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SPECIAL ISSUE

TIME

The Amazing Adventures of BEN FRANKLIN

PLUS: His Seven Great Virtues

BY WALTER ISAACSON

He was the most remarkable of the founding fathers: in his time, he was America's best scientist, inventor, diplomat, humorist and business strategist. In this second annual chapter in TIME's Making of America series, we bring you the adventures of BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, whose pioneering principles shaped the way Americans see the world today

Citizen Ben's 7 Great Virtues

By Walter Isaacson

FROM BENJAMIN FRANKLIN BY WALTER ISAACSON

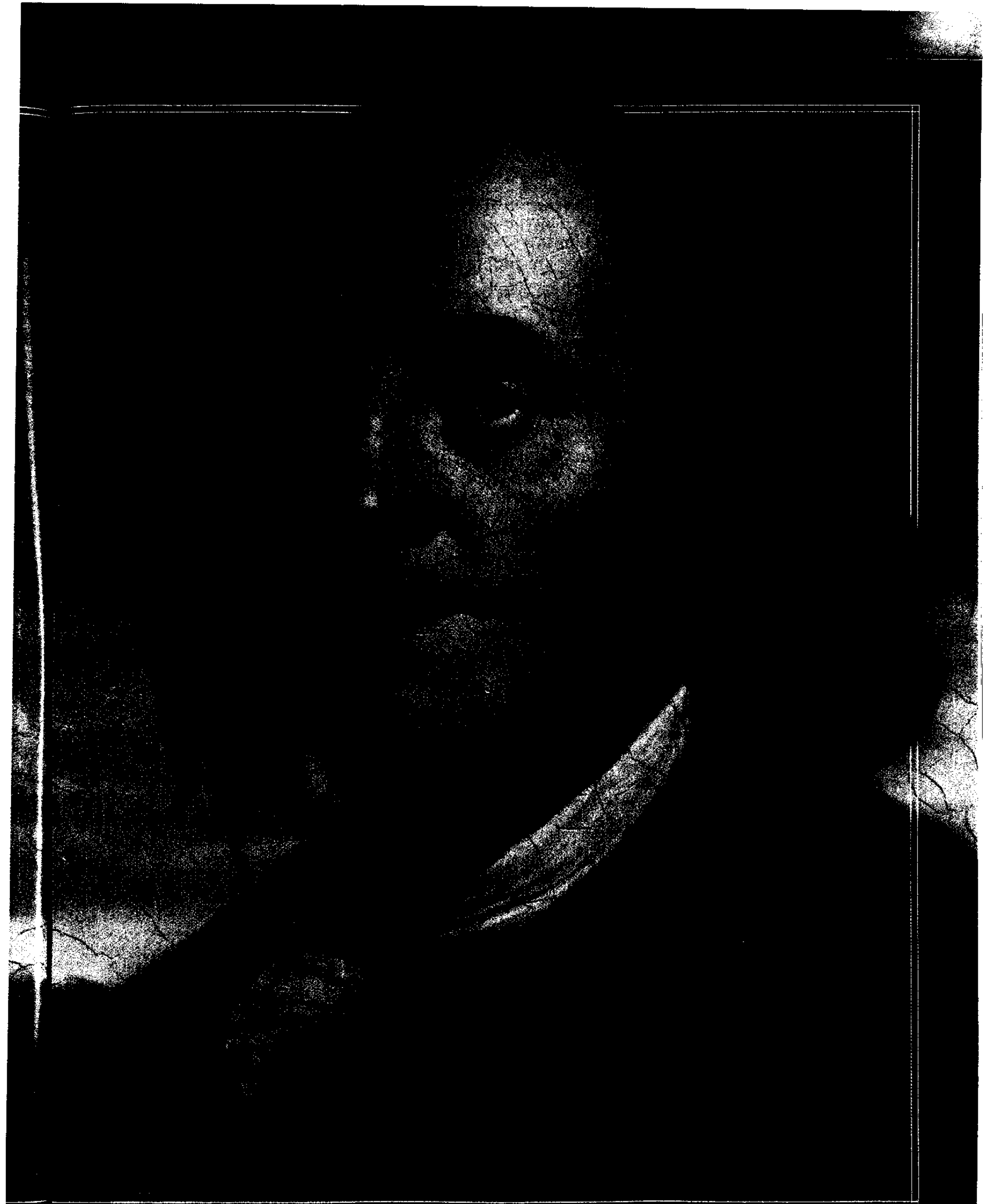

ILLUSTRATION FOR TIME BY ROB DAY

HIS ARRIVAL IN PHILADELPHIA IS ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS SCENES IN autobiographical literature: the bedraggled 17-year-old runaway, cheeky yet with a pretense of humility, straggling off the boat and buying three puffy rolls as he wanders up Market Street. But wait a minute. There's something more going on here. Peel back a layer and we can see him as a 65-year-old wry observer, sitting in an English country house, writing this scene, pretending it's part of a letter to his son, an illegitimate son who has become a Royal Governor with aristocratic pretensions and needs to be reminded of his humble roots.

A careful look at the manuscript peels back yet another layer. Inserted into the sentence about his pilgrim's progress up Market Street is a phrase, written in the margin, in which he notes that he passed by the house of his future wife Deborah Read and that "she, standing at the door, saw me and thought I made, as I certainly did, a most awkward ridiculous appearance." So here we have, in a brief paragraph, the multilayered character known so fondly to his author as Benjamin Franklin: as a young man, then seen through the eyes of his older self and then through the memories later recounted by his wife. It's all topped off with the old man's deft little affirmation—"as I certainly did"—in which his self-deprecation barely cloaks the pride he felt regarding his remarkable rise in the world.

Benjamin Franklin is the founding father who winks at us. George Washington's colleagues found it hard to imagine touching the austere general on the shoulder, and we would find it even more so today. Jefferson and Adams are just as intimidating. But Ben Franklin, that genial urban entrepreneur, seems made of flesh rather than of marble, addressable by nickname, and he turns to us from history's stage with eyes that twinkle from behind those newfangled spectacles. He speaks to us, through his letters and hoaxes and autobiography, not with orotund rhetoric but with a chattiness and clever irony that is very contemporary, sometimes unnervingly so. We see his reflection in our own time.

He was, during his 84-year life, America's best scientist, inventor, diplomat, writer and business strategist, and he was also one of its most practical, though not most profound, political thinkers. He proved by flying a kite that lightning was electricity, and he invented a rod to tame it. He devised bifocal glasses and clean-burning stoves, charts of the Gulf Stream and theories about the contagious nature of the common cold. He was a pioneer of do-it-yourself civic improvement, launching such schemes as a lending library, volunteer fire corps, insurance association and matching-grant fund raiser. He helped invent America's unique style of homespun humor and philosophical pragmatism. In foreign policy, he created an approach that wove together idealism with balance-of-power realism. In politics, he proposed seminal plans for uniting the colonies and creating a federal model for a national government. And he was the person most responsible, of all the Founders, for instilling in the new nation the virtue that is central to its role in the world struggle: that of tolerance, specifically religious tolerance.

Instinctively more comfortable with democracy than were his fellow Founders and devoid of the snobbery that later critics would feel toward his own shopkeeping values, he had faith in the wisdom of the common man and felt that a new nation would draw its strength from what he called "the middling people." Through his self-improvement tips for cultivating personal virtues and through his civic-improvement schemes for furthering the common good, he helped to create, and to celebrate, a new ruling class of ordinary citizens who learned to be tolerant of the varied beliefs and dogmas of their neighbors.

Franklin has a particular resonance in 21st century America.

A successful publisher and consummate networker with an inventive curiosity, he would have felt right at home in the information revolution. We can easily imagine having a beer with him after work, showing him how to use a Palm Pilot, sharing the business plan for a new venture or discussing Bill Clinton's foibles and George Bush's foreign policy. He would laugh at the latest joke about a priest and a rabbi or about a farmer's daughter. We would admire both his earnestness and his self-aware irony. And we would relate to the way he tried to balance, sometimes uneasily, a pursuit of reputation, wealth, earthly virtues and spiritual values.

Some who see the reflection of Franklin in the world today fret about a shallowness of soul and a spiritual complacency that seem to permeate a culture of materialism. They say that he teaches us how to live a practical and congenial life but not an exalted existence based on great spiritual passions. Others see the same reflection and admire the basic middle-class values and democratic sentiments that now seem under assault from élitists, radicals, religious fanatics and other bashers of modernity and the bourgeoisie. His admirers look upon Franklin as an exemplar of the personal character and civic virtue that are too often missing in today's world.

ILLUSTRATION FOR TIME BY VICTOR JUHASZ

Much of the admiration is warranted, and so too are some of the qualms. But the lessons from Franklin's life are more complex than those usually drawn by either his fans or his foes. Both sides too often confuse him with the striving pilgrim he portrayed in his autobiography. They mistake his genial moral maxims for the fundamental faiths that motivated his actions.

His morality was built on a sincere belief in leading a virtuous life, serving the country he loved and hoping to achieve salvation through good works. That led him to make the link between private virtue and civic virtue and to suspect, based on the meager evidence he could muster about God's will, that these earthly virtues were linked to heavenly ones as well. As he put it in the motto for the library he founded, "To pour forth benefits for the common good is divine."

It is useful for us to engage anew with Franklin, for in doing so we are grappling with a fundamental issue: How does one live a life that is useful, virtuous, worthy, moral and spiritually meaningful? For that matter, which of these attributes is most important? These are questions just as vital for a self-satisfied age as they were for a revolutionary one.

A methodical and wry man, Franklin loved making lists. He made lists of rules for his tradesmen's club, of synonyms for being drunk, of maxims for matrimonial happiness and of reasons to choose an older woman as a mistress. Most famously, as a young man, he made a list of personal virtues that he determined should define his life. Following his method, we can get a glimpse of his influence on the American character by looking at the seven defining virtues and traits that he, more than anyone, helped to imprint onto our national fabric.

1 AN AVERSION TO TYRANNY

At age 12, Franklin became an apprentice at the printshop of his older brother James, who tended to be quite tough as a master. "I fancy his harsh and tyrannical treatment of me," Franklin later speculated, had the effect of "impressing me with that aversion to arbitrary power that has stuck to me through my whole life." That was a bit unfair to poor James, whose newspaper in Boston was the first feisty and independent publication in the colonies and who taught young Benjamin how to be cheeky about establishment authority.

Franklin knew that his brother would never knowingly print his pieces. So one night he invented a pseudonym, disguised his handwriting and slipped an essay under the printing-house door. The cadre of his brother's friends who gathered the next day lauded the anonymous submission, and Franklin had the "exquisite pleasure" of listening as they decided to feature it on the front page of the next issue.

The literary character Franklin invented was a triumph of imagination. Silence Dogood was a slightly prudish widow from a rural area, created by a spunky unmarried Boston 16-year-old who had never spent a night outside of the city. He imbued Mrs. Dogood with that spirited aversion to tyranny that he would help to make part of the American character. "I am," she wrote, "a mortal enemy to arbitrary government and unlimited power. I am naturally very jealous for the rights and liberties of my country; and the least appearance of an encroachment on those invaluable privileges is apt to make my blood boil exceedingly." It was as good a description of the real Benjamin Franklin—and,

indeed, of a typical American—as is likely to be found anywhere.

Franklin used Mrs. Dogood to attack the theocratic rule of the Puritan establishment and the link between church and state that was then the very foundation of Massachusetts government. At one point she asks, "Whether a Commonwealth suffers more by hypocritical pretenders to religion or by the openly profane?" Unsurprisingly, she concludes the former is worse, and singles out the Governor, a minister who had become a politician, as an example. "The most dangerous hypocrite in a Commonwealth is one who leaves the gospel for the sake of the law. A man compounded of law and gospel is able to cheat a whole country with his religion and then destroy them under color of law."

Throughout his life, Franklin would be willing to compromise on many matters but not on his aversion to tyranny. After he became an editor on his own in Philadelphia, he led the fight against arbitrary taxes imposed from England. As early as 1755, when most of his fellow colonists were content to go along with such taxes, he wrote a scathing denunciation that concluded with what would eventually become an American rallying cry: "Those who would give up essential liberty to purchase a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety."

2 A FREE PRESS

The surest guard against tyranny and arbitrary power, Franklin came to believe, was free expression, the free flow of ideas and a free press. No tyrannical society can long exist, he felt, when it cannot control the flow of information and ideas.

After he had run away from his apprenticeship in Boston and begun publishing his own paper, the *Pennsylvania Gazette,* he expressed this credo in a famous editorial, "Apology for Printers," which remains one of the best defenses of a free press. The opinions people have, Franklin wrote, are "almost as various as their faces." The job of printers is to allow people to express these differing opinions. "There would be very little printed," he noted, if publishers produced only things that offended nobody. At stake was the virtue of free expression, and Franklin summed up the Enlightenment position: "Printers are educated in the belief that when men differ in opinion, both sides ought equally to have the advantage of being heard by the public; and that when Truth and Error have fair play, the former is always an overmatch for the latter."

"It is unreasonable to imagine that printers approve of everything they print," he went on to argue. "It is likewise unreasonable what some assert, That printers ought not to print anything but what they approve; since . . . an end would thereby be put to free writing, and the world would afterwards have nothing to read but what happened to be the opinions of printers."

It was not in Franklin's nature, however, to be dogmatic or extreme about any principle; he generally gravitated toward a sensible balance. The rights of printers, he realized, were balanced by their duty to be responsible. Thus, even though printers should be free to publish offensive opinions, they should exercise discretion. "I myself have constantly refused to print anything that might countenance vice or promote immorality, though . . . I might have got much money. I have also always refused to print such things as might do real injury to any person."

One such example involved a customer who asked the young printer to publish a piece in the *Gazette* that Franklin found "scurrilous and defamatory." In his effort to decide whether he should take the customer's money even though it violated his principles, Franklin subjected himself to the following test:

"To determine whether I should publish it or not, I went home in the evening, purchased a twopenny loaf at the baker's, and with the water from the pump made my supper; I then wrapped myself up in my great-coat, and laid down on the floor and slept till morning, when, on another loaf and a mug of water, I made my breakfast. From this regimen I feel no inconvenience whatever. Finding I can live in this manner, I have formed a determination never to prostitute my press to the purposes of corruption and abuse of this kind."

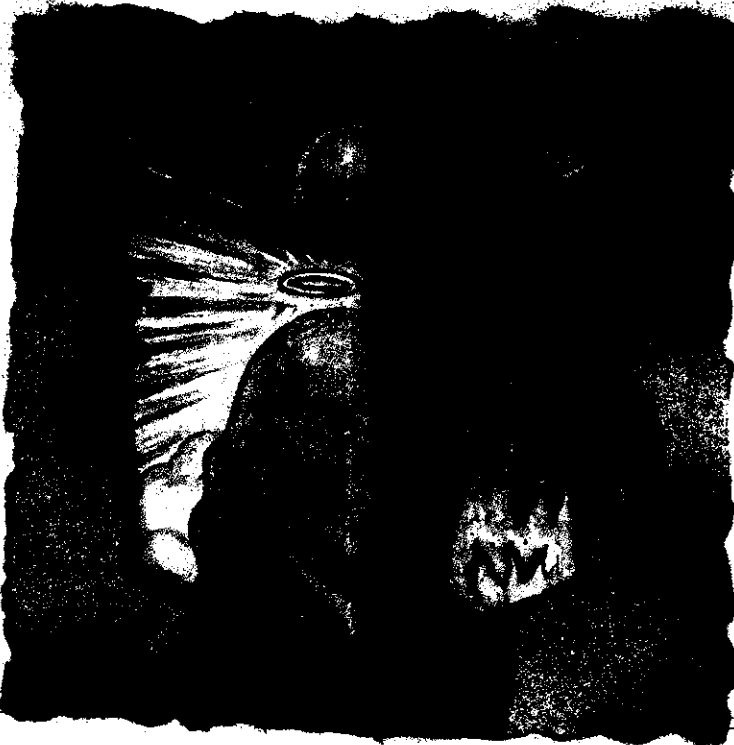

ILLUSTRATION FOR TIME BY PETER KUPER

It is important to remember, when people complain about the irresponsibility of the press today, that back then it was much more raucous. In the Pennsylvania Assembly election of 1764, for example, all sorts of vicious articles and pamphlets were printed attacking Franklin, who was a candidate.

One such piece, titled "What is Sauce for a Goose is also Sauce for a Gander," raked up every possible allegation against Franklin—including that he had bought his honorary degrees, sought a royal governorship and stolen his electricity experiments from others, all of which were false. It also alleged that his son William was the bastard child of a "kitchen wench," which had some truth to it. Another broadside painted him as an excitable lecher:

Franklin, though plagued with fumbling age,
Needs nothing to excite him,
But is too ready to engage,
When younger arms invite him.

Modern election campaigns are often criticized for being negative, and today's press is slammed for being scurrilous. But the most brutal of modern attack ads pale in comparison with the barrage of pamphlets in the 1764 Assembly election. Pennsylvania survived them, as did Franklin, who never considered suing. And

ILLUSTRATION FOR TIME BY DREW FRIEDMAN

America's democracy learned that it could thrive in an atmosphere of unrestrained, even intemperate, free expression. Indeed, its democracy was built on a foundation of unbridled free speech. In the centuries since then, the nations that have thrived, economically and politically, have been those, like America, that are most comfortable with the cacophony, and even occasional messiness, that come from robust discourse.

3 HUMOR

By creating Silence Dogood, Franklin invented what became the quintessential genre of American folksy humor: the wry and self-deprecating homespun character whose feigned innocence and naiveté are disarming but whose wicked little insights poke through the pretensions of the élite and the follies of everyday life. "I am courteous and affable, good humored (unless I am first provoked) and handsome, and sometimes witty," she declares, flicking in the word "sometimes" with a dexterity uncommon in a 16-year-old. "I have likewise a natural inclination to observe and reprove the faults of others, at which I have an excellent faculty." It was a style adopted by such descendants as Mark Twain and Will Rogers.

Among the things Mrs. Dogood dared to make fun of was the college Franklin had planned to attend until his father decided it wasn't worth the cost. She recounts falling asleep under an apple tree while considering whether to send her son to Harvard. As she journeys in her dream toward this temple of learning, she notices that the gate is guarded by "two sturdy porters named Riches and Poverty," and only those who met the approval of the former could get in. Most of the students are content to dally with the figures called Idleness and Ignorance. "They learn little more than how to carry themselves handsomely, and enter a room genteelly (which might as well be acquired at a dancing school), and from thence they return, after abundance of trouble and charge, as great blockheads as ever, only more proud and self-conceited."

Franklin created a similar character in Poor Richard Saunders, the pseudonym he used when he began to publish an annual almanac. The beauty of inventing a fictional author was that he could poke fun at himself by admitting, only half in jest, that money was his main motivation. "I might in this place attempt to gain thy favor by declaring that I write almanacks with no other view than that of the public good; but in this I should not be sincere," Poor Richard began his first preface. "The plain truth of the matter is, I am excessive poor, and my wife . . . has threatened more than once to burn all my books and Rattling-Traps (as she calls my instruments) if I do not make some profitable use of them for the good of my family."

In his first edition, Poor Richard predicts "the inexorable death" of his rival almanac writer Titan Leeds, giving the exact day and hour. It was a prank borrowed from Jonathan Swift. Leeds fell into the trap, and in his own almanac for 1734 (written after the date of his predicted death) called Franklin a "conceited scribbler" who had "manifested himself a fool and a liar." Poor Richard responded that all of these defamatory protestations indicated that the real Leeds must indeed be dead and his new almanac a hoax by someone else. "Mr. Leeds was too well bred to use any man so indecently and scurrilously, and moreover his esteem and affection for me was extraordinary."

Poor Richard's delightful annual prefaces never, alas, became as famous as the maxims and sayings that Franklin scattered in the margins of his almanacs each year, such as the most famous of all: "Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise." Franklin would have been amused by how faithfully these were praised by subsequent advocates of self-improvement, and he would likely have been even more amused by the humorists who later poked fun at them. In a sketch with the ironic title "The Late Benjamin Franklin," Mark Twain gibed, "As if it were any object to a boy to be healthy and wealthy and wise on such terms. The sorrow that that maxim has cost me, through my parents experimenting on me with it, tongue cannot tell. The legitimate result is my present state of general debility, indigence, and mental aberration. My parents used to have me up before nine o'clock in the morning sometimes when I was a boy. If they had let me take my natural rest where would I have been now? Keeping store, no doubt, and respected by all." Groucho Marx, in his memoirs, also picked up

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the theme. "'Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man you-know-what.' This is a lot of hoopla. Most wealthy people I know like to sleep late, and will fire the help if they are disturbed before three in the afternoon."

Franklin's favorite device for poking fun at social mores and political outrages was the hoax. Unlike the frauds perpetrated by Stephen Glass and Jayson Blair, Franklin's satires were meant to be playful and to make a moral point, although they did occasionally deceive. "The Speech of Polly Baker," for example, purports to recount the speech of a young woman on trial for having a fifth illegitimate child. Franklin, who had fathered an illegitimate child but taken responsibility for him, was particularly scathing about the double standard that subjects her, but not the men who had sex with her, to humiliation. As Polly says, "I readily consented to the only proposal of marriage that ever was made me, which was when I was a virgin; but too easily confiding in the person's sincerity that made it, I unhappily lost my own honor by trusting his; for he got me with child, and then forsook me. That very person you all know; he is now become a magistrate of this county." By doing her duty to bring children into the world, despite the fact that no one would marry her, and being willing to do so despite the public disgrace she argues that she deserved, "in my humble opinion, instead of a whipping, to have a statue erected to my memory." The court, Franklin wrote, was so moved by the speech that she was acquitted, and one of the judges married her the next day. Only years later, after the account was reprinted in both America and England, did Franklin reveal it was a hoax. As Franklin knew, humor was the gentlest yet most powerful way to make political points, and America would always be strongest when it was confident enough, and self-aware enough, to laugh at itself.

Or gig its tormentors. When he went to England to lobby for the American cause, he made his point with another widely reprinted hoax, "An Edict by the King of Prussia." In it the King declared that the Germans had colonized Britain years ago, protected it during wars and had now decided they had the right to levy taxes and restrict British trade. The edict added that the felons in German jails "shall be emptied out" and sent to England "for the better peopling of that country." Lest anyone be so thick as to miss the point, it concluded by noting that all of these measures should be considered "just and reasonable" in England because they were "copied" from the rules imposed by the British Parliament on the American colonies.

When his "Edict" appeared, Franklin had the pleasure of being a guest at the country estate of a friend. Another guest "came running in to us out of breath" with the morning papers, Franklin recounted in a letter to his son. "Here's the King of Prussia claiming a right to this kingdom!" Franklin feigned innocence as the story was read aloud.

"Damn his impudence," one of those present proclaimed.

But as the reading neared its end, another guest began to sense the hoax. "I'll be hanged if this is not some of your American jokes upon us," he said to Franklin. The reading, Franklin noted, "ended with abundance of laughing and a general verdict that it was a fair hit."

4 HUMILITY

When Franklin made his list of personal virtues he was intent on acquiring, he very proudly showed it around to his friends, one of whom, a Quaker, pointed out that he had left one off. Franklin was often guilty of "pride," the friend said, citing many examples. So Franklin added "humility" to his list.

He never quite perfected the virtue. "There is perhaps no one of our natural passions so hard to subdue as pride; disguise it, struggle with it, beat it down, stifle it, mortify it as much as one pleases, it is still alive and will every now and then peep out and show itself." This battle against pride would challenge him—and amuse him—for the rest of his life. "Even if I could conceive that I had completely overcome it, I would probably be proud of my humility."

But as he cheerily admitted, he learned how to fake the virtue. "I cannot boast of much success in acquiring the *reality* of this virtue, but I had a good deal with regard to the *appearance* of it," he wrote. In showing off his feigned humility, Franklin was America's first great imagemaker. Even after he became successful, he made a display of personally carting the rolls of paper he bought in a wheelbarrow down the street to his shop rather than having a hired hand do it.

When he formed his discussion club of fellow tradesmen, known as the Junto, Franklin's first rule was to display humility in conversation. America was to become, as Tocqueville would later point out, a nation of joiners and club formers, and Franklin was the first and foremost of the breed. And although civil and political discourse has been coarsened in recent years, there is still a tradition of Rotary Clubs and high-minded councils dedicated to discussing the common good without resorting to partisan fervor. Franklin decreed that Junto members should put forth their ideas through suggestions and questions, using (or at least feigning) naive curiosity to avoid contradicting people in a manner that could give offense. "All expressions of positiveness in opinion or of direct contradiction were," he recalled, "prohibited under small pecuniary penalties." It was a style he would urge upon the Constitutional Convention 60 years later, and he would wryly say of disputing: "Persons of good sense, I have since observed, seldom fall into it, except lawyers, university men and men of all sorts that have been bred at Edinburgh."

ILLUSTRATION FOR TIME BY BARRY BLITT

In a newspaper piece called "On Conversation," which he wrote shortly after forming the Junto, Franklin stressed the importance of deferring—or at least giving the appearance of deferring—to others. Otherwise, even the smartest comments would "occasion envy and disgust." His secret for how to win friends and influence people read like an early Dale Carnegie course: "Would you win the hearts of others, you must not seem to vie with them, but to admire them. Give them every opportunity of displaying their own qualifications, and when you have indulged their vanity, they will praise you in turn and prefer you above others ... Such is the vanity of mankind that minding what others say is a much surer way of pleasing them than talking well ourselves."

When he decided to use his Junto to launch the first subscription lending library in America, he realized that a show of humility would make it easier to raise funds. If he claimed the idea as his own, it would provoke jealousy. So he put himself, he said, "as much as I could out of sight" and gave credit for the idea to his friends. This method worked so well that "I ever after practiced it on such occasions." People will eventually give you the credit, he noted, if you don't try to claim it at the time. "The present little sacrifice of your vanity will afterwards be amply repaid."

President Bush, during his 2000 campaign, spoke of the need for America to have a little more humility in its dealings with the world. Sept. 11 changed that, and America felt the need to become more assertive. Nevertheless, Franklin would likely raise, in a gentle questioning way, whether it might make sense now to display just a bit of humility, or at least the appearance of it on occasion.

5 IDEALISM IN FOREIGN POLICY

When he went to Paris as an envoy during the Revolution, Franklin proved himself a master of the diplomatic doctrine of realism by playing an adroit balance-of-power game between France, Spain, the Netherlands and later Britain. In a memo he wrote to the wily French Foreign Minister Vergennes, whose realist outlook was summarized by his maxim that "the influence of every power is measured by the opinion one has of its intrinsic force," Franklin emphasized the cold calculation of national interests that he knew the minister would appreciate. If France and her ally Spain joined the American cause, Britain would lose her colonies and the "commerce that has rendered her so opulent," and America would guarantee that its allies could keep any Caribbean islands Britain lost. However, if France balked, then America might be "reduced to the necessity of ending the war by an accommodation" with Britain.

But Franklin realized that appealing to a calculus of power was only part of the equation. So even as he catered to France's calculation of her national interest, he also played the rousing chords of America's exceptionalism, the sense that America stands apart from the rest of the world because of its virtuous nature and ideals. Both the hard power that came from its strategic might and the soft power that flowed from the appeal of its liberty and democracy would, he realized, be equally important in assuring its influence.

On the private press he built at his home near Paris, Franklin printed the inspiring documents coming out of America—the Declaration, the constitution he had written for Pennsylvania—as a way of winning hearts and minds in France and elsewhere. In a letter to Congress explaining his tactics, he gave a classic formulation of the lure of America's ideals: "Tyranny is so generally established in the rest of the world that the prospect of an asylum in America for those who love liberty gives general joy, and our cause is esteemed the cause of all mankind." He ended by echoing the shining "city upon a hill" metaphor used by the great American exceptionalists from John Winthrop to Ronald Reagan. "We are fighting for the dignity and happiness of human nature," he proclaimed. "Glorious it is for the Americans to be called by Providence to this post of honor."

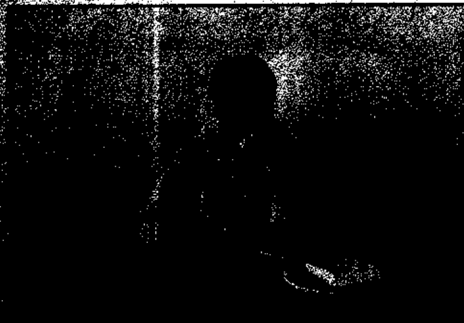
Ever the great imagemaker, he cast himself to the French public as a symbol both of the virtuous frontier freedom romanticized by Rousseau and of the Enlightenment's reasoned wisdom championed by Voltaire. In a clever and deliberate manner, leavened by the wit and joie de vivre the French so adored, he portrayed the American cause, through his own personification of it, as that of the natural state fighting the corrupted one. He made a point of eschewing powdered wigs and formal dress, instead wearing a fur cap he had picked up years earlier on a trip to Canada. The cap, like that worn by Rousseau, served as his badge of homespun purity and virtue, just as his ever present spectacles became an emblem of wisdom. It helped him play the part that Paris imagined for him: that of the noble frontier philosopher and simple backwoods sage—even though he had lived most of his life in Philadelphia and London.

It worked. Medallions of his fur-capped head were struck, engravings were hung in homes, and his likeness graced snuffboxes and signet rings. The fad went so far as to mildly annoy, though still amuse, King Louis XVI himself. He gave a lady of his court, who had bored him often with her praise of Franklin, a Sèvres porcelain chamber pot with Franklin's cameo embossed inside. Neither the King nor his ministers were instinctive champions of America's desire, which they correctly feared might prove contagious, to cast off hereditary monarchs. But the combination of Franklin's realist and ideal-

ILLUSTRATION FOR TIME BY BRIAN CRONIN

TO ENSURE SOCIAL SECU[illegible]

Find a telephone.



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ist appeals eventually brought France into the war on America's side, which proved critical to its victory in the Revolution. It also showed that even France, at least back then, could be charmed.

When Franklin visited Versailles to receive the King's formal assent to the treaties, he declined to wear the ceremonial sword and regalia that were considered de rigueur at court. Seeing no reason to abandon the simple style that had served him well, he dressed in a plain brown suit with his famous spectacles as his only adornment. His one fashion concession was that he did not wear his fur cap and instead carried a hat of pure white under his arm. "Is that white hat a symbol of liberty?" asked an aristocratic woman at whose salon Franklin had worn his fur cap. Whether or not he meant it to be, white hats for men were soon in vogue in Paris.

After the ceremony, Franklin had the honor, if not pleasure, of being allowed to stand next to the Queen, the famously haughty Marie-Antoinette, as she played at the gambling tables. Alone among the throng at Versailles, she seemed to have little appreciation for the man who, she had been told, had once been "a printer's foreman." As she noted dismissively, a man of that background would never have been able to rise so high in Europe. Franklin would have proudly agreed.

Better than most diplomats in the nation's history, Franklin understood that America's strength in world affairs would come from a mix that included idealism as well as realism. When woven together, as they would be in policies ranging from the Monroe Doctrine to the Marshall Plan, they were the warp and woof of a sturdy foreign policy. And when countries such as France felt that the soft suasion of idealism was lacking, as has recently been the case, it proved harder to attract them to a cause. "America's great historical moments," historian Bernard Bailyn has noted, "have occurred when realism and idealism have been combined, and no one knew this better than Franklin."

6 COMPROMISE

When he returned from France to become the sage at the Constitutional Convention, Franklin was not America's most profound political theorist. But he did embody one crucial virtue that was key to the gathering's success: a belief in the nobility of compromise. Throughout his life, one of his mantras had been, "Both sides must part with some of their demands." He used this phrase many times, but never more notably than when the Constitutional Convention became deadlocked on the issue of whether the new Congress should be proportioned by population or have equal votes for each state.

Franklin had been among the first to develop, 30 years earlier, the concept of a federal compromise, where both the national government and the state governments could have sovereign powers. And as the Constitutional Convention was about to break down in the hot Philadelphia summer of 1787, he set in motion the process that would break the impasse and, to a large extent, shape the new nation.

First Franklin succinctly stated the problem: "The diversity of opinions turns on two points. If a proportional representation takes place, the small States contend that their liberties will be in danger. If an equality of votes is to be put in its place, the large States say their money will be in danger."

Then he gently emphasized, in a homespun analogy that drew on his affection for craftsmen and construction, the im-

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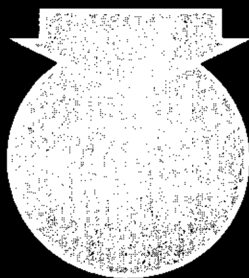

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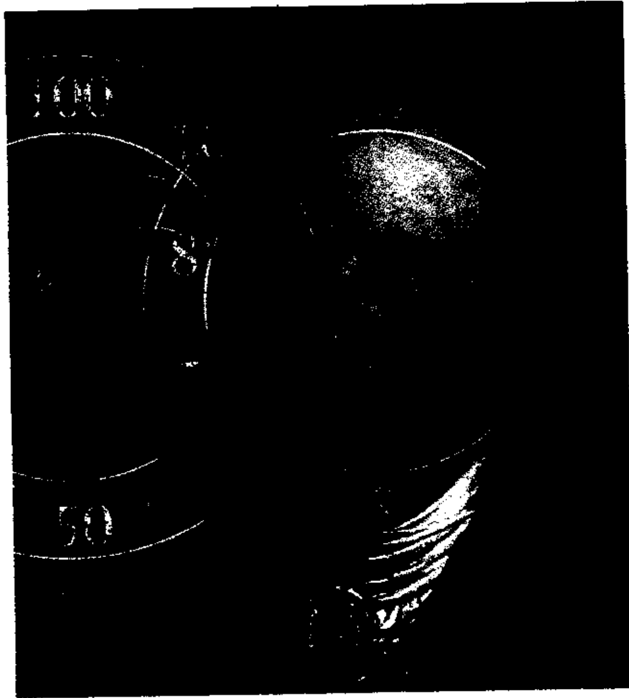
portance of compromise: "When a broad table is to be made, and the edges of planks do not fit, the artist takes a little from both, and makes a good joint. In like manner here, both sides must part with some of their demands."

Finally, he incorporated some compromises suggested by others into a specific motion. Representatives to the lower House would be popularly elected and apportioned by population, but in the Senate "the Legislatures of the several States shall choose and send an equal number of Delegates."

For Franklin, who personally believed in proportional representation, compromise was not only a practical approach but a moral one. Tolerance, humility and a respect for others required it. The near perfect document that arose from his compromise could not have been approved if the hall had contained only crusaders who stood on unwavering principle. Compromisers may not make great heroes, but they do make great democracies.



7 TOLERANCE

The great struggles of the 20th century were against fascism and then communism. As was made clear on Sept. 11, the great struggle of the 21st century will be between the forces of fanatic fundamentalism and those of tolerance. It is important to remember that America was not born with the virtue of religious tolerance, but had to acquire it. One of the myths is that the first settlers were advocates of religious freedom. In fact, the Puritans were very intolerant, not only of witches but also of any deviation from the tribal orthodoxy. The most arcane antinomian dispute ended up forcing people to move and found a new state like Rhode Island.

Among those who ran away from the intolerant orthodoxy of Boston was Franklin. He ended up in Philadelphia, a place unlike much of the world. There were Lutherans and Moravians and Quakers and even Jews, as well as Calvinists, living side by side in what became known as the City of Brotherly Love. Franklin helped formulate the creed that they would all be better off, personally and economically, if they embraced an attitude of tolerance.

Franklin believed in God and in the social usefulness of religion, but he did not subscribe to any particular sectarian doctrine. This led him to help raise money to build a new hall in Philadelphia that was, as he put it, "expressly for the use of any preacher of any religious persuasion who might desire to say something." He added, "Even if the Mufti of Constantinople were to send a missionary to preach Mohammedanism to us, he would find a pulpit at his service."

He also wrote parodies that poked fun at Puritan intolerance. In one of them, called "A Witch Trial at Mount Holly," a couple of accused witches were subjected to two tests: weighed on a scale against the Bible, and tossed in the river with hands and feet bound to see if they floated. They agreed to submit—on the condition that two of the accusers take the same test. With colorful details of all the pomp, Franklin described the process. The accused and accusers all succeed in outweighing the Bible. But both of the accused and one of the accusers fail to sink in the river, thus indicating that they are witches. The more intelligent spectators conclude that most people naturally float. The others are not so sure and resolve to wait until summer when the experiment could be tried with the subjects unclothed.

Franklin's freethinking unnerved his family. When his parents wrote of their concern over his "erroneous opinions," Franklin replied with a letter that spelled out a religious philosophy based on tolerance that would last his life. It would be vain for any person to insist that "all the doctrines he holds are true and all he rejects are false." The same could be said of the opinions of different religions. He had little use for the doctrinal distinctions his mother worried about. "I think vital religion has always suffered when orthodoxy is more regarded than virtue. And the Scripture assures me that at the last day we shall not be examined by what we *thought*, but what we *did* ... that we did good to our fellow creatures. See *Matthew* 26." (His parents, a bit more versed in the Scripture, probably caught that he meant *Matthew* 25.)

By the end of his life, he had contributed to the building funds of each and every sect in Philadelphia, including £5 for the Congregation Mikveh Israel for its new synagogue in April 1788. During the July 4 celebrations that year, he was too sick to leave his bed, but the parade marched under his window. For the first time, as per arrangements that Franklin had overseen, "the clergy of different Christian denominations, with the rabbi of the Jews, walked arm in arm."

And when he was carried to his grave two years later, his casket was accompanied by all the clergymen of the city, every one of them, of every faith.

In a world that was then, as alas it still is now, bloodied by those who seek to impose theocracies, Franklin helped to create a new type of nation that could draw strength from its religious pluralism. This comfort with the concept of tolerance—which was based on an aversion to tyranny, a fealty to free expression, a willingness to compromise, the morality of respecting other individuals and even a bit of humor and humility—is what most distinguishes America and its like-minded allies in the messy struggles that confront a new century. ■

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