

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-EAU CLAIRE

PRAGMATIST OR PRETENDER? BENJAMIN FRANKLIN AND SLAVERY

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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Abstract

Benjamin Franklin was known for his work and statesmanship during the American Revolution, but he was also an advocate of abolition near the end of his life. The antislavery group of which he was president submitted the first petition to the United States government to end the slave trade in America, but Franklin did not always hold antislavery beliefs, as he owned household slaves for the majority of his life and greatly profited from the institution. The purpose of this paper is to examine how Benjamin Franklin's opinion of slavery changed over the course of his life. It draws upon primary and secondary sources to synthesize existing scholarship into a single narrative, and discusses several different interpretations of Franklin and slavery.

Introduction: Slavery In The City Of Brotherly Love

In 1710, four years after the birth of Benjamin Franklin, there were an estimated 630 slaves in the city of Philadelphia, the majority working with artisans, merchants, and shopkeepers. In 1720, three years after Franklin began his indentured servitude to his brother James, there were 611 slaves. At the end of 1730, seven years after Ben had run away from James and the unfree labor that he represented, there were 481 slaves, the reduction due in part to a smallpox epidemic that had devastated the city.¹ After 1730, the slave population in Philadelphia would increase until the 1770s.² By the early 1760s, one out of every five workers in the northern colonies was a slave.³

Slavery was part of the reality of Benjamin Franklin's time. He had many personal encounters with it, such as slave advertisements in his *Pennsylvania Gazette* and the household slaves that he kept. In terms of the American Revolution, students of the topic would likely associate him with the Three-Fifths Compromise, which provided the Southern states with the recognition of slavery that they desired in order for them to ratify the Constitution.⁴ There is another aspect of Franklin's dealings with slavery that most people are probably not aware of, however, and that is his opinion of slavery. His opinion was not static; he owned household slaves for most of his life and gained much profit

¹ Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and its Aftermath* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 15, 20; H.W. Brands, *The First American: The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002), 33, 40; Leonard W. Labaree, ed., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959) 1:189. (referred to as *PBF* hereafter)

² Nash and Soderlund, 18.

³ Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 179.

⁴ The idea was not of Franklin's own invention, but he was likely the first one to formally suggest it at the Constitutional Convention. David Waldstreicher, *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 233.

from the institution, but he also thundered against the “slavery” imposed by Britain and, in the sunset years of his life, the system of slavery itself.⁵

The purpose of this paper is to provide a narrative of Franklin’s relationship with slavery, using his personal correspondence and other documents, as well as secondary sources that shed light onto the thoughts of the times. The reason for this is that information about Franklin vis-à-vis slavery is fragmented and scattered throughout many sources, and there are not many cohesive narratives about this aspect of his life (with the exception of David Waldstreicher’s *Runaway America*). My hope is that in gathering the available information and organizing it into a narrative, a clear picture of Franklin’s opinion of slavery can be seen, as well as how his opinion changed over the course of his life. Having such a narrative available will help students of the Revolutionary era to better understand him as well as the attitudes toward slavery during that time. Mine is not a complete narrative, however; this is by no means the definitive work on Benjamin Franklin and slavery. There are limitations on the scope of this narrative already; I would have liked to place Franklin in the context of the growing abolitionist movement of the time, but the research necessary for this was not possible due to time constraints. That is unfortunate, but ultimately the goal here is to polish the wheel, not reinvent it.

⁵ Waldstreicher, 24.

Chapter 1: Am I My Brother's Keeper?

Benjamin Franklin's first brush with servitude came in 1717, when he signed himself over to his older brother James as an indentured servant. Ben worked with James, who was a printer, in printing the *Boston Gazette*. In 1721, James founded the *New England Courant* as an alternative to the existing publications in Boston, with the intent of being "lively, opinionated, and not averse to challenging the establishment."⁶ This is where Ben's famous "Silence Dogood" letters were published, beginning in April of 1722.⁷ Ben would soon have further opportunity to publish, for in June of the same year, James was thrown in jail for a faux letter to the editor that not-so-subtly mocked the city government's approach to coastal pirates. Consequently, Ben found himself in the roles of publisher and managing editor in his brother's absence until James was released that July, at which point the bomb-throwing resumed in earnest.

Ben may have not minded taking on additional editorial duties, for historian H.W. Brands notes, "with each issue the paper lost a little of James' character and took on more of Ben's."⁸ However, James grew to dislike this gradual takeover of his pet project, and took umbrage at Ben's excessive high-mindedness. Eventually, the Franklin brothers approached their father with their grievances. James complained about Ben's attitude, and Ben complained about James beating him, among other forms of "harsh and tyrannical Treatment."⁹ Unsurprisingly, the patriarch sided with Ben.

⁶ Waldstreicher, 32; Brands, 24-25.

⁷ Brands, 26; Waldstreicher, 44.

⁸ Brands, 31.

⁹ Waldstreicher, 46.

In January 1723, James was arrested for publishing material highly critical of the Boston religious establishment, and was ordered to cease publishing the *Courant*. James' response to the order would carry serious consequences for his brother. Seeing a loophole in the court's order, he released Ben from indentured servitude so that Ben could legally publish the *Courant* under his own name, thereby circumventing the edict: the authorities had said that *James* could not publish, but they never said that no one else could. Despite appearances to the contrary, this "freedom" was a ruse, for he was still bound to his brother, thanks to a secret agreement that James had made him sign.¹⁰

It was at this point that Ben decided that he would no longer submit to his brother, and made plans to run away, even though it would have been illegal to do so since he was still secretly indentured. Technically, if James brought the secret indenture to suit, it would have exposed disingenuous sidestepping of the law's injunction, and gotten him into even more trouble. Weighing this issue against the fact that James had used him as the *de facto* scapegoat for the *Courant's* acerbic and libelous content, Ben decided to take his chances and flee. Before he did, he wrote a letter in the *Courant* under the guise of "Dingo", a slave who had found his own good name tarnished for the sake of his unsavory master's.¹¹

Given the low number of slaves in Boston, it is unlikely that Ben had a high amount of interaction with them: between 1716-1725, there were only 72 slaves in the city.¹² There is no indication of Ben's attitude towards slaves or slavery at the time of his indentured servitude, except that he was willing to take on the identity of a slave in order

¹⁰ Brands, 29-31.

¹¹ Brands, 32-34; Waldstreicher, 51-52.

¹² Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 401.

to make a point about the “harsh and tyrannical Treatment” he received from James. This could have been motivated by sheer cynicism, or perhaps it seemed to him that the comparison between his situation and the harsh reality of slavery was a logical one to make. Regardless of his true motives, this experience may have influenced his opinion of slavery in the years following his escape. Franklin scholar Claude-Anne Lopez describes his early attitude towards slavery as “contemptuous indifference,” which will become more evident when examining the thirty years after his flight from Boston.¹³

¹³ Claude-Anne Lopez, *My Life With Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 196.

Chapter 2: Pride, Prejudice, and Printing

In October 1729, Franklin became the publisher of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. This gave him an outlet for different types of writing, such as news reporting, humorous essays, and advice columns.¹⁴ He also published advertisements for goods and services-- including slaves. Many merchants offered their wares in the *Gazette*, and Franklin himself became a merchant when he started making his own goods and selling them through his newspaper. In 1730, he opened a book and stationary shop that also served as a general store, where customers could buy products such as coffee and sugar in addition to paper, ink, and lampblack. Franklin came to rely indirectly on slavery for his profits, since coffee and sugar were produced by slave labor.¹⁵ Not only that, but Franklin became directly involved in the buying and selling of slaves, as is revealed in this excerpt from the May 11, 1732 edition of the *Gazette*: “A likely young Negro Fellow, about 19 or 20 Years of Age... He is very fit for Labour, being us’d to Plantation Work, and has had the Small-Pox. *Enquire of the Printer hereof.*”¹⁶ Here, Franklin was not just using the *products* of slavery to make money, but he was using slaves *themselves*, being the facilitating agent of their trafficking.

Franklin worked as a printer shortly before taking over the *Gazette*. A Quaker named Ralph Sandiford came to him in March 1729, seeking publication of an antislavery tract. Franklin said that he would print the tracts, but they would have to be printed without his (Franklin’s) name on the title page, and Sandiford would have to

¹⁴ Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 64-70.

¹⁵ Waldstreicher, 91.

¹⁶ *PBF*, 1:272. Emphasis mine.

purchase and distribute the tracts himself. Sandiford agreed, and Franklin printed the tracts.¹⁷

Why would Franklin publish antislavery tracts if he would shortly be profiting from the institution that Sandiford denounced? There is no evidence from this point in time to show that Franklin was vehemently pro-slavery. One could argue that he approved of slavery, at the very least, based on the ads that he printed in the *Gazette* barely a year after printing Sandiford's tracts. But the mere presence of slave advertising is not *de facto* proof of Franklin's opinion of slavery, because the majority of printers of his day ran ads for slaves, regardless of their beliefs about the institution.¹⁸ However, the fact that Franklin did not want to take credit for printing the tracts shows that he did not want to be associated with the antislavery message. This could have been due to his own opinion of slavery or his overarching desire to not take sides on a controversial topic. As David Waldstreicher puts it, "Moral absolutes... were bad for business and bad for him."¹⁹

In 1726, smallpox entered Philadelphia for the second time.²⁰ It claimed many lives, including that of Franklin's young son, Francis.²¹ In the July 8, 1731 edition of the *Gazette*, Franklin declared, "The Small-pox has now quite left this City," recording the final tally of lives lost to the disease, numbering 288. Sixty-four of those people were blacks. Franklin wrote, "If these may be valued with one another at £30 per Head, the

¹⁷ Waldstreicher, 79.

¹⁸ Claude-Anne Lopez and Eugenia W. Herbert, *The Private Franklin: The Man and His Family* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975), 292.

¹⁹ Waldstreicher, 79.

²⁰ John Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott, *History of Philadelphia, 1609-1884* (Philadelphia: L.H. Everts and Co., 1884), 2:1600. Downloaded from Google Books on 25 March 2011

²¹ Isaacson, 82-83.

Loss to the City in that Article is near £2000.”²² Here, Franklin reduced blacks—human beings—to the lowest common denominator: money. This could have been the reasoning behind his proposal in 1731 to institute “an Office of Insurance for Servants,” to protect not only the investment into slaves on the part of their masters, but also the profit that the slaves produced.²³ Franklin identified national wealth with masters’ wealth, and for good reason, because while he was not yet a master himself, he definitely profited from the institution: due in part to his success with slave advertising, Franklin retired at age 42.²⁴

Eventually, Franklin possessed his own slaves. By 1735, Franklin owned a slave named Joseph, which may have made some business relations a bit awkward in 1737 when he printed Benjamin Lay’s “All Slave-Keepers That Keep The Innocent In Bondage.”²⁵ Franklin made the same kind of deal with this radical Quaker that he had made with Ralph Sandiford eight years earlier: the books would be printed without Franklin’s name on the title page. Despite Franklin’s attempt to keep his professional distance from the antislavery message, Benjamin Lay had a special relationship with him and his wife Deborah. Lay visited their shop to buy ink, paper, and books; he was a subscriber to the *Gazette*; and Deborah kept a portrait of him in their house twenty years later. In terms of ideology, however, Franklin was ambivalent towards Lay and his forceful antislavery message. This could have been because of Franklin’s continuing profit from slave advertisements or because of his own slaves. Whatever the case may have been, Franklin did not seem too eager to be involved with an antislavery firebrand

²² *PBF*, 1:217.

²³ Waldstreicher, 93.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁵ Gary Nash, “Franklin and Slavery,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 150, no. 4, 2006: 618-635; Waldstreicher, 26.

like Lay. As David Waldstreicher puts it, “[Franklin] brought [antislavery] into the market of ideas only to leave it there.”²⁶

By 1750, Franklin and his wife owned a married couple named Peter and Jemima. These slaves likely worked in Franklin’s shop and in his household.²⁷ Despite the extra help with his business, Franklin was not satisfied with the work that they performed. He wrote to his mother on April 12, stating that he and Deborah wanted to “sell [Peter and Jemima] at the first good Opportunity, for we do not like Negro Servants.”²⁸ He never sold them, so it is possible that their uses outweighed whatever dissatisfaction he had with them. Irrespective of his reasons for keeping his slaves, he published “Observations Concerning The Increase Of Mankind” in 1755, in which he criticized the economics of slavery. In point twelve, he said that slaves were economically inefficient, claiming that slaves cost more than “the working poor in Britain,” and that the blacks’ devilish nature contributed to their increasing costs, citing “[the slave’s] Pilfering from Time to Time, almost every Slave being by Nature a Thief.”²⁹

In point thirteen, Franklin claimed that in the British West Indies, the region’s poor were deprived of employment due to the vast number of slaves. Not only that, but the slaves were overworked and underfed, causing premature death and necessitating “a continual resupply from Africa.” The national reliance on slave labor was not only economically inefficient, but ultimately harmful to the nation’s work ethic: white children

²⁶ Waldstreicher, 81-83.

²⁷ Nash: *Franklin and Slavery*; Waldstreicher, 91.

²⁸ Lopez 197; Benjamin Franklin (BF hereafter) to Abiah Franklin, April 12, 1750, *PBF* 3:474.

²⁹ *PBF* 4:229.

raised in slaveowning households “become proud, disgusted with Labor, and being educated in Idleness, are rendered unfit to get a living by Industry.”³⁰

In one of Franklin’s final points, he complained about slave importation on racial grounds. He wrote that Americans should exclude Africans and Asians because “the Number of purely white people in the world is proportionably very small” and that “the lovely White and Red” color should be increased. Why did he think this? “Perhaps I am partial to the Complexion of my Country, for such Kind of Partiality is natural to Mankind.”³¹ Franklin’s racial prejudice was on full display with this statement. Despite such prejudice, his beliefs about blacks and slavery in general would be challenged during his time in England two years later.

³⁰ Ibid. 231.

³¹ Ibid. 234.

Chapter 3: The Associates of Dr. Bray

In January 1757, Franklin received a letter from John Waring, informing him that the recently deceased Henry Wheatley had left money to his relatives in Philadelphia for Franklin to distribute among them. After the necessary legal information, Waring included information about an English group called The Associates of Dr. Bray, which sought to convert American slaves to Christianity and provide them with a good education. Waring then asked Franklin for advice on how to best educate the slaves in his area, and whether or not there would be any potential to establish a school in Philadelphia for them.³²

The Pennsylvania Assembly appointed Franklin as their representative to Britain in June 1757, and he arrived in London in July with two of his slaves, Peter and King, in tow.³³ In his reply to John Waring, he explained that education was not available to black children partially due to prejudice (people thought such education useless, due to blacks' perceived mental defects), fear (slaves could revolt if they were educated), and desire to not have children "mix'd with Slaves in Education, Play, etc." However, if a *separate* school for black children were to be established, and if it were successful in educating them, other colonies would follow suit in developing schools of their own.³⁴ In Franklin's second letter to Waring, he gave advice on how to find the best schoolmaster and

³² John Waring (JW hereafter) to BF, January 24, 1757, *PBF*, 7:98.

³³ Richard I. Shelling, "Benjamin Franklin and the Dr. Bray Associates," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 63, no. 3 (July 1939): 284, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20087193> (accessed 10 March 2011)

³⁴ BF to JW, January 3, 1758, *PBF*, 7:356.

administrative staff, and that given a few years, the school would provide Waring and his fellow Associates “much Satisfaction.”³⁵

The school in Philadelphia was opened on November 20, 1758, with thirty students attending.³⁶ In August 1759, Franklin’s wife Deborah wrote him, saying that the pupils had impressed her and that she intended to enroll her young slave, Othello, at the school. He relayed this information to John Waring, who apparently published it in London newspapers under Deborah’s name, which took Franklin by surprise.³⁷ It seems that the Associates sensed that Franklin’s help with their efforts amounted to an endorsement, because Franklin was unanimously elected to be a member of the group in January 1760. At their first meeting that year, Franklin recommended establishing three more schools in New York City, Williamsburg, Virginia; and Newport, Rhode Island. Franklin also gave the Associates information about people who would likely support the schools if asked. He wrote these individuals, secured their support, and the additional schools were established. A few months later, Franklin was elected chairman of the group.³⁸

Sometime in the early part of 1760, Othello died. Ben did not usually comment on news of Deborah’s slaves, but he mentioned the boy in his letter to her on March 28.³⁹ He wrote that he was sorry to hear of Othello’s untimely passing, “as you seem to have had a regard for him. You must have suffer’d a good deal in the Fatigue of Nursing him in such

³⁵ BF to JW, February 17, 1758, *PBF*, 7:377.

³⁶ Shelling, 285.

³⁷ Deborah Franklin (DF hereafter) to BF, August 9, 1759, *PBF*, 8:425; BF to DF, June 27, 1760, *PBF* 9:173.

³⁸ Shelling, 286-87.

³⁹ Lopez, 200.

a Distemper.”⁴⁰ In June, Franklin had slave news of his own. He reported that Peter was doing well, and that there were no complaints to be had about him or his work. Franklin also mentioned that whatever faults Peter had, he “see[s] with only one Eye, and hear with only one Ear; so we rub on pretty comfortably.” One biographer has written that this could be indicative of Franklin’s attitude to slavery as a whole: he was not concerned with his slave’s faults because he was not concerned with the institution’s faults. He had other things with which to concern himself at this point. At any rate, he treated his slaves like family servants, rather than chattel.⁴¹ This attitude may also be evident in his treatment of the other slave he had brought to Britain. King had fled two years before this letter was written, and a woman in Suffolk had taken him in, converted him to Christianity, and taught him how to read and write. Ben did not ultimately care because King was “of little Use, and often in Mischief” when he was with the Franklins. British law would have allowed Franklin to force King’s return, but given King’s antics, he may have seen such action not worth the time and effort. He summarized his thoughts on the affair with a shrug: “In the meantime he is no Expence to us.”⁴²

Franklin returned to America in the fall of 1762.⁴³ A year later, he visited the school in Philadelphia that the Associates had started. In his report to John Waring, dated December 17, Franklin wrote that the students had impressed him with their degree of literacy and knowledge, even after a relatively short time of education. It was apparent to Franklin that black children were just as mentally capable as white children. “[I] have conceiv’d a higher Opinion of the natural Capacities of the black Race, than I had ever

⁴⁰ BF to DF, March 28, 1760, *PBF*, 9:37.

⁴¹ Isaacson, 190-91.

⁴² BF to DF, June 27, 1760, *PBF*, 9:173.

⁴³ Shelling, 288.

before entertained... you will wonder perhaps that I should ever doubt it, and I will not undertake to justify all my Prejudices, nor to account for them.”⁴⁴ This was definitely a change from the prejudicial tone of 1755, but not everyone is convinced that the change was genuine. David Waldstreicher notes that Franklin had written in the *present* tense concerning his prejudices. He could have meant that he would remain prejudiced and continue to judge others based on racial stereotypes, but without saying as much since he was writing to a person whose work involved fighting prejudice.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ BF to JW, December 17, 1763, *PBF*, 10:395.

⁴⁵ Waldstreicher, 195.

Chapter 4: Rhetoric

In December 1763, sixty settlers from Paxton Township murdered six Conestoga Indians, and when the fourteen remaining Indians were taken into protective custody at a local jail, the settlers broke into the jail and murdered them too. The killings became known as the Paxton Boys Massacre.⁴⁶ In response to this, Franklin wrote anonymously about the murders. In his essay, he claimed to relate a story from one Captain Seagrave. Seagrave's tale dealt with Africans in Guinea who wanted to kill a white soldier to take vengeance for their relatives, who had been kidnapped by white slavers. This soldier was living with Cudjoe, an African friend of his. Cudjoe told the angry mob assembled outside his house that the soldier was not a slaver and had done nothing wrong. Furthermore, Cudjoe said, they should differentiate between evil whites and innocent whites. The mob, convinced by his argument, left in peace. Seagrave's point was that even "the most brutal" of the "dark People" were "capable of feeling the Force of Reason."⁴⁷ It is unclear whether or not Franklin told this story because he himself believed that *some* "dark People" could be reasoned with, or because it was a story that served his purpose of condemning the Paxton Boys. It is possible that Franklin tailored his condemnation to fit the prejudices of the time, but intended to show his readers the irony of "dark People," presumed to be savage in nature, being able to discern between good and bad whites, while supposedly civilized whites were not able to discern between good and bad Indians.

⁴⁶ Francis D. Cogliano, *Revolutionary America 1763-1815* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 20.

⁴⁷ *PBF*, 11:62.

In 1765, Franklin published *Poor Richard Improved*, which included his critique of the Sugar Act, titled “Concerning Sweets.”⁴⁸ Franklin made the case that Americans should use honey instead of sugar, not only because it was cheaper and more efficient to produce, but healthier as well. Buying honey also did not involve paying the duties that the British had imposed on sugar. He contrasted the voluntary labor of bees to the forced labor of slaves in the British West Indies, saying that bees’ labor was to everyone’s benefit, but that the slaves’ labor was solely for their masters’ profit. Not only was this economically unfair, but “[if] the People of the Northern Colonies [could] see and know, the extreme Slovenliness of the West-India Slaves in making Melasses, and the Filth and Nastiness suffered to enter it, or wantonly thrown into it, their Stomachs would turn at the Thoughts of taking it in.”⁴⁹

Franklin did not offer any proof of such behavior actually occurring, which could mean that he simply assumed that it was happening, based on racial stereotypes. To take a more generous approach, Franklin could have meant that the slaves’ “extreme Slovenliness” was due to the corrosive effects of slavery, rather than the unsavory characteristics of the slaves themselves. This was the approach that he would later take in the 1769 reprint of “Observations Concerning The Increase of Mankind,” when he changed the statement “every slave by nature a thief” to “almost every slave being, from the nature of slavery, a thief.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸ The Sugar Act, originally enacted in 1733, was revised in 1764 to more thoroughly collect existing duties on sugar and molasses imported from non-British colonies in the West Indies. It was detrimental to the colonies not only economically, but also in terms of colonial autonomy, since the colonial legal powers had no say in the matter. Cogliano, 50-51.

⁴⁹ *PBF*, 12:9.

⁵⁰ Benjamin Franklin, *Experiments and Observations on Electricity* (London: David Henry) 1769, 200. Downloaded from Google Books on 12 March 2011.

On a more confusing note, Franklin may have taken his earlier sentiment about seeing his slave's faults with only one eye and ear a bit too far. In "Some Observations on North America from Oral Information by Dr. Franklin," collected by Gottfried Achenwall and published in a German magazine in 1767, Franklin asserted that blacks were found in the southern and southeastern colonies, but not in the northern ones, Pennsylvania specifically. This was because in the north, "there was no such hard work as they were fitted for in raising tobacco, rice, and indigo." He also claimed that blacks enjoyed the same legal rights as free men, as well as relatively good treatment from their masters. Masters, acting out of self-interest, did not overwork or underfeed their slaves, because that would increase their mortality rate. "The Negro slaves have all, in short, the general rights of humanity except freedom and property, neither of which they possess."⁵¹

These claims become laughably false when compared to the truth. In the 1740s, slaves accounted for fifteen percent of the workingmen in Philadelphia.⁵² From 1765 to 1770, there were 5,561 slaves in Pennsylvania, with 1,438 living in Philadelphia.⁵³ Franklin himself had written in 1755 that the reason for "continual resupply" of slaves was that masters overworked and underfed them. As for Franklin's argument that slaves had all basic human rights except freedom, his claim is absurd because *when freedom is denied, inherent rights are rendered irrelevant*. A similar argument would be that a fish out of water is able to breathe; it just has to breathe air instead. That is a foolish thing to say, because a fish out of water is completely unable to breathe and will inevitably suffocate in the absence of water. The fish still retains the natural capacity to breathe,

⁵¹ *PBF*, 13:355.

⁵² Berlin, 179.

⁵³ Nash and Soderlund, 5, 18.

despite its predicament, but it is ultimately doomed if removed from water entirely. In the same way, a person who is denied freedom, even though he or she has inherent human rights, may as well not have those rights at all, practically speaking. The very existence of inherent rights presupposes the freedom for them to be exercised.⁵⁴

Franklin may have told his German readers that Pennsylvania was a safe place for blacks, but the reality was much different. In 1726, the Pennsylvania legislature passed “An Act for the better regulation of Negroes,” which made restrictions on blacks much more severe than those already in place. Crimes such as rape, murder, and burglary were already considered capital offenses—if committed by blacks. Until 1718, whites were exempt from capital punishment for most of those crimes, save murder. Also, according to the new law, masters were required to pay a thirty-pound surety before manumitting a slave. There is no evidence that manumission was widespread at this point, but apparently the legislature was either frightened by the mere prospect of manumission and wanted to stop it before it happened, or they objected so strongly to the few manumissions already taking place that they decided to prohibit the act entirely. For the few slaves whose freedom masters were willing to purchase, the law declared that any freed black could be returned to slavery if the magistrate saw fit. The most damning act of this legislation was that the Pennsylvania government declared that all children of free blacks were to be bound in slavery until their early twenties, depending on their sex.⁵⁵

Given the cruel reality of Pennsylvania’s treatment of slaves, one has to ask, why did Franklin write an article of pure fantasy about his state? It seems unlikely that

⁵⁴ Legal philosophers may call this an oversimplification, but it is adequate for the purposes of this argument.

⁵⁵ A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr. *In The Matter of Color: Race & The American Legal Process: The Colonial Period*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 282-285.

Franklin would be ignorant of Pennsylvania's legal restrictions on blacks. It is possible that Franklin was merely trying to make his nation look good to the outside world, hoping that his foreign audience would not know the truth. Another possibility is that Franklin was satirizing his fellow Americans' defenses of slavery, but this seems unlikely since these observations were printed under his own name and directed to a foreign audience (usually his satires were printed under pseudonyms in publications that were guaranteed to be read by the people that he was mocking).

In January 1770, under the pseudonym "N.N.," Franklin had "A Conversation On Slavery" published in a British newspaper. This fictional conversation took place between an Englishman, American, and Scotsman. It opened with the Englishman accusing the Americans of being the true enemies of colonial liberty, citing a recently published antislavery pamphlet as evidence. The American replied that it was *Britain's* fault that some Americans owned slaves: "You bring the slaves to us, and tempt us to purchase them." The American also claimed that barely one in a hundred American families owned slaves, and those who did treated their slaves with dignity and humanity. Britain had started the slave trade, after all. He also asserted that "many thousands" of Americans hated the slave trade and did all that they could to abolish it. It would have been unfair of him to state that one rotten Englishman out of a hundred makes *all* Englishmen "Rogues and Thieves," he reasoned, so in the same way, it was unfair for the Englishman to claim that a minority of American slaveholders translated into the majority owning slaves.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ PBF, 17:37-39.

The Englishman disagreed, stating that the majority of Americans did, in fact, own slaves, and that the slave laws were unfairly harsh. The American met him halfway and agreed that the slave laws were harsh, but only in those few colonies that had a great number of slaves, and only because the slave-owners believed that severe laws were needed to “keep the Slaves in Obedience.” This was necessary because the majority of blacks were “of a plotting Disposition, dark, sullen, malicious, revengeful and cruel in the highest Degree.”⁵⁷ In other colonies that had less slaves, the slave laws were less harsh because there were less slaves to worry about. Eventually, the Scotsman chimed in, saying that there were no slaves in Scotland. The American fired back, stating that Scottish miners were the equivalent of the slave class, “[working] in those dark Caverns under Ground, unblessed by Sunshine.” Furthermore, if the miners were blacks, the Scottish would be justified in making them do the nation’s literal dirty work, but “they are honest good People and are your own Countrymen!” The Conversation ended with the American telling the Englishman that the English military was the slave class in his nation. If an English soldier were told to “slay all Children under two Years old” or “shoot your Women and Children in St. George’s Fields,” he would have to comply. However, in America, “we cannot command a Slave of ours to do an immoral or a wicked Action.”⁵⁸

Much like Franklin himself had stated in 1755, the American believed that blacks were innately cruel and miserable creatures. Blacks were so miserable, the American argued, that the Scottish would have been justified in using them in their mines instead of white Scots. If we assume that Franklin was using the American as a means of expressing

⁵⁷ Ibid, 41.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 43-44.

his own viewpoint, then it seems that Franklin had not abandoned his earlier prejudice. Or, if this was not the case, he could have been playing devil's advocate and simply used the American to parrot popular defenses of slavery. Another interpretation could be that he was intentionally framing the debate to make the British look bad, since America was on the eve of revolution, so he was free to propagandize American slavery in order to communicate the weight of colonial grievances. It may even be a mistake to try to divine Franklin's own views out of this piece since it amounts to nothing more than anti-British propaganda, given the context of the strife between Britain and her colonies. We can formulate many different interpretations, but there is no way to be certain of how much the Conversation was representative of his own views, if at all.

Chapter 5: The Turning Point?

Despite the overtly prejudicial tone of the Conversation, Franklin was personally wrestling with the issue of slavery, and was on the verge of becoming an ally to the abolitionist cause. In April 1772, he received a letter from abolitionist Anthony Benezet, asking for his help in the struggle against slavery. Benezet knew that Franklin was a respected and influential man, and made his request in the same way. “[I ask that] thou would’st deeply consider, whether something may not be in thy power towards an effectual step, and a kind of basis lay’d for the removal in time (if not at present) of that terrible evil [of slavery].” Benezet then appealed to Franklin’s conscience, painting a bleak picture of slave life and those who sold their fellow men into slavery. Then Benezet quoted slavery statistics, possibly in an attempt to appeal to Franklin’s economic objections to chattel slavery: “By a late computation there is now eight hundred and fifty thousand negroes in the English Islands and Colonies; and an hundred thousand more yearly imported, by our Nation; about a third of this number is said to perish in the passage...”⁵⁹

Benezet’s entreaty must have had an effect on Franklin, because in June, Franklin sent a piece to *The London Chronicle*, in which he attacked slavery on moral grounds for the first time. He quoted Benezet’s statistics, then offered commentary of his own: “Can sweetening our tea with sugar be a circumstance of such absolute necessity... [and] compensate for so much misery produced among our fellow creatures, and such a constant butchery of the human species by this pestilential detestable traffic in the bodies

⁵⁹ Anthony Benezet (AB hereafter) to BF, April 27, 1772, *PBF*, 19:113-116.

and souls of men?”⁶⁰ This was a drastic change from just a few years earlier, when Franklin had exhorted his fellow Americans to stop using sugar on economic grounds; here, Franklin was telling the English (and Americans) to stop using sugar because human beings had suffered and died to produce it.

Franklin’s newfound sentiments were also apparent in his letters. In a letter to Anthony Benezet, dated August 22, 1772, Franklin mentioned his antislavery piece in the *Chronicle* and noted that he was “glad to hear that the Disposition against keeping Negroes grows more general in North America.”⁶¹ In a letter to Richard Woodward on April 10, 1773, he mentioned his pleasure at the growing abolitionist sentiment in America, using the same language as he had with Benezet.⁶² In two letters dated July 14, 1773, Franklin told Benezet that slavery was “dangerous to [the colonies’] very Existence,” and told Benjamin Rush that slavery “has long disgrac’d our Nation and Religion.”⁶³ In a letter from December 1773, the Marquis de Condorcet, a French antislavery advocate, asked Franklin about the status of free blacks in the colonies, if they lived in black communities or lived among the whites, and if freeborn black children had adopted European characteristics or had “retained the Negro spirit.”⁶⁴ Franklin’s reply reaffirmed his belief that blacks were “not deficient in natural Understanding” but lacked education. Franklin also mentioned that free blacks lived among the whites, but were typically “improvident and poor.” He also mentioned that blacks were good musicians.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ *PBF*, 19:188.

⁶¹ BF to AB, August 22, 1772, *Ibid*, 269.

⁶² BF to Richard Woodward, April 10, 1773, *PBF*, 20:155.

⁶³ BF to AB, July 14, 1773, *Ibid*, 296; BF to Benjamin Rush, July 14, 1773, *Ibid*, 314.

⁶⁴ Marquis de Condorcet to BF, December 2, 1773, *Ibid*, 489. Translated by Sharon Gould on 13 March 2011.

⁶⁵ BF to Marquis de Condorcet, March 20, 1774, *PBF*, 21:151.

During this time, in the context of the American Revolution, many colonists cited England's stirring up of slave insurrections as one of their many grievances against the mother country. Thomas Jefferson had stated as much in the Declaration of Independence. Franklin was certainly no exception to this, as he often cited slave insurrections in his correspondence during the early 1770s. Lord Dunmore, governor of Virginia, issued a proclamation in November 1775 that guaranteed freedom for slaves and servants, blacks included, who fled their rebel masters and took up arms with the English.⁶⁶ The colonists caught word of the proclamation months before it was issued, as Franklin pointed out in July of that year: "Lord Dunmore and Governor Martin, have already, we are told, taken some Steps towards... exciting an insurrection among the Blacks."⁶⁷ Franklin would later reiterate this point in additional letters to two of his English friends.⁶⁸ There was no racial prejudice in these letters, merely statements of the English government's provocation of slaves.

In November 1775, Franklin was appointed to a committee whose task was to win foreign support for the Americans. He arrived in Paris in December 1776, where he would remain until 1785.⁶⁹ Since his primary goal was to enlist support for America, he did not speak openly about the cause of abolition. His opinion of slavery had to be set aside for the higher cause, especially since one of the first Frenchmen to pledge aid was involved in the slave trade.⁷⁰ However, due to Franklin's plain-looking attire, he was identified with the Quakers and mistaken for one at times. The image of Quakers as an

⁶⁶ Cogliano, 86-87.

⁶⁷ BF to Jonathan Shipley, July 7, 1775, *PBF*, 22:93.

⁶⁸ BF to David Hartley, September 12, 1775, *Ibid*, 196, 199; BF to Jonathan Shipley, September 13, 1775, *Ibid*, 199.

⁶⁹ Brands, 521; Lopez, 204.

⁷⁰ Lopez, 203.

antislavery group had been firmly established in the French mind, which allowed Franklin's appearance to take on those connotations.⁷¹ Despite his image, there were two incidents during his time in France that did not fit well with the implications of his attire. The first was in the early 1780s, when one of Franklin's relatives in France, Jonathan Williams, Jr., tried to get permission from the French government to keep a slave, even though the king had abolished slavery in 1779. Franklin intervened on his kin's behalf, and it is assumed that Williams was allowed to keep his slave. The next incident was when John Jay's slave woman ran away from him, and Franklin intervened on his behalf, having the French police track her down and imprison her.⁷² Taken at face value, these two incidents could be used to argue that Franklin had never abandoned his racial prejudices, but they could also be interpreted as Franklin intervening on behalf of others' interests, regardless of his personal beliefs concerning them. Ideological purists might say that if Franklin believed so strongly that slavery was an evil institution, then he should have been true to his principles and refused to aid any friend or relative with the recapture of their slaves.

Whatever his motives for aiding friends of slavery, Franklin's rhetoric remained strongly antislavery. In *Maritime Observations*, published in August 1785, he remarked that when sea navigation was used to transport necessary goods to people in need, it was a very good thing, "but when employed in pillaging merchants and transporting slaves, it is clearly the means of augmenting the mass of human misery."⁷³ When taking into consideration the wars fought in Africa in order to obtain the sugar islands, as well as the

⁷¹ Waldstreicher, 217-18.

⁷² Lopez and Herbert, 300.

⁷³ Benjamin Franklin, "A Letter from Dr. Benjamin Franklin, to Mr. Alphonsus le Roy, Member of Several Academies, at Paris. Containing Sundry Maritime Observations." *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 2 (1786): 323. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1005200> (accessed 10 March 2011).

number of people who perished at sea en route to those wars, Franklin viewed sugar as being saturated with blood. Comforts like sugar and tobacco were not worth the misery forced upon human beings in order to afford their convenience.

Chapter 6: The Last Crusade

When Franklin returned from France in September of 1785, the free black population in Philadelphia was at over a thousand, while the number of slaves was less than five hundred.⁷⁴ In 1787, he became president of the recently reorganized “Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and the Relief of Free Negroes, Unlawfully Held in Bondage.”⁷⁵ Barely a month later, the Constitutional Convention began. One of the most divisive issues facing the delegates was whether or not slaves should be counted toward representation in the House of Representatives. Delegates from states with few slaves argued that slaves should not be counted as persons, since slave owners themselves did not view their slaves as people; delegates from slave states replied that if slaves were not represented in some way, they would not ratify the Constitution.⁷⁶ In a special committee meeting, Franklin suggested that each slave would be counted as three-fifths of a person, as far as House representation and taxation were concerned. This compromise was enough to pacify both Southern slave states and Northern states where slavery was on the decline, and ensure national unity despite vastly different beliefs on the issue.⁷⁷

The episode is probably the best-known example of Franklin’s pragmatism, and how he was willing to shelve his principles, if that was what was required for compromise to be achieved. On the same day that this compromise was suggested, another member of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society had given Franklin an antislavery

⁷⁴ Nash: *Franklin and Slavery*.

⁷⁵ Nash and Soderlund, 124; Gordon S. Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 227.

⁷⁶ Brands, 688-89.

⁷⁷ As stated at the beginning of the paper, the Three-Fifths Compromise was not Franklin’s own idea, but he was the one who suggested it during the Convention.

petition to present to his fellow delegates. Franklin never did, likely in order to avoid a schism that could have threatened the unity of the nation. Slavery, as odious as it appeared to Franklin and his fellow Society members, had to be set aside for the greater good.⁷⁸

Over the next few years, Franklin would complete small tasks for the Society. He wrote letters to state officials, asking them to end slave trafficking in their states, and also wrote to fellow abolitionists such as Granville Sharp and John Wright. He also signed off on a plan to “improve the condition of free blacks,” which included organizing committees to oversee the education of free black children, find employment for free blacks, and give advice to them.⁷⁹ This work culminated on February 3, 1790, when the Society sent to Congress a request to abolish the slave trade in America.⁸⁰ The legislative body dismissed it, saying that Congress had no authority to do it, but several Congressmen who were Southern slaveholders, were incensed at the group and Franklin in particular, for even suggesting such a thing. James Jackson, representative of Georgia, took to the floor of the House and denounced the abolitionists, arguing that the Bible justified slavery, and that the Southern states’ economies would be crippled without the institution, since no one else could work in the hot fields. Amidst accusations of hypocrisy and senility, Franklin wrote a satirical rebuttal of Jackson’s speech, under the guise of “Historicus” in the March 25 edition of the *Federal Gazette*. Historicus relayed a speech given by one Sidi Mehemet Ibrahim to the council of Algiers, defending the practice of enslaving white Christians from a petition to abolish slavery. Ibrahim repeated

⁷⁸ Waldstreicher, 233-234.

⁷⁹ Albert Henry Smyth, ed., *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1907), 10:127-129.

⁸⁰ *PBF*, unpublished (46:392).

Jackson's arguments, but with a Muslim twist: the Koran justified slavery, the economy of Algiers could not function without the goods that they produced, and the slaves were being converted to Islam (which was better for them than Christianity).⁸¹ In turning the tables on Jackson's arguments, Franklin had the last laugh.

Benjamin Franklin died on April 17, 1790. In his will, he forgave all of his relatives' debts to him, and freed his daughter's slave, Bob. Sadly, Bob spent most of his time looking down bottles of liquor, and asked his former mistress to take him back as a slave. She denied his request, but allowed him to live in her house, which he did until his death.⁸²

⁸¹ Wood, 228-29. Waldstreicher, 237.

⁸² Isaacson, 470; Lopez and Herbert, 306; Waldstreicher, 239.

Chapter 7: Interpretations

What is there to be said about Franklin and slavery? Ultimately, his antislavery credentials cannot be ignored, but we also cannot conveniently ignore facts that do not fit into that narrative. It is clear that Franklin was strongly prejudiced against blacks for many years, and that this prejudice was evident in his letters and public musings. His attitude seemed to change after his work with the Associates of Dr. Bray, but as pointed out earlier, he also indicated that his prejudices would not necessarily change based upon that experience. The abolitionist sentiments that filled many of his post-1770 letters were addressed to other abolitionists; there is no record of him actually debating slavery with anyone. During the Revolution, he viewed blacks primarily through the lens of insurrection, mentioning Dunmore's Proclamation in many of his letters. The general narrative of Franklin and slavery is filled with apparent contradictions as well as room for debate. Over the course of researching, I have found several different interpretations of this aspect of Franklin's life, which will be briefly examined below.

There is no consistent school of thought throughout these sources, as the authors that I have read all have a slightly different view of the topic. Gordon S. Wood, author of *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin*, views Franklin's work with the Society as being part of his lifelong mission to improve the lives of his fellow men.⁸³ Gary B. Nash, author of *The Forgotten Fifth* and co-author of *Freedom By Degrees*, notes, somewhat disappointedly, that Franklin was the most active abolitionist out of all of the Founding Fathers, but did not use as much of his public capital to further the cause as he could

⁸³ Wood, 227.

have.⁸⁴ He also states that while Franklin revised his will to free Peter and Jemima in the event of his death, he outlived both of them.⁸⁵ In *The Forgotten Fifth*, he argues that it is debatable on whether or not the Three-Fifths Compromise was truly necessary. If it was not, then the episode casts aspersions on the genuineness of Franklin's pragmatism in that situation: was Franklin truly being a pragmatist and putting his principles aside to ensure the unity of the new nation, or was he simply looking for a temporary and politically expedient solution to the issue, leaving the matter of slavery to be settled by future generations?⁸⁶

Biographer Walter Isaacson accounts for Franklin's profit from slavery in *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life*, as well as the reprint of "Observations Concerning The Increase of Mankind" in 1769 that omitted all of the prejudicial rhetoric concerning blacks. Isaacson views Franklin's work with the Associates of Dr. Bray as the tipping point for Franklin's beliefs regarding slavery, and characterizes him as "one of America's most active abolitionists" during Franklin's sunset years.⁸⁷ That second point is debatable, seeing as Franklin did not do very much to further the cause other than write letters (which would have naturally been part of his capacity as president of the Society) and attach his signature to public statements and petitions. Given Franklin's health problems in his old age, it is possible that Isaacson's characterization is not far from the mark, but it seems overly generous at first glance.

⁸⁴ Gary B. Nash, *The Forgotten Fifth: African-Americans in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 93.

⁸⁵ Gary B. Nash, "Slavery's Foe, at Last," *Time.com*, July 7, 2003, <http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy.uwec.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=10124320&site=ehost-live> (accessed 28 November 2010).

⁸⁶ Nash discusses the matter in the chapter titled "Could Slavery Have Been Abolished?" Please note that his argument's specific implications for Franklin are not stated there; the analysis is mine.

⁸⁷ Isaacson, 153.

An edited collection of some of Franklin's writings, appearing in the January 1919 issue of *The Journal of Negro History*, reveals a hagiographical interpretation of Franklin's dealings with slavery. The editor of the article states that Franklin was involved in antislavery from the very beginning of his career, when he provided printing services for antislavery advocates. Franklin himself claimed as much in an unpublished letter to John Wright in November 1789: "I printed pamphlets in 1729 and 1736, [thereby] sowing seeds in your profession."⁸⁸ However, Franklin did not print his name on the title pages of these pamphlets and had the authors buy and distribute their own copies, so that he would not be associated with their message. The author of this article did not mention such information. Also, the author quotes at length from the original printing of "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind," in an attempt to show that Franklin's arguments against slavery were both economic and moral. However, the section where Franklin wrote, "Every slave [is] by nature a thief" appears alongside the editor's praise of Franklin's antislavery beliefs. Franklin was not exactly proving himself to be a friend of blacks in 1755, despite the editor's attempt to prove otherwise.⁸⁹

Franklin scholar Claude-Anne Lopez also views Franklin's antislavery work as being genuine, and offers an interesting explanation for Franklin's shift in beliefs regarding slavery. She hypothesizes that Franklin's time in France, spent mainly in socialite dinners and salons, exposed him to Enlightenment ideals about the natural rights of man, and is responsible for the so-called "sea change." She admits that there is no written corroboration of this hypothesis, only her own guesswork.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Benjamin Franklin, "Benjamin Franklin and Freedom," *The Journal of Negro History* 4, no. 1 (1919): 46; BF to John Wright, November 4, 1789, *PBF*, 46:345 (unpublished)

⁸⁹ Franklin: *Benjamin Franklin and Freedom*, 41-42.

⁹⁰ Lopez, 196-200.

Finally, the most critical viewpoint of Franklin's life came from David Waldstreicher, author of *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution*. He argues that Franklin's public antislavery statements were more political than ideological, that Franklin's abolitionist work is best understood as a mere footnote to an otherwise prejudiced life, and that Franklin's pragmatism outweighed the moral dimension of slavery. Antislavery, according to Waldstreicher, was merely an image for Franklin: a prop to be used when it was convenient and discarded when not.⁹¹ It is not as if this negative view of Franklin is completely without merit. Franklin's first public stance against slavery, printed in *The London Chronicle*, could easily be interpreted as a condemnation of Britain, rather than slavery. "Pharisaical Britain! to pride thyself in setting free *a single Slave* that happens to land on thy coasts, while... so many *hundreds of thousands* are dragged into a slavery..."⁹²

Given the intricacies of his story, it almost seems foolish to make a conclusive statement about Franklin and slavery. He was not as strong an abolitionist as his rhetoric made him out to be, but he does not come across as a liar, either. It is difficult to judge his words and deeds because it is hard to say where the pragmatism ended and the principles began. His experience with indentured servitude and eventual rejection of it may have influenced his early opinion of slavery in that he was uncomfortable with *someone else* benefiting from *his* labor. Tellingly, he did not seem as uncomfortable with unfree labor as long as *he* was the one profiting from it, as his work with the *Pennsylvania Gazette* demonstrates. He owned at least seven slaves over the course of his life, and we know for certain that Franklin never freed any of them while he was alive: he

⁹¹ Waldstreicher, 57, 216-221, 229-232.

⁹² *PBF*, 19:187. The "single slave" to whom he is referring is James Somerset, a slave freed in 1772 after much legal controversy. Waldstreicher, 198-199.

had made a provision in his will to free Peter and Jemima if he died in England, but there is no evidence that shows that Peter came home with Franklin.⁹³

One could examine his involvement with the Associates of Dr. Bray, his antislavery writings, and post-Revolution abolitionist work, and conclude that he did those things purely in an effort to build political capital or cement his legacy, but such an evaluation seems very cynical. Given the different perspectives on this topic, I believe that the most reasonable interpretation is to take him at his word: once confronted by reality, his racial prejudices were abandoned and he eventually believed it necessary to take a moral stand against slavery. It seems only logical that Franklin possessed a measure of true antislavery sentiment, because it is very unlikely that he would have been involved with the abolition movement, even in name only, if he were always prejudiced at heart. He was a pragmatist, yes, but he does not appear to be a liar.

⁹³ Nash: *Franklin and Slavery*.

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-This is the book published in 1769 that contains, among other things, a reprint of "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind" which excised the racial prejudice found in the original printing of 1755.

Labaree, Leonard W., ed. *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*. 38 vols. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959.

-This is the main primary source used, which contains all of Franklin's surviving correspondence, donated from various sources. New volumes are being published and all correspondence, including yet-unpublished letters, is available at www.franklinpapers.org.

Smyth, Albert Henry, ed. *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin*. 10 vols. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1907.

-This was going to be the original primary source for this paper, but the amount of letters in this collection pales in comparison to *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*. It was useful for finding a sole document that is not yet available from the *Papers* collection, but that is all.

Secondary Sources

Berlin, Ira. *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.

-This source was used to gather background information and statistics of slavery in the colonial era. Its usefulness was limited since its scope is much broader than that of this paper, but provided some helpful information nonetheless. It would be very useful for a general look at slavery in early America.

Brands, H.W. *The First American: The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin*. New York: Anchor Books, 2002.

-This was the main source used for biographical information. It is the most interesting and engaging biography out of the several that I looked at when preparing the paper, and would be very useful to anyone looking for a detailed picture of Franklin's life.

Cogliano, Francis D. *Revolutionary America 1763-1815*. New York: Routledge, 2009.

-This is a textbook that was used to supply explanations for specific Revolutionary War events mentioned herein. It is written for a college audience, but is accessible enough that anyone interested in the Revolution could read it.

Franklin, Benjamin, "Benjamin Franklin and Freedom," *The Journal of Negro History* 4,

no. 1 (1919).

-This is an edited collection of several of Franklin's writings that deal with slavery. The editor's interpretation of Franklin should be taken with a grain of salt, as he or she ignores the negative aspects of Franklin's opinions for the purpose of praising him.

Higginbotham, Jr., A. Leon. *In The Matter of Color: Race & The American Legal Process: The Colonial Period*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.

-This book was only used in a few sections of the paper, but it offered very useful information about slave laws in America during the colonial era. Anyone interested in this topic could use it.

Isaacson, Walter. *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004.

-This is the second biography used in the paper. It is not as detailed as Brands', but this does not detract from its usefulness as the author offers an interpretation of Franklin and slavery that other authors do not.

Lopez, Claude-Anne. *My Life With Benjamin Franklin*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.

-This collection contains many of Lopez's writings about Franklin. It was very helpful when studying Franklin and slavery, but would be a valuable resource for anyone studying Franklin in general.

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Nash, Gary B. *The Forgotten Fifth: African-Americans in the Age of Revolution*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006.

-This compact volume does not deal with Franklin specifically, but focuses on the broader topic of the black experience in the American Revolution (as the subtitle suggests).

—. *The Urban Crucible*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978.

-This book had limited application to my paper, having been used just to find information on slavery in Boston during Franklin's indentured servitude. If more time had been available, I would have searched the book for additional information on the economics of slavery.

- . “Slavery’s Foe, at Last,” Time.com, July 7, 2003,
<http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy.uwec.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&N=10124320&site=ehost-live> (accessed 28 November 2010).
 -I used this to corroborate information about the lives of Peter and Jemima (two of Franklin’s slaves). It is also helpful in gauging the popularity of recent studies of Franklin and slavery, seeing as this appeared in a relatively recent issue of Time.
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 -This source had the most information about Franklin’s work with the Associates of Dr. Bray, and was invaluable in finding details about their meetings, schools, and other endeavors.
- Waldstreicher, David. *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2004.
 -Other than the Brands biography, this was the most-used secondary source in this paper, as it has the most information about the specific topic of Franklin and slavery. The author has a very critical opinion of Franklin, which is not necessarily bad, but his analysis seems overly cynical at times.
- Wood, Gordon S. *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin*. New York: Penguin Books, 2004.
 -This source was used to find information about Franklin’s final work with the Pennsylvania abolitionist group, as well as the controversy surrounding the group’s petition to Congress to end the slave trade.