

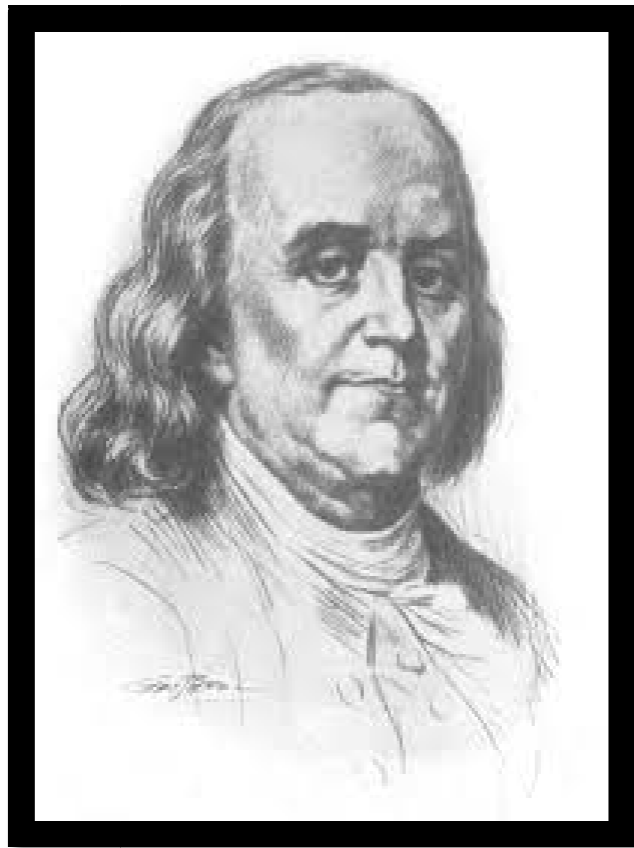
# Benjamin Franklin

## A Glimpse of Imperfection

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## Abstract

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A re-examination of Benjamin Franklin becomes necessary when one considers how his essay *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, etc.* has impacted modern society. In his essay Franklin speaks of an English Empire that spans the entire globe and increases the population of its peoples. He speaks of anti-immigration and he reveals the true of his anti-slavery beliefs. Upon critically examining this essay, in conjunction with other writings, a new Franklin materializes, one who has thus far been ignored.

In his essay *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, etc.* Franklin professes his strong desire for a transatlantic English Empire. Franklin professes this same desire in *A Description of Those, Who, at Any Rate Would Have Peace with France* and *Humorous Reasons for Restoring Canada*. In these writings Franklin criticizes those who threaten his dream of a growing English Empire. In response to the Stamp Act Franklin created an engraving he titled *MAGNA Britannia: her Colonies REDUC'D* that embodied his belief that without each other neither the colonies nor Great Britain could survive.

In the same essay Franklin reveals a strong ethnocentric and anti-immigration belief. He reiterates these beliefs in letters to friends and a petition to parliament titled *On a Proposed Act to Prevent Emigration*. Franklin states his befuddlement with regard to England letting immigrants flood the otherwise perfectly English colonies and worse still attempt to limit the emigration of English peoples from the island. Franklin would fight for his ideals whether right or wrong and he will take on all those who get in his way.

Lastly in the essay Franklin reveals the true nature of his beliefs with regard to slavery and Africans in general. In this light Franklin becomes a man who perceives all slaves as natural born thieves. Franklin was of course an abolitionist but he did not want to rub elbows with free Africans in the colonies. In fact Franklin wanted to make North America a shining white star to the heavens.

Benjamin Franklin provides a human persona, an embodiment of race relations in modern society. Historians who wrote on Franklin emphasized his good works and ignored his bad, politically incorrect beliefs that impact the present just as much. To understand the real Franklin he must be treated as a human being capable of error. Once his fallibility is acknowledged can his work be critically examined in a way that reveals his true beliefs and needs no excuses. In this same way modern society wants to ignore racism and racial tension instead of focusing on it to overcome it. Historians observe problems or issues in the present and then use the past as a means to solve them. Therefore what can Dr. Benjamin Franklin tell modern society about ethnocentric prejudice and racial tensions?

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## Introduction

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George Bancroft created the first account of American history in 1834 with his ten volume compilation *History of the United States, from the Discovery of the American Continent* in which he romantically defines everything from the creation of the Virginia colony to the creation of the U.S. Constitution and everyone from the pilgrims to the founding fathers. Most important, the founding fathers of Bancroft's narrative were great men operating under divine guidance and therefore incapable of failure. Every historian of American history has subsequently built on and battled with these romanticized notions of Bancroft's narrative, usually by injecting into it their ideas based primarily on the time in which they lived. Historian Charles Beard, the most notable among those who took on the "father of American history", attempted to radically redefine the founding fathers of Bancroft.<sup>1</sup>

Many progressive historians, Beard chief among them, reevaluated the ideals of Bancroft by examining the economic motivations of the founding fathers and the entire American Revolution. Beard and his contemporaries wrote during the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a time of industrial revolution and robber barons like John D. Rockefeller exploiting American workers for capitalistic gains, and the injustice they observed motivated their writings.<sup>2</sup> During a time now in American history that has witnessed the evil of Adolf Hitler's Nazi regime and a civil rights movement in which African Americans fought to obtain equal rights as citizens of the

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<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s.v. "George Bancroft," accessed November 15, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/51366/George-Bancroft>.

<sup>2</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s.v. "Charles Austin Beard," accessed November 15, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/57356/Charles-A-Beard>.

United States of America, the importance of re-examining the rhetoric of America's founding fathers is paramount. Historians now, from a modern perspective, must ask the difficult questions regarding the racial or ethnic principles held by America's founding fathers and how their principles reflect in attitudes championed long after the time in which they held such principles.

Where then does Dr. Benjamin Franklin fit into any of this? Dr. Edmund Morgan, who has published a biography on Franklin, believed that Franklin sacrificed himself for the greater good of society at large.<sup>3</sup> While certainly one of the more fair and level representations of Franklin, Morgan still suffers mildly hero-worship by placing Franklin on a lofty pedestal. There was however a dark side to Franklin represented in a piece of his writing that has been thus far merely a side note in history. In 1751 Franklin wrote an essay about his worldly concerns, published in Boston four years later under the title *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, etc.* (featured in the appendix for reference) and this piece of writing became Franklin's biggest mistake.<sup>4</sup> Essentially Franklin went on a twenty four point tirade in which he professed his desire to witness white people of English descent increase in population and inhabit as much of the planet as they possibly could, he then outlined how to achieve such an aspiration. Why then has a piece of Franklin's writing that consisted of his societal philosophies not received much critical attention, especially with consideration to modern hindsight?

Franklin presented himself masterfully to history. He took great pains in his autobiography and other writings not to reveal the best parts of himself, as some of his critics

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<sup>3</sup> Edmund S. Morgan, *Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Ormond Seavey, *Benjamin Franklin: Autobiography and Other Writings* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press Incorporated, 1993), 251-252.

have charged, but to hide the worst parts.<sup>5</sup> Franklin even omitted parts of the controversial and politically incorrect essay once he realized it might open him up to criticisms. For these reasons parts of Franklin's character, the unflattering aspects of his morality, conveniently do not receive critical attention, overshadowed by his accomplishments and his allies. By critically examining the motivations behind Franklin's *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, etc.*, in conjunction with how it relates to a number of his other writings, it becomes quite clear that Franklin was a great man devoted to the advancement of society however the way in which Franklin defined his ideal society reveals his most glaring, possibly only, fault.

First, however, one must sort out Benjamin Franklin the man, extracting him from the image, the apparition, and the faceless topic of countless critical essays and biographies. Only upon accomplishing this can one justly examine Franklin with regard to his thoughts on the progress of Englishmen, the mass immigration experienced in colonial Pennsylvania, and slavery as an institution and with regard to Africans in a general sense. Sifting through such details one discovers that Franklin did not always use his printing press for good. Instead he used his printing press to print pamphlets and letters that advocated for the expansion of Englishmen across North America that would create a united English empire dominant over both spheres of the globe. These pamphlets and letters also revealed Franklin's ethnocentric principles, anti-immigration attitudes, and while Franklin was an abolitionist he certainly did not believe in African slaves obtaining civil rights or equality. Who was Benjamin Franklin then; first he was a man that lived in the city of Philadelphia in the colony of Pennsylvania and wrote an essay that echoed through time.

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<sup>5</sup> Carl Van Doren, "Meet Doctor Franklin," in *Benjamin Franklin and the American Character*, ed. Charles L. Sanford (Boston, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1955), 29.

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## A North American Englishman: Obsessed with Empire

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Franklin first arrived in Philadelphia a runaway in 1723 and began working for Samuel Keimer who owned one of the cities two printing operations. In 1724, only one year after arriving in Philadelphia, Franklin set sail for London on the request and false patronage of Pennsylvania governor Sir William Keith. The purpose of such a voyage, pick up equipment necessary for printing, was far less important than the result. While living in London Franklin grew as a philosopher and a scientist but most importantly he returned home in 1726 with a greater appreciation for what it meant to be an Englishmen living in North America.<sup>6</sup>

Franklin now dreamed of a transatlantic English empire and he chronicled this in his essay *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, etc.* In points ten and thirteen of his essay Franklin actually lists the obstacles to increase the numbers of the English population. First Franklin mentions that a people must remain unconquered because this diminishes, “the subsistence of the natives discourages their marriages, and so gradually diminishes them, while the foreigners increase.” This naturally led Franklin to his next point, that loss of territory would decrease the possibility for population expansion and growth. Franklin’s next two points stem from Great Britain’s capacity to continue as “master of the sea” because control of the sea meant control of trade and food resources which would allow for the English empire and population to dominate the earth. In his final point Franklin mentions “heavy taxes,”

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<sup>6</sup> Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 38, 40-43, 50-51.

“bad government and insecure property” as causes for emigration and subsequent conversion of English peoples to foreigners because, “people not only leave such a country, and settling abroad incorporate with other nations, lose their native Languages, and become foreigners.” This misguided way of governance would serve only “to distress...to weaken” the British Empire because “weakening the children weakens the whole family.” Franklin simply could not understand why, with so much potential, England would choose to limit its population by limiting its colonies.<sup>7</sup>

In point twenty two of his essay Franklin proceeded to describe how England might overcome the obstacles he previously listed. He went on in jubilation about the potential, if England would only embrace his ideology, of the increase in the numbers of Englishmen and women. Franklin believed, or wished rather, that were the earth “empty of other inhabitants, it might in a few Ages be replenish’d from one nation only; as for Instance, with Englishmen.” Franklin might as well have said the earth should be replenished as God intended, with Englishmen. The North American colonies, as Franklin saw it, provided England with unlimited possibilities for not only increased population but also a transatlantic empire. These achievements would lead to the, “accession of Power to the British empire by the Sea as well as Land! What increase of trade and navigation!” This point spurred Franklin on to his next, “how important an affair then to Britain, is the present treaty for settling the bounds between her colonies and the French, and how careful should she be to secure room enough, since on the

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<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Franklin, “Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, the Peopling of Countries, etc.,” in *Benjamin Franklin: Autobiography and Other Writings*, ed. Ormond Seavey (New York: Oxford Univ. Press Incorporated, 1993), 254-256, 258-260.

room depends so much the increase of her people?" Great Britain had to acquire more territory to expand its empirical holdings and thereby expand its population.<sup>8</sup>

Franklin believed, from the beginning, that the North American colonies were a vital piece to securing his vision of a global British Empire. Franklin wanted nothing more than to have the colonies included in the English empire but as equal's not subordinate or subjugated inferiors. He held on to this hope until the bitter end when humiliation forced him to relinquish it and begin to jadedly view the colonies as the independent better half of the English empire.

Franklin, like many living in the American colonies, became predominately concerned with the general relationship between the North American colonies and their English mother country during and after the Seven Years War (1750's – 1760's).<sup>9</sup> Not until this time had the dichotomous relationship between England and its colonies been so exposed therefore it makes sense that Franklin's own dichotomous nature would be revealed in his writings at this same time. On November 24, 1759 Franklin published a letter to the press titled *A Description of Those, Who, at Any Rate Would Have Peace with France* and then one month later, on December 27, 1759, he published another letter titled *Humorous Reasons for Restoring Canada*. The first letter criticized those in the North American colonies that would have peace with, or even worse provide aid to, France. The second letter criticized those in London (England) who did not want to continue the Seven Years War in Canada after driving the French out of the lands chartered by the crown for the English colonies.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 254-256, 258-260.

<sup>9</sup> Walter R. Borneman, *The French and Indian War: Deciding the Fate of North America* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), 14-20, 296-300.



In that first letter (*A Description of Those, Who, at Any Rate Would Have Peace with France*) Franklin reveals that, as he understands the situation, there are only “two prevailing motives” among those in the North American colonies to “wish for a peace with France.” According to Franklin “power and self-interest” motivated those whom he described as “dishonourable...selfish wretches” to seek such a peace with one of England’s “bitterest enemy.” Franklin became concerned with this insatiable “lust for power” which he thought to “strongly bias great numbers of people” in the colonies because he believed Englishmen should not act in ways that would harm or disadvantage the English empire, especially if it simultaneously benefited an enemy. This strong reprimand of the American colonies from whence he came reveals Franklin the Englishman, angry at those he considered “enemies to their country.” One month later Franklin turned his criticism, covered in classic Franklin sarcasm, toward London.<sup>10</sup>

In this follow up letter (*Humorous Reasons for Restoring Canada*) Franklin, writing from the perspective of those he criticizes, reveals the absurdity of those proposing any reason not to continue the Seven Years War and England’s conquests into French Canada. Franklin reveals more about his beliefs in this letter than the beliefs of those he criticizes however especially when he points out that restoring Canada would allow the “French, by means of their Indians” to carry on a “constant scalping war” against the English colonies. This would “thereby stint their [the colonies] growth” and Franklin can only imagine one reason as to why England would want to diminish the growth of their colonies, “for, otherwise the children [the colonies] might in time be as tall as their mother.” Franklin could not fathom any reason why anyone in London would not want such a large tract of land, which might afford colonial expansion north and west, in the

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<sup>10</sup> Benjamin Franklin, “A Description of Those, Who, at Any Rate, Would Have a Peace with France, November 24, 1759,” in *Franklin Writings*, ed. J. A. Leo Lemay (New York: Literary Classics of the United States Incorporated, 1987), 530-531.

possession of the English empire. What better way to celebrate victory over France than to expand English territories in North America. What better way to realize the expansion of white populations of English descent.<sup>11</sup>

Considered with points thirteen and twenty two of his essay clearly Franklin grew agitated with colonial residents as well as the residents of Great Britain because neither shared his vision of an expanding transatlantic empire of Englishmen and women. Franklin had created his own version of manifest destiny and became frustrated that few people, if any, shared his vision. The taxation of the colonies by parliament in an attempt to relieve English debt gave Franklin additional ammunition but always in defense of his vision.

MAGNA Britannia: her Colonies REDUC'D



Figure 1: An engraving conjured by Franklin during the life of the Stamp Act.

<sup>11</sup> Benjamin Franklin, "Humorous Reasons for Restoring Canada, December 27, 1759," in *Franklin Writings*, ed. J. A. Leo Lemay (New York: Literary Classics of the United States Incorporated, 1987), 532-533.

The Stamp Act passed by parliament in 1765 sparked Franklin to create the infamous post card engraving *MAGNA Britannia: her Colonies REDUC'D* (figure 1).<sup>12</sup> The image endured throughout the American Revolution as a symbol of British suppression however Franklin had not intended this. What Franklin intended was to display to the world his belief that the American colonies and Great Britain were equally dependent on each other. This sentiment can be observed in the post script of a letter he had sent to his youngest sister Jane Mecom from London on March 1766. In it Franklin congratulates her “on the Repeal of the Stamp Act” and he explains the attached post card engraving as the representation of his “messages during the time.” Franklin went on to elaborate on the mood in London during the debate over the Stamp Act and he revealed that parliament had considered using force to subdue or, as Franklin himself said, “reduce” the colonies to achieve colonial obedience. The conclusion of the debate, according to Franklin, was “that the Colonies might be ruined, but that Great Britain would thereby be maimed.”<sup>13</sup> Franklin’s included post card engraving bore the image pictured in figure 1 which represented the physical incarnation of points ten and parts of point thirteen of his early essay concerning the increase of mankind. Considered with point ten of his essay this letter and engraving demonstrate that Franklin had always believed needless taxation of the colonies and suppression of their industry by Great Britain would result in a weakening of both and therefore a fundamental weakening of his ambition to witness his ideal English empire. Immigration also contributed to this weakening by stinting the growth of white English peoples through competition for resources.

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<sup>12</sup> Lester C. Olson, *Benjamin Franklin’s Vision of American Community: A Study in Rhetorical Iconology* (Columbia, S.C.: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 2004), 66, 77.

<sup>13</sup> Benjamin Franklin, “A Pretty Good Sort of a World,” in *Franklin Writings*, ed. J. A. Leo Lemay (New York: Literary Classics of the United States Incorporated, 1987), 816-818.

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## A North American Englishman: Fearful of Immigration

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Unfortunately for Franklin when he arrived in colonial Pennsylvania in 1723 he had decided to take up residence within the most ethnically diverse of the American colonies. In fact, and probably to Franklin's alarm, Pennsylvania was the most equally diverse colony in which there resided persons of English origins and persons of German origins at approximately the same population levels.<sup>14</sup> Unbeknownst to Franklin the proprietor and founder of colonial Pennsylvania, William Penn, had intended this diversity from the very beginning. Immigration to colonial Pennsylvania would consistently rise throughout the colonial period.<sup>15</sup>

When Franklin wrote his essay *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, etc* in 1751 the colony of Pennsylvania had already experienced thirty four years of mass immigration.<sup>16</sup> Franklin could not hide his distaste for these impure immigrants, especially in parts twenty one and twenty three of his essay. Point twenty one reveals Franklin's fear of having the England's North American colonies over run by foreigners, "the importation of foreigners into a country that has as many inhabitants as the present employments and provisions for subsistence will bear, will be in the end no increase of people," worse still the foreigners might outcompete the English natives. Franklin goes on to state that immigrants are entirely unnecessary, "nor is it necessary to bring in foreigners to fill up any

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<sup>14</sup> Sally Schwartz, *A Mixed Multitude: The Struggle for Toleration in Colonial Pennsylvania* (New York: New York Univ., 1988), 1.

<sup>15</sup> Arthur D. Graeff, Walter M. Kollmargen, Clyde S. Stine, Ralph Wood, Richard H. Shryock, Albert Franklin Buffington, G. Paul Musselman, Harry Hess Reichard, *The Pennsylvania Germans*, ed. Ralph Wood (Princeton NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1942), 3-5.

<sup>16</sup> Alan Tully, "Englishmen and Germans: National-Group Contact in Colonial Pennsylvania, 1700-1755," *Pennsylvania History*, 45, No. 3 (July 1978), 237-239.

occasional vacancy in a country; for such vacancy...will soon be filled by natural generation.” Bad enough that the colonies import slaves and “by one hundred years exportation of slaves that has blacken’d half America,” why allow any immigration into the colonies that might dilute their English purity. While Franklin certainly disliked sharing the North American colonies with any peoples not of English descent he singled out one group in particular; Germans.<sup>17</sup>

Franklin unabashedly spoke about the German immigrants flooding into colonial Pennsylvania, referring to them using the insulting label “Palatine Boors.” He felt as though English colonists “suffered” the “swarm” of German immigrants who settled together so they might “establish their languages and manners to the exclusion of ours [English people].” Franklin angrily observed colonies like Pennsylvania “founded by the English” becoming full of immigrants and alien. He believed the Germans in the colonies might, “shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them, and will never adopt our language or customs, any more than they can acquire our complexion?” How could Great Britain let its colonies be taken over by foreigners, by Germans.<sup>18</sup>

Most of the immigrants came from the palatine region of the European continent near the Rhine River, present day Germany, after the destruction of farmland and property that resulted as a consequence of the Thirty Years War.<sup>19</sup> Worse still to Franklin, these German immigrants had determined to preserve not only their spoken language but also their cultural beliefs. This obstinacy made them easy targets because their communities became strikingly different from the main Anglo-Saxon communities. Franklin’s acute awareness of the immigration “problem”

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<sup>17</sup> Franklin, 258-259.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 258-259.

<sup>19</sup> Schwartz, 82-84.

he witnessed in colonial Pennsylvania shows up again in the letters that he wrote to family and friends.<sup>20</sup>

On May 9, 1753 Franklin wrote a letter to his friend Peter Collinson, a royal botanist and scientific colleague of his, in which he outlines exactly why he disliked the ever increasing German presence in colonial Pennsylvania. First Franklin mentioned the disturbing way in which German immigrants were taking English employment opportunities because, “of the six printing houses in the province, two are entirely German, two half-German half-English and but two entirely English.” This brought Franklin to his next frustration: German immigrants would not learn English. He informed Collinson that “few of their children in the country learn English” even worse “advertisements intended to be general are now printed in Dutch and English.” Franklin continued his tirade by divulging that the street signs in parts of colonial Pennsylvania have “inscriptions in both languages” and in some “places only German.” Franklin finished his anti-German rhetoric; his tone drenched in indignation, by complaining to Collinson that the Germans “make all their bonds and other legal writings in their own languages which are allowed good in our courts.” Franklin feared that the Germans might Germanize the colonies and threaten his ideal English America.<sup>21</sup>

Collinson for his part attempted to calm his friend but when he suggested that the English in colonial Pennsylvania consider intermarrying with the Germans Franklin scoffed at the idea believing that Englishmen could not possibly find German women attractive.<sup>22</sup> Franklin could only speak for himself and he made no secret about his preference in women, he undoubtedly

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<sup>20</sup> Dietmar Rothermund, “The German Problem of Colonial Pennsylvania,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 84, No. 1 (January 1960), 4.

<sup>21</sup> Benjamin Franklin, “A Pretty Good Sort of a World,” in *Franklin Writings*, ed. J. A. Leo Lemay (New York: Literary Classics of the United States Incorporated, 1987), 471-474.

<sup>22</sup> Morgan, 78.

preferred those of his own complexion with pale skin and rosy cheeks. In a letter to Polly Stevenson, the daughter of his landlady, Franklin details his journey into Paris and notes the complexion of the women he observed from his carriage, “the women that we saw on the road...and in the inns and villages, were generally of a dark complexion; but arriving at Abbeville, we found a sudden change...women...in that place appearing remarkably fair.”<sup>23</sup>

Franklin had such a propensity toward his own kind that he wrote a letter to the press petitioning parliament when it proposed an Act that would prevent emigration from England to the colonies.<sup>24</sup>

Franklin published a letter titled *On a Proposed Act to Prevent Emigration* petitioning parliament in 1773 over a proposed Act that would essentially put a stop to any emigration from England. That would mean that the North American colonies, already experiencing high levels of German immigration, would now experience a decrease in English immigration. Franklin began his petition letter by reminding parliament that the North American colonies have experienced tremendous growth in many areas and that “the lands in general are better cultivated.” He then went on to list four reasons as to why a law that prevented emigration from England, especially with regard to the North American colonies, would only injure the English people.<sup>25</sup>

The first postulation made by Franklin had to do with the casual necessity that results in emigration, “if a country has more people than can be comfortably subsisted in it” those who are not contented “may be induced to immigrate.” Franklin thought this a much better option to the stagnation of the English population. Second Franklin demonstrates that a law prohibiting

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<sup>23</sup> David Schoenbrun, *Triumph in Paris: The Exploits of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1976), 57.

<sup>24</sup> Benjamin Franklin, “On a Proposed Act to Prevent Emigration,” in *Franklin Writings*, ed. J. A. Leo Lemay (New York: Literary Classics of the United States Incorporated, 1987), 704-710.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 705.

emigration cannot be practically enforced because the sheer number of “cruisers necessary...to make a prison of the island for this confinement of free Englishmen” made such a law impossible. Third Franklin states that because there “is no danger of depopulating Britain” this policy or law would make no sense. Why not see to the “natural growth of your own people” by using the North American colonies, already part of Great Britain’s empirical dominions. The fourth notion Franklin brought to light involved the justice of such a law, or rather the injustice of it. According to Franklin “every Briton who is made unhappy at home” has the right to move in order to find their happiness or a better living situation. Franklin could not begin to imagine a law that would contain the white English population to such a small island especially when the English empire had in its possession all the land that the North American colonies provided for expansion.<sup>26</sup>

These later writings and letters coincide with points twenty-one and twenty-three of Franklin’s essay lending support to the theory that the opinions and beliefs he recorded in this essay motivated much of his future writing. Therefore Franklin’s political and philosophical ideas did not change, especially with regard to race and ethnic supremacy. Point twenty-one of Franklin’s essay mentions the importation of slaves to the North American and the subsequent blackening of America. This may seem like Franklin hinting at his anti-slavery beliefs because Franklin became a prominent voice for the abolishment of slavery but he was also rather predisposed to his own ethnic race. What Franklin really opposed was the blackening of his ideally white America.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 706-710.



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## A North American Englishman: Anti-Slavery or Anti-African

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On February 12, 1790 the young American congress received a petition from the Pennsylvania Abolitionist Society that advocated for the termination of the institution of slavery. The petition would have normally been ignored as Quaker nonsense had it not been for the signature of Benjamin Franklin. This became the way in which history would remember Franklin's beliefs about slavery and African slaves. Franklin may have even intended this however the only thing Franklin's signed petition accomplished was the start of a debate he would not live to see through.<sup>27</sup> Franklin did not endorse the institution of slavery but that does not mean that he believed in equal rights for freed African slaves or thought of them as any better than the German immigrants that cluttered his lily white America. In fact most of the Quakers that lived in Pennsylvania had far more progressive moral beliefs with regard to slavery and equal rights than did Franklin.

Franklin revealed his real anti-slavery motivations in his essay *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, etc* along with the true nature of his feelings toward African slaves. In points twelve and thirteen of his essay Franklin states that slaves were more of a liability than a benefit to the North American colonies. According to Franklin, "the interest of the first purchase of a slave, the insurance...on his life, his clothing and diet, expenses in his sickness and loss of time" were all great costs, not to mention that "almost every slave" was "by nature a thief." Franklin however merely used this somewhat logical argument against

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<sup>27</sup> Joseph J. Ellis, *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* (New York: Random House Incorporated, 2000), 83, 119.

slavery to hide his real motive, to increase whites, specifically English, in the colonies and decrease blacks. Those colonies with slaves reveal “the negroes brought into” these colonies “have greatly diminish’d the whites there” and transversely the colonies “having few slaves increase in whites.” These sections of his essay shine a very different light on Franklin. He becomes someone who thought of slaves as natural born thieves and as a people who accomplish little more than diminishing the white population in the North American colonies.<sup>28</sup>

Franklin summed up his essay with his most controversial and politically incorrect point in which he describes his perfect world. In point twenty four Franklin remarks that “the number of purely white people in the world is proportionally very small” only America was “(exclusive of newcomers) wholly so [white].” Franklin continues by stating that “all of Africa is black or tawny. Asia chiefly tawny” and “in Europe...are generally of what we [the English] call a swarthy complexion.” The English of course “make up the principal body of white people on the face of the earth. I could wish their numbers increased.” Franklin wrapped up his essay by postulating why there should be any other race allowed to increase their numbers in America, “why increase the sons of Africa, by planting them in America, where we have so fair an opportunity, by excluding all blacks and tawneys, of increasing the lovely white and red?” Franklin finishes with a half hearted attempt at retraction, “but perhaps I am partial to the complexion of my Country, for such kind of partiality is natural to Mankind.”<sup>29</sup> He keenly adds that last sentence as if to pacify his racially charged statements that verge on master race rhetoric. While Franklin would not have thought of himself as a racist the evidence suggests that

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<sup>28</sup> Franklin, 255-256.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 255-256.

if he was not a racist he had a habit of writing like one. Franklin would later omit point twenty-four from his reprints of the essay when he received political backlash in the Assembly.<sup>30</sup>

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## **A Polarizing Founding Father: The First Voice of American Ethnocentrism**

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The polarizing dichotomy that defined Franklin makes him one of the most difficult founding fathers to characterize. He is almost too human, capable of unimaginable greatness and at the same time susceptible to absolute ignorance. This can even be observed in comments about him by his contemporaries. On September 23, 1789 George Washington wrote a letter to Franklin in which he praised Franklin for his “philosophical mind.” Washington believed that Franklin had not only benefited his country but that his earthly existence had become “useful to mankind.” The letter finished with Washington reassuring Franklin that, “so long as I retain my memory, you will be thought on with respect, veneration and affection by your sincere friend [George Washington].”<sup>31</sup> This esteem for Franklin came from the only man who, as historian Joseph Ellis acknowledged, occupied a more secure place in the American pantheon than Franklin himself.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Seavey, 252.

<sup>31</sup> George Washington, “A Philosophic Mind,” in *Benjamin Franklin and the American Character*, ed. Charles L. Sanford (Boston, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1955), 22.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph J. Ellis, 83.

While Washington gave his complements great men like John Adams expressed their own, less flattering, opinions of Franklin. In his writings Adams stated that he thought Franklin possessed “an exaggerated reputation” and he could not hide his contempt for Franklin and his popularity when he described it as an infection, “princes and courtiers as well as citizens and countrymen, clergy as well as laity, became infected.” Adams did however concede that, “Franklin’s fame was universal. His name was familiar to government and people, to kings ... as well as plebeians, to such a degree that there was scarcely a peasant or a citizen ... who did not consider him a friend to human kind.”<sup>33</sup> These attack and retreat style criticisms of Franklin reveal the impressive popularity he achieved in his own lifetime and they also reveal why history has regarded the image of Dr. Benjamin Franklin the way that it has.

Considering the primary source pool available and the admiration Franklin received from his contemporaries, even from his critics, it becomes quite clear why historians and biographers have followed this same pattern of relenting to Franklin’s greatness. Biographers of Franklin present him in such a way as to make the good doctor invulnerable to his own misdeeds. Franklin himself might love to read what generations of scholars have written about him and that might be the intention of such writings. Regardless of intention the writings on Franklin have thus far been saturated with fond comments of his great contributions to humanity and convenient excuses for his failures. One eclipses the other, and this unfortunately results in a substantial lack of critical analysis in regard to Franklin’s mistakes. Clearly however the rhetoric featured within some of Franklin’s writing, specifically *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, etc*, has impacted history and society negatively. The twentieth century contains

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<sup>33</sup> John Adams, “An Exaggerated Reputation,” in *Benjamin Franklin and the American Character*, ed. Charles L. Sanford (Boston, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1955), 22-23.

multiple examples of influential people echoing Franklin's ethnocentric ideals and the twenty first century appears poised to offer up many more.

The significance of one of America's most popular founding fathers becoming the first ethnocentric spokesperson for an anti-immigrant America and this different understanding of Franklin's attitude toward African slaves lies in the modern perspective.<sup>34</sup> Franklin should no longer be viewed through the lens of Bancroft's narrative alone or be put on Morgan's pedestal. Instead Franklin must be critically examined on ways in which he relates to modern society with its pervading racial and ethnic tensions. One might possibly observe Franklin's rhetoric in the principle ideas behind the Manifest Destiny movement and Nativists propaganda of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the eugenics programs of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and in the Jim Crow Law of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century or even championed by the anti-immigration advocates of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These ideas deserve emphasis in the current climate of American history.

Historian Charles Mclean Andrews published a volume of historical writings in the 1930's titled *Colonial Period of American History*. His work won him the Pulitzer Prize in 1935 and he was considered the chief historian of the Imperial school of thought. Andrews however wrote from an ethnocentric Anglo point of view during a time of world wars and Americans returning to their English roots. According to Andrews the American Revolution should be considered more of a tragic civil war between Englishmen of the same stock that, had it not been for an inability to reconcile, might have ruled the world.<sup>35</sup> Franklin would have agreed with Andrews had he been alive and had he not hated England so much for not realizing its true empirical potential by compromising with its colonies in North America. Winston Churchill

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<sup>34</sup> Morgan, 77-78.

<sup>35</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s.v. "Charles Mclean Andrews," accessed November 15, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/23993/Charles-McLean-Andrews>.

published a book after World War II titled *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples* in which he attempted to unite the English speaking west against the growing Soviet (Russia) threat from the East.<sup>36</sup> Again Franklin would have been in complete agreement with what Churchill preached in his book. In fact Franklin's writings and rhetoric might have inspired Churchill and Andrews or at the very least Franklin's words can certainly be observed in both of their works. Pride in ones ethnicity, while not entirely devoid of merit or generally negative, can lead to prejudices and racism.

Franklin of course will not be confused with Hitler in the annals of history but his essay *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, etc* reveals hints of master race rhetoric and while Franklin would not have considered himself a racist his writings bare some resemblance to Ku Klux Klan hate speech. Conservative language regarding immigration in the twentieth and twenty first century appears completely contrived from Franklin's essay. What Franklin reveals through his imperfection is that everyone can be susceptible to human fallacy and that race, or blood, relations is still a prevailing and controversial issue.

Historians observe issues in modern society and use the past to explain them. Once Franklin is removed from his untouchable pedestal he becomes accessible, his rhetoric and essay become available for critical examination, not for the purposes of defaming him but to prove he was capable of great error. Franklin's error becomes magnified because of his greatness and his station as American founding father. His influence on American society, as well as the rest of the world, makes it imperative to criticize his ethnocentric beliefs not excuse them. If racial tension

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<sup>36</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s.v. "Winston Churchill," accessed November 15, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/117269/Sir-Winston-Churchill>.

and ethnocentric beliefs have always been prevalent in society they must be confronted and not simply ignored.

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## APPENDIX

### *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, etc*

*Benjamin Franklin*

#### SECTION – OBSESSED WITH EMPIRE:

*10. ...The increase of the Colonies a vast demand is growing for British Manufactures, a glorious market wholly in the power of Britain, in which foreigners cannot interfere, which will increase in a short time even beyond her power of supplying, tho her whole trade should be to her Colonies: Therefore Britain should not too much restrain Manufactures in her Colonies. A wise and good mother will not do it. To distress is to weaken, and weakening the children weakens the whole family.*

*13. ...the following things must diminish a Nation, viz. 1. The being conquered...this diminishing the subsistence of the natives discourages their marriages, and so gradually diminishes them, while the foreigners increase. 2. Loss of Territory...3. Loss of Trade...If the nation be deprived of any branch of trade, and no new employment is found for the people occupy'd in that branch, it will also be soon deprived of so many People. 4. Loss of Food...If another nation becomes Master of the Seas, and prevents the Fishery, the people will diminish in proportion as the loss of employ, and dearness of provision makes it more difficult*

*to subsist a family. 5. Bad Government and insecure property. People not only leave such a country, and settling abroad incorporate with other nations, lose their native Languages, and become foreigners; but the industry of those that remain being discourag'd, the quantity of subsistence in the country is lessen'd, and the support of a family becomes more difficult. So heavy taxes tend to diminish a People...*

*22. There is in short, no bound to the prolific nature of plants or animals, but what is made by their crowding and interfering with each others means of subsistence. Was the face of the earth vacant of other plants, it might be gradually sowed and overspread with one kind only;...and were it empty of other inhabitants, it might in a few Ages be replenish'd from one nation only; as for Instance, with Englishmen. Thus there are suppos'd to be now upwards of One Million English Souls in North America, (tho tis thought scarce 80,000 have been brought over sea) and yet perhaps there is not one the fewer in Britain, but rather many more, on Account of the employment the Colonies afford to manufacturers at home. This million doubling, suppose but once in twenty-five years, will in another century be more than the people of England, and the greatest Number of Englishmen will be on this side the water. What an accession of Power to the British empire by the Sea as well as Land! What increase of trade and navigation!...How important an affair then to Britain, is the present treaty for settling the bounds between her Colonies and the French, and how careful should she be to secure room enough, since on the room depends so much the increase of her people?*

## SECTION – FEARFUL OF IMMIGRATION:

*21. The importation of foreigners into a country that has as many inhabitants as the present employments and provisions for subsistence will bear, will be in the end no increase of people; unless the new comers have more industry and frugality than the natives, and then they will provide more Subsistence, and increase in the country; but they will gradually eat the natives out. Nor is it necessary to bring in foreigners to fill up any occasional vacancy in a country; for such vacancy...will soon be filled by natural generation. Who can now find the vacancy made in Sweden, France or other warlike nations, by the Plague of heroism forty Years ago; in France by the expulsion of the Protestants; in England by the settlement of her Colonies; or in Guinea, by one hundred years exportation of slaves, that has blacken'd half America? The thinness of inhabitants in Spain is owing to national pride and idleness, and other causes, rather than to the expulsion of the Moors, or to the making of new settlements.*

*23. ...And since detachments of English horn Britain sent to America, will have their places at home so soon supply d and increase so largely here; why should the Palatine Boors be suffered to swarm into our settlements, and by herding together establish their languages and manners to the exclusion of ours? Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a colony of Aliens, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them, and*

*will never adopt our language or customs, any more than they can acquire our complexion?*

SECTION – ANTI-SLAVERY or ANTI-AFRICAN:

*12. Tis an ill-grounded opinion that by the labour of slaves, America may possibly vie in cheapness of manufactures with Britain. The labour of slaves can never be so cheap here as the labour of working men is in Britain. Any one may compute it. Interest of money is in the Colonies from six to ten per Cent. Slaves one with another cost thirty sterling per head. Reckon then the interest of the first purchase of a slave, the Insurance or risque on his life, his cloathing and diet, expenses in his sickness and loss of time, loss by his neglect of business. (Neglect is natural to the man who is not to be benefited by his own care or diligence), Expence of a Driver to keep him at work, and his pilfering from time to time, almost every slave being by Nature a thief, and compare the whole amount with the wages of a manufacturer of iron or wool in England, you will see that labour is much cheaper there than it ever can be by negroes here. Why then will Americans purchase slaves? Because slaves may be kept as long as a man pleases, or has occasion for their labour; while hired men are continually leaving their master (often in the midst of his business,) and setting up for themselves.*

*13. 6. The introduction of slaves. The negroes brought into the English Sugar Islands have greatly diminish'd the whites there; the poor are by this means depriv'd of employment, while a few families acquire vast Estates, which they spend on foreign luxuries, and educating their children in the habit of those*

*luxuries, the same Income is needed for the support of one that might have maintain'd one hundred. The Whites who have slaves, not labouring, are enfeebled, and therefore not so generally prolific; the slaves being work'd too hard, and ill fed, their constitutions are broken, and the deaths among them are more than the births; so that a continual supply is needed from Africa. The Northern Colonies having few slaves increase in Whites. Slaves also pejorate the Families that use them; the white children become proud, disgusted with labour, and being educated in idleness, are rendered unfit to get a Living by industry.*

*24. Which leads me to add one remark: That the number of purely white people in the world is proportionably very small. All Africa is black or tawny. Asia chiefly tawny. America (exclusive of the new comers) wholly so. And in Europe, the Spaniards, Italians, French, Russians and Swedes are generally of what we call a swarthy complexion ; as are the Germans also, the Saxons only excepted, who with the English make the principal body of white people on the face of the earth. I could wish their numbers were increased. And while we are, as I may call it, scouring our planet, by clearing America of woods, and so making this side of our globe reflect a brighter light to the eyes of inhabitants in Mars or Venus, why should we in the sight of superior beings, darken its people? Why increase the sons of Africa, by planting them in America, where we have so fair an opportunity, by excluding all blacks and tawneys, of increasing the lovely white and red? But perhaps I am partial to the complexion of my Country, for such kind of partiality is natural to Mankind.*