

DR. FRANKLIN'S PLAN

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The sudden illness of his wife Martha called his travelling companion Thomas Jefferson back to Monticello. So on a Saturday in late October 1776 Benjamin Franklin, almost 70, exhausted and afflicted by gout and boils went aboard without him, and sailed for France in the 16-gun sloop *Reprisal*.¹ He did so in the certain knowledge that if *Reprisal* was taken by a British warship he would be hanged for High Treason. His name was on the inflammatory Declaration of Independence, a document he had just helped Jefferson to write.

Franklin had been home less than a year, after almost two decades spent in the belly of the most powerful empire in the world representing first Pennsylvania's and, eventually, America's case at the court of King George II then, when he died, his grandson George III. The experience had made him more familiar with the ways of Europe than anyone else in the new American government, and he was going to need all the expertise he could muster. If he could not convince the French to fund and support the war, those who were leading the revolution all knew their cause would fail. It would be almost a decade before he returned to the country he had worked so long to create.

There was never any real question as to whether Franklin would accept this appointment to represent the newly declared United States at the court of Louis XVI. He never turned down a request that he work for America. He had come late to the idea of Independence, but early to America as a distinct union. Once he had embraced independence, he had passionately held to a distinct vision of the kind of country he wanted it to be: a democratic republic whose political power flowed from its middle class. To build such a society he had been working with three simple practical steps: the creation of "virtuous" citizens, the formation of small groups with a common purpose and commitment to the collective good, and the establishment of networks that grew from these groups connecting. "I have always thought," he once wrote a friend, "that one man of tolerable abilities may work great changes and accomplish great

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affairs among mankind, if he first forms a good plan and... makes the execution of that same plan his sole study.”²

He had been thinking of the colonies as one country for almost 40 years.³ As early as 1751 he had outlined how a union might be achieved.⁴ Three years later, as he made his way to a conference in Albany, New York, he formalized this thinking into *Short Hints towards a Scheme for Uniting the Northern Colonies*.⁵ The conference was officially about concluding a treaty with the Six Nations, a powerful force that had to be honored. The confederation of the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, Senecas and Tuscaroras also constituted the oldest continuous democracy, and their thinking and the *presence* of their leaders influenced Franklin. He got the colonist delegates to seriously talk about a union for the first time and, on 9 July, they asked him to prepare a formal written document: the Albany Plan of Union. It was so premature that neither the individual colonies nor the British Government were willing to make the adjustments in power a union would demand, even as part of the British empire. In this plan, and in three subsequent letters, Franklin presented the arguments that would define the War of Independence, a quarter century before it happened.⁶

That same year, he was made Deputy Post Master of North America. He wanted the appointment. The salary when added to the money he was making from his business activities would give him an income equal to the governor, the great man of the colony,⁷ and it was his justification to begin travelling through the colonies for months at a time. In an age when travel was difficult, problematic, frequently uncomfortable, and sometimes dangerous, he loved it. He was no more deterred by bad roads, or foul weather, than he was by the conditions aboard square rigged sailing ships, or the storms during the lengthy Atlantic crossings. He rode well, loved good food, although he would eat anything put before him, and was wonderful company. A compulsive scientist, and insatiably curious, he could not cross an ocean without measuring currents, could not look at a stream without considering the fish that swam within, or ride a horse without considering horse, weather, and the species of tree they both sheltered beneath. And he talked and wrote about all of it. People were fascinated.

By joking and cajoling, spiced with patronage, and instruction, he got local people, who mostly had no conception of his larger plan, to make the colonial post office the first effective government institution to treat America as a country. No other Founder had similar experience, or even came close to Franklin's direct level of familiarity with the cultures, beliefs, and by-ways of the diverse and contradictory land and people that had just become The United States.

Most intellectuals, working from drawing rooms on both sides of the Atlantic, thought the colonies would eventually replicate Britain's power structure based on large land ownership, and an entrenched leadership class. There was more land than anyone in Europe had ever seen and, amongst the leadership, Washington, Jefferson, Mason, Madison and a host of other Founders, lived the country life. Even city rich such as Robert Morris, owned and speculated in land. Franklin, however, although he was often involved in land schemes, did not think the British agrarian model, even in its more noble Jeffersonian variant, would prevail. The reason he did not was because his life had been very different from the other Founders. They all were country gentry or urban upper middle class professionals. He was a "leather apron man" in the slang of his day, was proud of it, and never changed, no matter the circumstances.

When he got to France and eventually called upon the King, he did not wear the obligatory courtiers' wig but a round fur hat, and instead of embroidered silks the wealthy affected, he always wore the clean well-made but simple "Quaker" clothes of cotton and wool that were his hallmark. His rented home at Passy in France, like his home in Philadelphia, was notable for comfort, convenience, books, and nifty gadgets, not fancy style, and he never lost touch with friends regardless of the difference in their stations.

When he wrote his will at the end of a life filled with honors, and celebrity he defined himself as: "I Benjamin Franklin, of Philadelphia, printer, late Minister Plenipotentiary from the United States of America to the Court of France, now President of the State of Pennsylvania."⁸

It wasn't personal experience, alone, however, that guided Franklin. He appraised with a demographer's eye, and calculated that the American

population and economy within a century would exceed that of Britain. Almost 50 years before Thomas Malthus wrote his famous *An Essay on Principle of Population* in 1798, Franklin had written, *Observations concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, etc.* “ No man continues long a labourer for others,” wrote Franklin as he considered the vast tracts of the frontier, “but gets a plantation of his own.... No man continues long a journeyman to a trade,” he said, thinking of the thriving shops he had known, “but goes... and sets up for himself.”⁹ He was right. In 1775, the skilled working class, “artificers” as they were then called, represented about 3 out of 10 people in the Boston population, which was about 10,000.^{10,11} The Tax Rolls of 1772, show not quite half the Philadelphia population of nearly 25,000 listed in the same category.^{12,13} It was a class structure very different from Europe where a bloated and corrupt aristocracy was supported in the cities and countryside by the mass of people, many of whom lived in appalling poverty.¹⁴

Franklin was born 17 January 1706, in a little rented house (now gone) on Milk Street in Boston, and taken that same cold wintry day across to the Old South Church where he was baptized.¹⁵ His father, Josiah Franklin, was nearly 50, a soap and candle maker. His mother, Abiah Folger was 38.¹⁶ Benjamin would be Abiah's 10th and last child. ¹⁷ We know very little about her beyond Franklin's words in her epitaph. He called her a “discreet and virtuous woman.”¹⁸

Josiah had immigrated from the village of Ecton in the English midlands where, for 300 years, the Franklin clan had been small freeholders, their income supplemented by a blacksmith shop.¹⁹ He had been apprenticed as a cloth dyer, a trade he had inherited from his father²⁰ but, when he came to Boston in 1683, there were already dyers enough. He had no choice but to find another trade, and he became a tallow chandler, rendering animal fat to make soaps and candles.²¹ A deeply religious Congregationalist, he was respected for his piety and his fair judgement. Benjamin as a boy recalled visits, when the city's master craftsmen came to ask his father to mediate small disputes.²²

The other major adult figure in the boy's life was Josiah's brother for whom Franklin had been named. His uncle Benjamin did not do well in England and immigrated to Massachusetts when Benjamin was almost

seven. For the next three or four years he lived with Josiah and his family, and took special care of his young nephew, already seen as the most exceptional of Josiah's and Abiah's children.²³

Josiah's original plan for his youngest son was that he be the family's tithe to their church. Benjamin would become a minister.²⁴ He sent him to Boston Latin School, an unusual choice for a working class family. But Josiah now had modest prosperity, and it was a critical step in the process of making a clergyman. The school taught the students enough Latin to pass the entrance exam for Harvard College, from whence they would like arrows head towards ordination.

Within a year his father's judgment seemed validated; although slow in math, Benjamin had a gift for languages, and had advanced to the head of his class.²⁵ He was moved up to the next class, with plans for him to move to a third, and yet more advanced class, at the end of the year. But it never happened. Josiah suddenly took Benjamin out of Boston Latin, and sent him to George Brownell, a local school master who taught bright tradesmens' boys a little grammar, writing, and mathematics, so that they could help their masters when apprenticed.²⁶ In his *Autobiography*, Franklin said practicality and interest in his success had trumped his father's religious commitment, and that the decision was made "from a view of the Expence of a College Education which, having so large a Family, he could not well afford, and the mean [*inadequate*] Living many so educated were afterwards able to obtain...."²⁷ Those may not have been the only reasons though. Franklin's grandson Temple later told a story about how his grandfather "found the long graces used by his father before and after meals very tedious. One day after the winter's provisions had been salted," Franklin told his father "if you were to say *Grace* over the whole cask -- once for all -- it would be a vast *saving of time*."²⁸

In 1715, when he was 10 years old, his formal academic education, totalling less than a year,²⁹ ended and like most working class boys of that time, Franklin entered the world of the apprentice, the real engine of education in the colonies.³⁰ ("Dr." Franklin would be created in late middle age when he received an honorary doctorate from St Andrews University in 1759, and one from Oxford in 1762.) He started with his father, but hated the messy business of soap and candle making and

longed to run away to sea, as an older brother had.³¹ Josiah then considered apprenticing his son to his cousin Samuel who made knives, thinking it would hold the boy's attention. But Samuel asked too high a fee to take Benjamin on and, at 12, the boy became the apprentice of another older brother James -- nine years senior -- to learn the printing trade.³²

Although he would never attempt really fine printing, from the first, Franklin loved the mechanicalness of the press, its presence as a machine, the smell of oiled metal and ink, the dust of the paper, the worn wooden boxes with their stacks of type, the whole thing enchanted him. Sixty years later, when he was in Passy and America's Minister Plenipotentiary, he set up a press so that he could print his forms and official documents.

Had we seen him during his time with James, we would have seen a stocky energetic boy, attired in the deerskin knee breeches that along with thick blue wool knee stockings, long-sleeved speckled shirt, and thick well greased and substantial shoes, made up the uniform of a printer's apprentice.³³

His manners might be rough, but he already had a taste for books, and he was reading Plutarch and Defoe at 12. Even though the brothers fought almost from the beginning, James seems to have encouraged his reading. He himself was just returned from London where he had done his own apprenticeship, and proud of the sophistication he had acquired there. His printing house sold Swift, Dryden, Pope, Addison, and Steele at a time when several of these titles would not have been found in the Harvard Library.³⁴ Matthew Adams, a tradesman with literary tastes who came to the printing house, also took an interest in Benjamin and gave him the run of his small library. It was in Adams' library that he first was exposed to the of the English philosopher John Locke's writings on personal freedom, and the perfectibility of man, concepts that would so deeply affect many of the Founders.³⁵ These books were his real education, and his mind opened like sunrise.

He inherited his father's intense interest in the spiritual questions of life, but not his father's forms. After carefully considering the question he decided that while he was a believer -- a Deist -- he was not going to be a

churchgoer. He says he found the theological judgments the various sects levied on each other discordant and their disputes arid.³⁶ "I think vital religion has always suffered when orthodoxy is more regarded than virtue," he once wrote to his parents.³⁷ This struggle to work out the difference between the spiritual and the religious, did not take place in private. Although the main reason he left Boston was a dispute with his brother, he admits that "My indiscrete Disputations about religion (had) begun to make me pointed at with Horror by good People, as an Infidel or Atheist."³⁸

He began using the time people were at church to work on his reading and writing, but he always supported church congregations, and advocated people attending. He saw churches as the one institution, in a new world that had very few, *that supported virtue*, which he saw as critical to a citizen's inner growth, and the creation of a civil society. When he married he paid an annual fee for several years to maintain a pew at the only Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia and, later, at the Episcopalian Christ Church where his wife Deborah attended, his two younger children were baptized, and he and Deborah ultimately were buried.

In 1722, at 16, not long before he left Boston, Franklin quite consciously changed his life radically. After reading one of the first health books ever published in America, *The Way to Health* by Thomas Tryon³⁹ he became a vegetarian for a while, began a regular exercise program, and may have been the only man in Philadelphia who tried to bathe regularly.⁴⁰ He also became concerned with ventilation, proper breathing, and good air,⁴¹ and, when he was 81, told his physician and friend Benjamin Rush, with whom he started the first hospital in Philadelphia, that he had "never snuffed, chewed or smoked."⁴² All of these decisions flowed from Tryon's arguments that respecting his body made him a better more productive person, and expressed greater respect for his Creator. Better individuals made better citizens, better citizens made for a more civil democratic society. It was a view shaped by the Enlightenment Philosophers he had read who centered science on the idea that the human species was infinitely perfectible. Franklin's logical mind took easily to the patterns of science with its process of developing theories, and using experiments to test them. He resolved to make his own life his first experiment.

He was willing to learn from anyone. Cotton Mather was already famous for his involvement with the Salem Witch Trials, and the most influential Puritan in Massachusetts when he first published, *Bonifacius: Essays to Do Good* in 1710. Franklin biographer Ronald Clark calls Mather “one of the most disagreeable characters of early American history...”⁴³, and it was a book that would hardly have seemed a Franklin choice given its dogmatic religious views. Even more dubious a selection since the Franklin brothers were then in open conflict with the powerful Mather clan. Yet Cotton Mather's words, including: “...You must accept of any public service, of which you are capable, when you are called to it... The fault of not employing our talent for the public good is justly styled, ‘a great sacrilege in the Temple of the God of Nature,’”⁴⁴ had a profound effect on Franklin. Three quarters of a century later, having lived a life of almost unparalleled public service, he would write Mather's son, Samuel: “If I have been, as you seem to think, a useful citizen, the public owes the advantage of it to (your father's) book.”

He even used Mather's book title as an inside joke to create the surname “Dogood” for his first literary alter ego, a fictional middle-aged widow, Silence Dogood. Her 14 letters, published in his brother's newspaper the *Courant*, represent his first major public writing. They were an instant and influential success, and he immediately understood the power that writing well bestowed, and the influence media commanded.⁴⁵

By the time he had gotten to the eighth letter, published on 2 July 1722, the 16-year old Franklin had gone beyond the gossipy humor with which he had begun the letters, and embarked on what would become a life-long working out of his philosophy in print: “WITHOUT Freedom of Thought,” he wrote, “there can be no such Thing as Wisdom; and no such Thing as publick Liberty, without Freedom of Speech; which is the Right of every Man, as far as by it, he does not hurt or control the Right of another. And this is the only Check it ought to suffer, and the only bounds it ought to know.

“This sacred Privilege is so essential to free Governments, that the Security of Property, and the Freedom of Speech always go together.... Whoever would overthrow the Liberty of a Nation, must begin by subduing the Freedom of Speech...”⁴⁶

In 1727, he proposed to a group of friends that they join together to start what he called the Junto. It was the first test of his hypothesis about the power of small associations. Part club, part encounter group, part civic action team, it became 'his benevolent lobby for the benefit of Philadelphia' and, truth be told, now and then to the advantage of the members including Franklin.⁴⁷ Wealth as an end in itself though wasn't interesting as a life goal, and it became even less enticing as his world expanded, and he came to know the rich and powerful, and saw that money could not be equated with virtue and wisdom, which is what he sought. When he got to a comfortable level of affluence he basically set his business machine in motion through partners, and walked away from it, passing up profits that would have made him a far richer man. He never forgot what he had sometimes done to make money though, and he knew that unless there were avenues for enterprising people to advance, the weaker spirits would devolve to corruption, despair, and crime. To create those opportunities, he used the Junto small group model again and again, including, when a group grew unwieldy, spinning off clones. Linked up the groups made networks. It was particularly effective starting fire companies, but he started police, and libraries with it, as well.

At 22, he wrote *Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion*, which would serve him as creed and private service, linking his inner world of spirit, and his outer world of action. "I shall make myself most acceptable to Him... I believe He is pleased and delights in the happiness of those He has created; and since without virtue man can have no happiness in this world, I firmly believe he delights to see me virtuous, because He is pleased when He sees me happy...."⁴⁸ Looking at his own life in terms of what it meant for him to be a virtuous citizen, he compiled a list of "virtues", explaining to his friends that "the perfection of anything" was "only the greatest the nature of the thing is capable of."⁴⁹ With typical lack of modesty, he told them he intended to emulate Jesus and Socrates.⁵⁰

"Like a scientist undertaking an experiment,"⁵¹ he ranked his list according to how hard he thought it would be for him to attain that quality, and then set about working on them, one by one. The order is revealing. At the head of the list was Temperance; easy for a man who had already decided against excessive drinking or eating. Then: Silence,

Order, Resolution, Frugality, Industry, Sincerity, Justice, Moderation, Cleanliness, Tranquility and, finally, the two really tough ones for him: Chastity, and Humility.

In youth Van Doren says, Franklin “went to women hungrily, secretly, and briefly.”⁵² Before he entered into a marriage with Deborah Read, he fathered a child while in London, shortly after leaving his brother James’s shop in Boston. The mother’s identity was never known. Without concern for what others thought, he brought the son he named William back to Pennsylvania in 1726, and acknowledged and reared the boy, as he would acknowledge and largely rear William’s illegitimate son Temple who, in turn, also had a child (who died) out of wedlock while Franklin was in France.⁵³ In spite of this Franklin was not casual about marriage. He supported his partnership and saw his marriage as the foundation of his successful life.⁵⁴

He was 24, when he and Deborah, a carpenter’s daughter, registered their marriage at Christ Church on the first of September 1730. It had to be a common law union without a ceremony because Deborah had been abandoned by a first husband, who was presumed to still be alive. She was “a sturdy, handsome, high coloured woman, untaught and sometimes turbulent, little interested in her husband’s studies or speculations but devoted to him.”⁵⁵ For the next 25 years they worked in tandem building up first their own printing house, and publishing their paper, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, and then the series of partnerships, and what amounted to printing franchises that would give Franklin the freedom to pursue his goals through public service.

Deborah would not be comfortable when famous and brilliant people began to be drawn to her husband, nor did Philadelphia society ever really accept her. At home they lived the family centered life Deborah preferred while Franklin entertained at his clubs and in taverns. In 1732 a son, Francis, was born only to die at four from smallpox. Franklin would always mourn him. In 1744, a daughter Sarah, known as Sally, was born; she would grow up to be her mother’s companion.

There is no evidence that he was unfaithful to Deborah at any time in this period, and he acknowledges in many places the debt he felt for her

support of him, her loving care, and her careful stewardship of their financial interests, particularly when he was away.⁵⁶ There was deep affection always between them. She called him "Pappy."⁵⁷

They began to grow apart as their interests diverged, and it was compounded by the fact that Deborah didn't like travel and particularly feared sea voyages. Once Franklin began to travel for the post office they were apart for months at time. During these trips around the colonies, he may have had affairs with younger women, although with whom, or how many, we do not know. Franklin only speaks of one who did not succumb. Catharine Ray, 23, daughter of a wealthy Rhode Island family. He probably met her when he was 50. She refused his seduction but fell in love with him.⁵⁸ They remained friends and correspondents, and he a mentor to both her, and her husband, as long as he lived.⁵⁹

He never saw Deborah again after he sailed to England in 1757 to serve as Pennsylvania's colonial agent. The last 17 years of their marriage were nothing but correspondence, and she died, at 66, in 1774, while Franklin was in London struggling with the final deterioration of the colonial relationship. The last five years of her life were particularly hard as she endured a series of strokes, and there can be little doubt that she felt abandoned, although she was always supportive of his work. His son William wrote him in London after the funeral, that "her disappointment" in his not returning "prayed a good deal on her spirits."⁶⁰

His struggle with pride, which he had placed last on his list as the most difficult virtue for him to achieve, turned out much more successfully than his attempts at chastity. It is a measure of where he started from that he said he had not originally even intended to include "humility," as he phrased it. He added it only when a Quaker friend whom he respected told him that his peers "thought me proud."⁶¹

One of the central influences that helped him in all this was Freemasonry. He was first exposed to it during a year he worked in London as a young man. He was struck by how many powerful influential men belonged to the newly formed (1717) Grand Lodge, and realized belonging tied a man into an invisible network that brought business and conferred influence, both of which he sought.⁶² There was no chance that he could join then,

but his careful mind took note. When the Lodge of St. John, the first in the colonies was formed in Philadelphia, in 1727,⁶³ the pattern of the powerful becoming members was repeated, once again as Franklin watched. This time though he was not a simple journeyman but, master of a printing house, and publisher of *The Pennsylvania Gazette* which he had purchased in 1730, when he was 24.

His ambition was still raw and aggressive then and, on 8 December that year, perhaps hoping to show the Masonic brothers he was a force to be reckoned with, he published an article he had written claiming to reveal their secrets.⁶⁴ Instead of responding like the theocrats in Boston, who had tried to shut down his brother James' paper, the *Courant*, when it criticized the Puritan clergy, the Masons invited him in. In February 1731 he was inducted and, on 13th of May he wrote and published an apology in the *Gazette* admitting what he had done.⁶⁵

Freemasonry shaped and fed Franklin's spirit. It was secret, congenial, offered a unique place for men of different classes to gather in equality, and there were no theological disagreements. Masonry was a spiritual path without sectarian disputes, it emphasized action not theology. Once inside the brotherhood, Franklin discovered it almost exactly mirrored his own beliefs, and glorified his class. It had a logical quality, and its ascending degrees, like his list of virtues and his creed, were designed to help a man build a life that was "four square and true" through hard work and fair dealing. And the metaphysics of Free Masonry, was expressed through the metaphor of the Creator as the great builder, and the individual as a pilgrim journeyman. Most important of all, Masonry watered the seed Cotton Mather had planted: Public work for the common good was an important part of a Masonic life.

Had we seen him at that time, working in his printing house on Market Street in Philadelphia, we would have seen a prospering tradesman with both the charm and toughness of a self-made entrepreneur?⁶⁶ Until middle age people still thought him proud if brilliant, a little aggressive, a bit too self-promoting, but endlessly well-intentioned and hardworking. And everyone agreed he was a presence. He seemed bigger than his five foot nine or ten, and he had a large head. His voice was pleasant although he sometimes spoke hesitantly, and he was already using the disarming

flow of humorous stories and snatches of songs that marked the conversation of his later years. Once committed, he was decisive and tenacious in action.⁶⁷ Strangely, for all the portraits of him, we do not know the color of his hair or eyes. One biographer says he had dark brown hair with gray eyes,⁶⁸ another describes him as near blond with hazel eyes.⁶⁹

On 14 May 1743, Franklin began work on his ultimate Junto, the American Philosophical Society, which was also modelled on the Royal Society, the leading intellectual association in Britain. We think of Franklin today principally for his experiments in electricity, particularly the indelible images of him flying a kite in a storm, but Franklin's contributions range across a half a dozen disciplines from climatology, to oceanography, to geology, to medicine. By writing the leading colonial natural scientists inviting them to join him in forming America's premiere intellectual society, he was exercising yet another variation of his small-group model. As Masonry fed his spirit, so The American Philosophical Society, his memberships in the Royal Society (1753) and the French Academy (1772) would come to feed his mind.

The quarter century from the 1727 founding of the Junto to his trip to England as colonial agent comprised most of Franklin's efforts to execute his plan for the organization of American urban society, and the creation of his virtuous citizens. During this time he held a wide selection of government posts, in addition to his appointment with the Post Office, all of them yet further permutations of his plan. As historian Bruce Yenawine observed, Franklin never lost his "unshakable faith in the faculty of human rationality and the ability of fair-minded and hard working men to squarely face the trials of their lives and time and devise inventive, effective, and compassionate responses."⁷⁰

On hot Tuesday afternoon, on the 13th of July 1787, during a break in the deliberations of the Constitutional Convention, Manasseh Cutler, armed with a letter of introduction, called upon Franklin at his home on Market Street. Cutler had just pushed through the Articles of Confederation Congress in New York (then governing the country) a massive land program. Franklin, who had been involved with land projects for much of his life was happy to receive him. Thanks to that visit we have a final

portrait of one of our history's most extraordinary figures: "we found [Franklin] in his garden sitting upon a grass plat (mat) under a very large Mulberry, with several other gentlemen (like Franklin most were delegates to the Constitutional Convention) and two or three ladies."

He was, Cutler said, "a short fat, trunched old man, in a plain Quaker dress, bald pate, and short white locks, sitting without his hat under the tree.... (He was) perfectly easy, and everything about him seems to diffuse an unrestrained freedom and happiness. He has an incessant vein of humor, accompanied with an uncommon vivacity, which seems as natural and involuntary as his breathing."⁷¹

Two years later, in 1789, Franklin's health was failing, and he knew it. With wisdom's long vision, he decided to amend his will, so that he could continue his life's work by reaching out across the next two centuries, almost to the end of the 20th Century. He stated his goal candidly: "I wish to be useful even after my Death, if possible, in forming and advancing other young men that may be serviceable to their Country..."⁷²

The protocol for his two-century experiment -- for that was what it was, reminiscent in many ways of his experiments with electricity -- was a testament trust that anticipated the modern micro-lending programs of the famous Grameen Banks, which have had such an empowering effect on today's Asian nations.

He gave to Boston and Philadelphia each "One thousand Pounds Sterling..."⁷³ This money was to be *loaned* (not given) in small sums to "young married Artificers, under the Age of twenty-five Years, as have served an Apprenticeship in the Said Town; and faithfully fulfilled the Duties of their Indentures so as to obtain a good moral Character from at least two respectable Citizens..."⁷⁴ Franklin clearly saw those three people forming small group, and the triads, in the nature of things overlapping into networks to strengthen their cities, their states and, ultimately, their nation.

Within a year Franklin would be dead, yet the trusts would live on, if not always as he had planned, until dissolved in 1991, still in accordance with Franklin's careful instructions. For 200 years they improved the lives of

thousands of young families in Boston and Philadelphia, and they do so still, because the 6.5 million dollars in the trusts when they were dissolved was used to support educational programs for the same people Franklin had originally designed them to serve.⁷⁵

George Washington and Franklin who had worked together through the war, developing a deep respect and affection, said goodbye through their correspondence. On 23 September 1789, now President Washington wrote his friend, whom he had been told was dying: "If to be venerated for benevolence--if to be admired for talent--if to be esteemed for patriotism--if to be beloved for philanthropy can gratify the human mind, you must have the pleasing consolation to know that you have not lived in vain; And I flatter my self that it will not be ranked among the least grateful occurrences of your life to be assured that so long as I retain my memory--you will be thought on with respect, veneration and affection..."⁷⁶ Franklin in turn would leave to Washington his cane with the gold eagle head, that he had been given by Louis XVI.

Franklin wrote his last thoughts on liberty later that year to British inventor and politician David Hartley, with whom, six years before, he had negotiated the Treaty of Paris that had sealed American independence. He said he hoped "that not only the love of liberty, but a thorough knowledge of the rights of man, may pervade all the nations of the earth..."

He fully understood the paradox for the United States in what he was saying, and the last great effort of his life was dedicated to eliminating the cancer of slavery from his new country. In early life, Franklin had owned slaves, advertised their sale in his newspaper, and even traded in human beings. But by 1751 he had begun to think the institution was immoral and economically unsound.⁷⁷ While in London, in 1758, he had proposed that a school be started in Philadelphia to educate Blacks.⁷⁸ Like George Mason he believed the only chance Africans had in America was education. When he returned from France in 1786, he helped reinvigorate The Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, the first such society in America, and became its President, lending his enormous prestige to the cause of African American liberation. On 9 November 1789, most historians believe he ghost wrote the Society's formal

arguments against slavery.⁷⁹ After a Congressional committee reported that Congress could not interfere with the internal affairs of the states, and slavery was a states rights issue, he also used his connections to see that the Society's memorial was presented to the first Congress.⁸⁰

On Tuesday the 23rd of March 1790, with only a month left to live, now forced to take tincture of opium regularly to counteract pain, he completed a last literary hoax in the service of ridding the new nation of slavery.

A Georgia Congressman, James Jackson, had given a speech arguing the states rights position. Franklin wrote the editor of the *Federal Gazette*, entitling his letter: *On the Slave Trade*. In it he says that Jackson's speech reminded him of a one made about a hundred years earlier by Sidi Mehemet Ibrahim, a member of the Divan of Algiers. Sidi Mehemet Ibrahim, like Silence Dogood, was a fiction and the letter used wit where others might have cried out with passionate rhetoric.

As he had decades before in the eighth Dogood Letter on liberty, when he offered a fictitious "...Abstract from the *London Journal*..."⁸¹ he even provided his bogus Arab speech with a citation: "Martin's account of his consulship, *anno 1687*."⁸² The speech, Franklin said, argued that it was acceptable for Algerian pirates to enslave Christian mariners when their ships were captured (one of the most passionately felt foreign policy issues America faced at that time). The justifications Ibrahim made for this practice, were the exact arguments advanced by Representative Jackson to justify the enslavement of Africans.

Franklin died about 11 o'clock Saturday night on 17 April 1790.⁸³ He was three months past his 84th birthday. At 82, he had talked about the power of one individual with a purpose. Two centuries of hindsight enable us to fully appreciate how correct he was in his vision of America, and how much we are all the beneficiaries of Dr. Franklin's plan.

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