

No pain, no gain



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One of Benjamin Franklin's most memorable aphorisms in *The Way to Wealth* is the phrase "There are no gains, without pains" (2). This phrase has entered the American lexicon and become an established aphorism that represents the American work ethic and the larger ethos of the United States' culture and economy. Immediately before this aphorism, Franklin, via *Poor Richard*, offers the suggestion that "He that lives upon hope will die fasting" (2). Here, Franklin points out that simply hoping for vitality in one's life is not sufficient. In order to achieve success, one must be determined to accomplish the task in front of them and rely on their own merit instead of that of God's or the state's. Here, Franklin advocates for a sort of individual self-determination that will become the bedrock of American thought for years to come.

Franklin's larger argument is for self-determination and independence. Franklin was vehemently opposed to continued British rule from the opposite side of the Atlantic. He was of the opinion that Americans were ready to assert rule over themselves. Immediately after this famous aphorism, *Poor Richard*, via Franklin, states that, "Help hands, for I have no lands, or if I have, they are smartly taxed" (2). Franklin strongly asserts that one of the most important aspects of self-governance is taxation with representation. The British imposition of taxes without representation at Parliament at Westminster was a paramount issue for Franklin. Indeed, Franklin asserts that the American people have the workmanship and ability to construct their own state, but they simply do not have even a semblance of authority over their own lands.

Franklin is offering this advice in order to convince the American people that they need not be dependent on the British state. He writes that, " He that hath a trade hath an estate, and that hath a calling hath an office of profit and honor" (2). The British governed largely on a system based on hereditary right over land that seemed arbitrary to many of the freethinking Americans. In Franklin's terms, the men who owned land necessarily had a stake in the long-term vitality and daily operations of the state. Therefore, there needed to be more representation in government than the established British system allowed. However, Franklin asserted that it was industriousness and self-determination, not simply the ownership of land, that necessitated American autonomy. Unlike the British system, it was not sufficient to simply inherit land, one had to earn it through merit and by example across one's own life.

Franklin's mission is not entirely secular. While the focus of Poor Richard's aphorism is self-determination, without relying on other external forces, there is still space for the inclusion, albeit a brief mention, of God. Poor Richard states that " God helps them that help themselves" (!). This phrase can be interpreted in a few different ways. On one hand, Franklin could be spurning God by using irony to convey the idea that God really has little engagement with the financial ventures of everyday people. However, on the other hand, Franklin could also be inferring that self-determined entrepreneurs manifest the American spirit of self-reliance and independence that the Puritans first established in their covenant with God in the New World. In either case, Poor Richard advises the everyday man to

rely on his own abilities and actions instead of hoping for God's blessing and intervention.

Franklin also ties his notion of self-reliance to the vitality of both the individual body and the government. In some ways, maintenance of personal health and of the government and society at large are comparable. Franklin writes that, "It would be thought a hard government that should tax its people one tenth part of the time, to be employed in its service. But idleness taxes many of us much more" (1). The perception of unfair taxation greatly influenced the American colonies to separate from the British and seek independence. Taxation without representation and unfair governance was a major qualm for revolutionaries. However, Franklin argues that sloth is perhaps worse. He states that, "Sloth, by bringing on diseases, absolutely shortens life" (1). While taxation can potentially have a negative impact on the function of government and society, sloth necessarily reduces personal health and prevents the individual from achievement. In this sense, the limitations of sloth reflect the stringency of unfair taxation in the eyes of Franklin.

Franklin highlights the importance of time to self-determination and industry. He advises that if, "Dost thou love life, then do not squander time, for that's the stuff life is made of" (1). Franklin's aphorism here is that time is the essence of life. In order to validate one's life one must make use of his time wisely and prudently. One must work hard in order to substantiate his existence. As Poor Richard, Franklin states that, "If time be of all things the most precious, wasting time must be, as Poor Richard says, the greatest prodigality" (1). Franklin is highly critical of sloth in addition to his praises of <https://assignbuster.com/no-pain-no-gain-2/>

hard work through the ‘no pains, no gains’ mentality. Franklin sees sloth and industry as opposites. He writes that, “Sloth makes all things difficult, but industry all easy” (2). Franklin’s maxim is that everyday people can accomplish great things when they work hard and put their skills to use. This principle governed the American Revolution and Franklin’s conviction in constructing a new democratic society.

The establishment of an American work ethic is a priority for Franklin. One must develop a new society piecemeal. In order to create a new nation truly independent from the financial whims of overseas powerbrokers, domestic industry must be successfully established. Franklin advises, “Drive thy business, let not that drive thee” (2). While temporal and fiscal concerns are always important and should be taken into account, the effective entrepreneur takes business matters into his own hands. These principles should be adhered to throughout many aspects of one’s life. For example, Poor Richard proclaims that, “Early to bed, and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise” (2). Personal health, prosperity, and intellectual achievement are all tied together for Franklin. Like the establishment of a new democratic state, the individual man must achieve all three virtues.

Franklin is hopeful about the American vision. He states that, “At the working man’s house hunger looks in, but dares not enter” (2). Franklin is offering advice to the average American who is struggling against the British imperial power. Here, Franklin is offering a bright and positive analysis of the struggles of everyday life in the colonies, and he suggests that the industry and spirit of the American people will eventually triumph over British hegemony. In essence, Franklin is arguing that sacrifices will have to be

made in order to accomplish the goal of establishing a strong state. In his aphorism of, “ There are no gains, without pains” (2), Franklin asserts that the people of America must suffer first in order to secure the necessary industry and resources to sustain success. There is no irony in this phrase, and Franklin is straightforward in his analysis of this issue. This is similar to the rest of the text in terms of its relevance to the opposition cause. It is good advice, as it advocates for the self-determination of every man. Personally, Franklin persuaded me by this aphorism. The rhythmic quality to the aphorism adds a strong tone to the phrase that makes it especially appealing. The context is also well established within a number of other Poor Richard aphorisms. The overall thesis, that American businessmen must forward their own agenda, reverberates through the modern era.