

Benjamin franklin: the enlightenment figure assignment

[History](#)



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Benevolent Leader for a Virtuous Nation There were many people that helped contribute to the Enlightenment, but the most prominent American leader was a well-know political figure named Benjamin Franklin. The Enlightenment, also called the Age of Reason, was period of time when people tried to justify life in terms of scientific theory and rationalism. The Enlightenment was responsible for inspiring revived interests in education, science, and literature" (" HistoryKing. com"). It also emphasized progression away from traditional customs and foundations that were supposedly restraining modern civilization. These ideas ran throughout the eighteenth century and spurred debates over religious order. During the Enlightenment Benjamin Franklin encouraged changes in the nature of human thought that, consequently, questioned the validity of popular institutions. Philosophy, the inquiry of wisdom, encouraged new ideas based on the principle of natural law.

Franklin, an established philosopher, inventor, printer, author, scientist, and visionary, was well-known for his contributions during the Age of Reason. In his autobiography Franklin detailed the significant strides he made to further his education and writing abilities, because he believed that " self-education, self-improvement, self-discipline were the constituent parts of the self-made man" (Masur, 16). Franklin's transcendental calling led him to become a " consummate Enlightenment figure" through his constant pursuit to

Geiss 2 improve mankind through revolutionary social understandings, religious establishment, political development, and new scientific inventions.

Franklin's reputation was well-known in the colonies, especially in <https://assignbuster.com/benjamin-franklin-the-enlightenment-figure-assignment/>

Philadelphia, because of the social contributions he made for the betterment of society. He communicated his ideas from his Printing House via newspapers, to which he had many subscribers. Franklin contributed to the Enlightenment by spreading his ideas in society through his creation of the Junto, a private group in which the members shared differing viewpoints on a range of topics.

This group discussed “ any Point of Morals, Politics or Natural Philosophy, to be discuss’d by the Company” (Franklin, 75). Some of the most notable contributions of the Junto include “ proposals for a circulating library, a fire company and fire insurance company, and better cleaning and illuminating the streets” (Masur, 6). The “ Libraries...made the common Tradesmen & Farmers as intelligent as most Gentlemen from other Countries” (Franklin, 85). The social contributor was aware of his humble upbringing and the success he achieved through education.

Franklin ascended to the highest social status and, because of his success, he was compelled to offer others, like himself, the opportunity he had been given. As an effort to support the opportunities of the poor, Franklin came up with the idea to create a free school for children who could not afford the price of most public schools. This institution would have resisted the predestination of poor youth towards future financial dependence, thus creating more social equality. He often thought of the well-being of others and introduced his institutions in support of that goal.

Franklin, having been raised in a family with a limited financial status, was aware that education was the primary benefactor contributing Geiss 3 to his

success. Without education, Franklin may have been a labor worker, confined to a lifestyle of the lower or middle class. His newspaper, The Pennsylvania Gazette, “[stimulated] new interests in education, science and literature, and as a consequence many new colleges were founded” (“HistoryKing. com”). He, along with the help of the Junto, introduced the plans for establishing the first American business institution for higher education; The University of Pennsylvania.

The visionary outlined his plans for the institution in a reading titled, Proposals relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania. As a means of resolving public health issues and providing care for the physically or mentally ill. , Franklin constructed the idea for the first map for a public hospital in Pennsylvania. The final bit of philanthropic advice given from Franklin outlines a list of the 13 virtues necessary to live a virtuous life. Franklin mastered all of the virtues on his list and felt that others could benefit from his system “ not by] attempting the whole at once, but [by fixing] one of them at a time” (Franklin, 96). As a philanthropist, Franklin continuously sought after ways to improve his community. With the help of his Junto, Franklin succeeded in leading new undertakings of social advancement. “ He expressed his hope to produce something for the common Benefit of Mankind” (Franklin, 6). Benjamin Franklin notably contributed to the period of religious revival known as the Great Awakening. Being a printer, he was well acquainted with the texts of different religious sects, because much of the material printed at the time were Bible texts.

Franklin represents a quintessential ideal of how to achieve success through education. His pursuit of perfection was driven by the values instilled in him by his Puritan father as Geiss 4 a child. Synonymous with the beliefs of the Puritan faith he acquired during his childhood, Franklin embodied the protestant work ethic through his pursuit of economic, political, and social success. Later, after Franklin left his father's care and was open to influences of the world he was converted to a new religion; Deism.

Through his fame, Franklin contributed to " the growth of Enlightenment rationalism" (Foner, 152) by supporting the newly established religion of Deism. Deism changed how people in the New and Old world viewed divine authority by challenging traditional religious beliefs. Franklin was attracted to this religion, because he found the arguments much stronger than those of other religions. In his autobiography he states, " And from the attributes of God, his infinite wisdom, goodness & power concluded that nothing could possibly be wrong in the world" (Franklin, 74). This quote unearths the religious leader's support for his beliefs.

He expresses that if God is perfect and everything God makes is perfect, then how could something that is scientifically proven in nature be imperfect. Thus, from this standpoint, life must be governed by natural law. Franklin, because he " formed religious opinions based on reason, independent of authority or dogma" was known as a " Freethinker" (Franklin, 74). In a sense he was a pioneer of his own religion, recruiting other members, because of his intellectual fame. His religious ideals were circulated through his newspapers and helped spur the Great Awakening.

During the Great Awakening Deism was attacked by Old Light ministers wanting to increase church membership and strengthen spiritual fidelity in tradition religions and their forms of worship. Despite their varying beliefs, Deists still considered themselves Christians. Geiss 5 Franklin caused many conflicts from his introduction of Deism, but he also received credit for his personal endeavor, gaining many new followers. As the “ consummate Enlightenment figure” of the eighteenth century Franklin made his voice heard in the political affairs of the colonies and Britain.

Franklin’s political career extended during the period of time from the 1750’s to 1790. He served as [the oldest] delegate to the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention” (Masur, 17). He felt that the colonies needed a strong intellectual voice to support their cause for independence. He contributed to the drafting of the US Constitution and “ offered his thoughts to the Continental Congress on the Articles of Perpetual Union, to help prepare the Declaration of Independence” (Masur, 11). In 1783 Franklin was used as a negotiator during the conclusion of the Revolutionary war, involving the American colonies and Britain.

He honorably negotiated with Britain and advocated the passage of the Treaty of Paris, which ended the French and Indian War. Nearing the conclusion of his life, the great political figure “ was the President of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery” (“ Web Guides”). “ Franklin’s political and diplomatic activities never ceased” (Masur, 7). Therefore, he was able to involve himself with government affairs in the American colonies, pushing the will of the people whom he

represented. His social status grew evermore as he sat in positions of political influence.

Benjamin Franklin's continual endeavor for knowledge and scientific advancement affirmed his authority as, " the greatest philosopher of the present age" (Masur, 12). Franklin educated himself in popular scientific theories which lead him to develop new inventions that served mankind. He invented many things that rightfully Geiss 6 gave him international fame. One of such inventions, called the lightning rod, acted as society's protector by directing kinetic energy from lightning surges into the ground.

Many house fires, occurring in wooden colonial buildings, were often caused by lightning strikes. These lightning rods gained so much support that they were erected on the tops of many prominent buildings in both Europe and North America. This invention, developed in 1752, was perfected so that it has remained the primary method of averting lightning damage for over 250 years. Another invention, the open stove, took the place of traditional fireplaces in British and American colonial societies. Fireplaces were the most common way of producing heat, but they were seemingly inefficient.

Franklin's new invention " allowed for a more efficient fire..., used one quarter as much wood, and generated twice as much heat" (Bellis). The open stove, as well as the lightning rod, decreased the number of house fires in British and Colonial communities. In addition, the inventor refined glasses so that they would contain two sets of lenses in each frame, one pair for seeing up close and the other for seeing at distances. These upgraded glasses were given the name bifocals. There were also many other less renowned

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inventions that he developed, such as the glass armonica, the odometer, swim fins, the medical catheter, and the ladder chair.

He expressed his desire to do good works, by refusing to place patents on his inventions so that others were given the opportunity to benefit from his success. With success came admiration. The many people who “revered him for his work in philosophy and science [were called] Franklinists” (Masur 11). Through his scientific inventions, Franklin hoped to “ease the burdens of labor” and possibly contribute to the freeing of slaves (Franklin, 19). Franklin gained satisfaction by the amount of public Geiss 7 approval and success achieved by his inventions, not by his financial gains.

He refused to accept patents for his inventions stating, “As we enjoy great Advantages from the Inventions of others, we should be glad of an Opportunity to serve others by any Invention of ours, and this we should do freely and generously” (Franklin, 124). He carried this philosophy throughout his life, gaining much admiration from the public for his humility. Benjamin Franklin was a virtuous American who became known as a “consummate Enlightenment figure.” He was honored with this title due to his social improvements, religious devotion, political fame, and scientific success.

Franklin, having less than two years of formal education, was a self-educated philosopher, inventor, author, but most acclaimed humanitarian. He dedicated himself to “self-education, self-improvement, [and] self-discipline” (Masur, 16). Franklin once said, “If you would not be forgotten as soon as you are dead and rotten, either write things worth reading or do things worth the writing” (Franklin, 6). He followed his own advice and gave the world

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insight into the mind of the “ consummate Enlightenment figure” by writing one of the most influential pieces of literature in of all time; The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin.

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