

Benjamin franklin compared to jonathan edwards assignment

[History](#)



Through their influential writing and critical evaluations of how to improve oneself, Jonathan Edwards and Benjamin Franklin both encompass American themes that ultimately define them as part of American literature. While living in different times and writing for different reasons they share the common themes of self-improvement, the setting and accomplishment of goals, and the importance of cohesion of society. By studying Edwards' "Personal Narrative", "Resolutions", "Sinners In the Hands of an Angry God", and excerpts from Benjamin Franklin's "Autobiography", found in North's Anthology of American Literature, edited by Nina

Beam, their distinct individual ideas, and these shared fundamental themes of American literature can be seen. Their personal narratives show how their environment impacted them to better themselves. Jonathan Edwards' "Personal Narrative" portrays his progress towards a more close relationship with God. "His family was followers of the Congregationalist Church, and from early childhood, he followed a Christian life" (Edwards 385).

Edwards' autobiography, "Personal Narrative", begins with him saying, "I had a variety of concerns and exercise about my soul from my childhood; but had two more memorable seasons of awakening, before I met with that change, by which I was brought to those new dispositions, and that new sense of things, that I have had" (Edwards 386). Edward completes a sojourn that brings him closer to God. This discovery helped him in his evaluation of what it took to become a better Christian in God's eyes. On the other hand however, Benjamin Franklin less closely adhered to his family's Christian beliefs.

As a Deist, Franklin believed that there was a “ Supreme Being” and that it is ones own chore to discover reality through reason. In his autobiography, he reveals a few Instances that altered his way of life. Case in point, he had qualms about not further pursuing his relationship with Miss Read when he left for England. Franklin calls these wrong doings or regrets “ Errata” (Franklin 473). The spirituality of Edwards and Franklin, although different, and very distinctive, their and growth. Also, as a Deist, Franklin believed he determined his inevitability by his own accord.

This encouraged him to set and accomplish goals to achieve what he desired in life. His autobiography portrays his faults and his accomplishments. This lack of modesty in revealing his errata is targeted towards his assembly, the American man, with hopes of prompting them to augment themselves and progress upon their deficiencies. Franklin rallied for the reformation of the American man through self- evaluation and correction. On the contrary, Edwards believed that it was God’s divine will of which men were the selected few who could entered into heaven after life.

Edwards focused his writings towards Christians more so than just purely Americans. His goal was to prepare Christians to become these select individuals that gained entrance into heaven. Christians under Edwards felt responsible to live better lives and to set examples for the congregation and the community. As Christian individuals, just as Franklins Americans, they continually believed that one must examine and self-asses their place in life, the church, and the community. In the book *Early American Literature: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Michael T.

Gilmore, Gilmore writes in the introduction, "The Puritans in their minds the Bible was the book of history, and typology revealed the developmental pattern of everyday vents by finding correspondences between the Old and New Testaments" (Gilmore 2). Edwards consistently leads his life adhering to the bible. "He believed like Winthrop, that his community needed to prepare and become 'a city upon a hill'" (Gilmore 2). In "Resolutions" Edwards' self-reflection and goals can be seen.

He constantly tries to improve himself and his congregation so that they can achieve God's envisage of a new homeland in New England. Edwards' primary commitment was to understand the Bible and to abide by it to live life to the fullest. Edwards spires to better himself and set a precedent for his congregation and his Christian community. Franklin, like Edwards, also seeks these goals and achievements as an individual and for the American man. In *Soundings: Some Early American Writers*, Lewis Leary writes, "Franklin was the true American ... He constantly redefines himself... None better represented the simple, noble men... Who lived close to nature faithful to her laws uncontaminated by artificialities of court or town" (Leary 9, 11). Franklin provides his audience with virtues to adhere to when trying to set goals to improve themselves. Franklin explains, "no one can change overnight and one must work on one vice until successively conquered, such as chastity, everyman can find self-improvement and further contribute to their community" (Franklin 487).

Franklin's determination to overcome vices enabled him to become closer to virtuosity, and hopefully in the end encourage his community to do the

same. Similarly, Edwards efforts to overcome his sins enabled him to become closer to God and to set an example for his congregation. Both men documented the progress of their goals to follow their self-defined resolutions and both men hoped their morasses would adhere to the same principles. They desired to be influential and catch attention and esteem from their community by showcasing their sacrifices.

Along with self-improvement and setting of goals Edwards' and Franklins writings reflect the importance of cohesion as a society. While Edwards urges his America was redefining religion, Franklin, through his writing encourages society to move closer together after the Revolutionary War. In, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," Edwards reciprocates with ferocity and anger to his congregation when faced with "The Great Awakening. In the sermon to his congregation Edwards' objective is to rationalize with the countless that are doomed to damnation and not saved.

He preaches, "Now you have an extraordinary opportunity, a day wherein Christ has thrown the door of mercy wide open" (Edwards 435). Edwards begs for the cohesion of his congregational community in effort to defeat the influences of uncertified preachers and the impedance of damnation. Ursula Brume explains in her essay "Jonathan Edwards and Typology," In *Early American Literature: A Collection of Critical Essays*, "Edwards took part heart and soul in the events of the Great Awakening He regarded this movement with overwhelming expectations in the belief that it marked the beginning of a new millennium" (Brume 71).

Edwards felt “ The Great Awakening” was a test from God, that Satan was causing these events, and that by force through his sermons he could hold his congregation together and pass this test from God to see who was faithful. Being much less forceful in his path, Franklin simply attempted to coax others to follow his path to become more patriotic. Franklin delves into the concept of how man can be made into a good citizen by following his suits of virtues. He says, “ It’s every one’s interest to be virtuous, who wished to be happy even in this world” (Franklin 495).

Franklin’s goal is, “ to show men that his autobiography and literature alike can help oneself to analyze and correct their own errors” (Leary 15).

Franklin’s autobiography is defined by the case of “ rags to riches” and has become a commonly used theme by many American writers. In the book *Making the American Self: Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* by Daniel Walker Howe, Howe further explains the evolution of the self made man, “ Edwards and Franklin agreed in their assessment of human nature and the difficulties put in the way of a virtuous life.