passages, giving Land, Negros,
Utensils, Stock, or any other kind of Emolument whatsoever. In short, America is the Land of Labour, and by no means what the English call "Lubberland," and the French "Pays de Cocagne," where the streets are said to be pav’d with half-peck Loaves, the Houses t’il’d with Pancakes, and where the Fowls fly about ready roasted, crying, *Come eat me!* . . .

**Activities**

**Classroom Assignment:**
Answer the following questions orally.

1. What kinds of mistaken ideas and expectations do people who want to move to America have?
2. What would happen to a foreigner in the United States that did not have any special training?
3. Describe what black people say about white people.
4. What do you think Franklin’s purpose was in writing this essay?
5. What kind of language is used?

**Homework Assignment:**
Imagine that you live in Europe and want to move to colonial America. Write a brief composition explaining your reasons for wanting to move.

**Biography**

Thomas Jefferson
1743 - 1826

Thomas Jefferson's literary life is intertwined with his life as diplomat, statesman, architect, environmental planner, scientist, politician, and theorist of education. The versatile Jefferson is an awesome figure to later generations who proclaim the value and necessity of specialization. Jefferson embodies the eighteenth-century ideal of a gentleman, a "man of parts" who is worldly, learned, and proficient in numerous endeavors. Jefferson lived that ideal. More, he became an American paradox, an aristocrat who was also a democrat.

Jefferson was born in central Virginia near the future sites of Monticello and the University of Virginia. His father's estate, Shadwell, was at that time near the frontier, and Peter Jefferson, a farmer and surveyor, taught his son Indian lore and mapmaking, perhaps the basis for Jefferson's eventual interests in anthropological study and in design. At age five, Jefferson was sent to an English school some fifty miles distant and at ten was enrolled in a Latin school for training in classical language and literature. In 1760, he entered the College of William and Mary, where he had the "great good fortune," as he put it, "to be instructed by Dr. William Small, then Professor of Mathematics, a man profound in most of the useful
branches of science, with a happy talent of communication, correct and gentlemanly manners, and an enlarged liberal mind." This teacher, Jefferson wrote, "probably fixed the destinies of my life."

Upon graduation in 1762, and with Small's guidance, Jefferson began to study law. Once again he found a mentor - George Wythe, a prominent attorney who also became Jefferson's "most affectionate friend through life." Under the influence of Small and Wythe, Jefferson gradually imbibed the principles of republicanism. He shed the orthodox, conservative Anglican heritage and embraced Deism, which provided the model of the Creator to be emulated in building a new republic. Through Dr. Small he became aware of the Scottish Common Sense school, from which he came to believe that the moral sense is one's highest faculty and is equally present to all, a view later expressed in the Declaration of Independence, which he drafted.

Jefferson was admitted to the bar in 1767 and practiced law while taking advantage of the cultural opportunities of Williamsburg, which was a colonial capital as well as a college town. He learned the violin, sometimes playing string quartets with Governor Francis Fauquier, himself a member of the Royal Society and another of the father figures in the young man's life. Jefferson also attended theatrical performances and began collecting the books that proliferated into a library of about ten thousand volumes that later became the basis for the Library of Congress. He doubtless learned to participate in the polished urbane conversation of the colonial aristocracy, though Jefferson never was skilled in public speaking.

In 1772, Jefferson married Martha Wayles Skelton, a wealthy salve-holding widow. Within a year, their first child, a daughter, was born. The couple had six children, including a son, but only two daughters lived to adulthood. Jefferson was deeply bereaved when his wife died after ten years of marriage. His daughter wrote, "In those melancholy rambles [on horseback], I was his constant companion - a solitary witness to many a burst of grief." Jefferson never remarried.

Pre-Revolutionary politics proved irresistible. In 1773, Jefferson attended a meeting of the Virginia Committee of Correspondence, an inter-colonial group that promoted the exchange of letters in opposition to harsh and arbitrary British policies. In 1774, Jefferson attended the newly formed Continental Congress and won respect for his clear style and moderate tone in a pamphlet that defended colonial rights, A Summary View of the Rights of British America. By 1776, with events of the Revolution moving swiftly, Jefferson was one of a committee appointed to draft a document including the severance of the colonies from England. Though the committee and the congress edited the draft, the Declaration of Independence.
Independence was Jefferson's. His remarks on the Declaration are revealing. "I turned to neither book nor pamphlet while writing it," he said. "I did not consider it any part of my charge to invent any new ideas, but to place before mankind the common sense of the subject." He considered the Declaration of Independence "an expression of the American mind." The ideals of the Declaration were compatible with Jefferson's work in Virginia to establish religious freedom by law and thus to separate church and state. These two achievements meant so much to him that he included them, together with his fathering of the University of Virginia, in the epitaph he wrote and left behind after his death. During the Revolutionary War years, Jefferson served as governor of Virginia, narrowly escaping British capture. In 1783, he was elected to Congress and became minister to France, where he served for five years. He was a member of Washington's Cabinet, Vice-President under John Adams, and then President for two terms beginning in 1801. Jefferson envisioned the United States as a self-sufficient, agrarian nation and enacted his vision of its future in the Louisiana Purchase (1803), persuading Congress to sponsor the expedition of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to explore and map the new territory. Jefferson's Presidency marked the beginning of the democratic plain style in politics. The Chief Executive lived at a boardinghouse, rejected all outward signs of wealth or pomp (including ornamental shoe buckles), and was known to receive visitors in his slippers. After his Presidency, he withdrew from public life. ("I am retired to Monticello, where, in the bosom of my family, and surrounded by my books, I enjoy a repose to which I have long been a stranger.")

Evidence suggests that the "bosom" of Jefferson's family included a thirty-eight-year relationship with a slave woman, Sally Hemings, who was a quadroon, the half sister of Jefferson's deceased wife. Social attitudes of the time would have made marital legitimation of the relationship impossible, no matter how much both parties might have wished otherwise. The affair, together with Jefferson's keeping of slaves, has raised charges of hypocrisy against him and has remained troubling to scholars and analysts. It must be pointed out, however, that Jefferson attempted to outlaw slavery in his original draft of the Declaration of Independence and that as President he worked successfully for the enactment of a law banning the further importation of slaves.

In the years of his so-called retirement, Jefferson kept a large correspondence. Fortunately, he had reconciled with his New England counterpart, former President John Adams, after a political rift of several years. The two resumed their friendship, and the letters on both sides deepened in reflection and outspokenness. Jefferson died within hours of his old friend Adams on the jubilee of the promulgation of the Declaration of Independence, July