

Benjamin Franklin's America  
ENGA 6579

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This course will combine the focus of a seminar with the range of a survey by reading the writings of Benjamin Franklin within the broader contexts of eighteenth-century American literary culture. It will discover in Franklin's diverse body of work illuminating windows into print culture, satire and belles-lettres, science and commerce, upward-mobility, and race, class, and gender politics, as well as paradigmatic expressions of public sphere rhetoric and literary self-representation. But it will also seek to test Franklin's claims of representativeness against the claims of other eighteenth-century American writers and some of his most important contemporary critics.

Required Texts:

- *Benjamin Franklin: Silence Dogood, The Busy-Body, and Early Writings* (Library of America)
- *Benjamin Franklin: Autobiography, Poor Richard, and Later Writings* (Library of America)
- Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (Penguin Classics)
- Foster, *The Coquette* (Penguin Classics)
- Brown, *Wieland* (Penguin Classics)
- Madison, Hamilton, and Jay, *The Federalist Papers* (Penguin Classics)
- Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Penguin Classics)
- Course-reader (CR)

Course Requirements:

Archival essay: Within the various electronic archives of early American and eighteenth-century writing available through Fordham libraries (*Early American Newspapers* and *Early American Imprints*) you will discover two generically-distinct but related documents on a subject relevant to Benjamin Franklin's writings and eighteenth-century American culture. Then you will write a short essay (5-7 pp.), whose research and close textual readings put the documents into conversation with Franklin and with each other and raise pertinent critical questions. This essay is due in class on October 16.

Research essay: Drawing on the readings of the seminar and your own original research, you will write a substantial essay (around 20 pp.) concerned with some aspect of eighteenth-century American literature or culture. This essay is due in my mailbox on December 20. All students must meet with me well in advance of the due date to discuss possible texts, topics, and arguments.

Presentation: Each week, one or more students will begin our discussion by presenting a series of questions, contexts, hypotheses, or challenges that will inform our exploration of the assigned texts. Please limit your presentation to five minutes.

Participation: Because a graduate seminar aims not only to teach specific texts and ideas but to exemplify scholarly practice, you will be expected to read all assigned texts carefully, take extensive notes on your reading, come to each seminar meeting prepared to engage actively in discussions, and meet all other seminar responsibilities promptly and professionally.

*The Benjamin Franklin Papers* will be an important resource for every member of the seminar. They are accessible in two forms:

- The hardcopies are held by Walsh Library (Call No. E302.6.F7 D7). Please use them in the library and do not check them out;
- The digital edition is available online at <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin>.

Schedule:

- Sept 6 Introduction
- Sept 11 *Autobiography*, Parts 1-4
- Sept 18 Print Culture  
“Silence Dogood, Nos. 1-12”  
“Hugo Grim on Silence Dogood”  
“Rules for *The New-England Currant*”  
“Defense of James Franklin to Samuel Sewall”  
“Timothy Wagstaff”  
“Abigail Twitterfield”  
“Epitaph”  
“The Busy-Body, Nos. 1-8”  
“The Printer to the Reader”  
“Printer’s Errors”  
“Apologies for Printers”  
“On Censure or Backbiting”  
Letter to Samuel Mather, 7/7/73  
Warner, from *The Letters of the Republic* (CR)
- Sept 25 Class, Commerce, and Upward Mobility  
“On Titles of Honor”  
“Anthony Afterwit”  
“Rules for a Club Formerly Established in Philadelphia, 1732”  
“Proposals and Queries to be Asked the Junto”  
“Blackamore, on Mulatto Gentlemen”  
“Obadiah Plainman Defends the Meaner Sort”  
“Obadiah Plainman to Tom Trueman”  
“Advice to a Young Tradesman, Written by an Old One”  
“Rules to be Observed in Trade”  
“On the Labouring Poor”  
“Information to Those Who Would Remove to America”  
*Poor Richard*, 1733, 1737, 1738, 1748, 1749, and 1758  
Hamilton, from *The Itinerarium* (CR)  
Wood, from *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (CR)
- Oct 2 Gender, Society, and Pleasure  
“Rules and Maxims for Promoting Matrimonial Happiness”  
“Lying Shopkeepers”  
“Replies by ‘Betty Diligent’ and Mercator”  
“On Simplicity”  
“Celia Single”  
“Alice Addertongue”  
“On Drunkenness”  
“Meditation on a Quart Mugg”  
“Reply to a Piece of Advice”  
“The Drinker’s Dictionary”  
“Apology for the Young Man in Goal”  
“Speech of Miss Polly Baker”  
“The Elysian Fields”  
“The Morals of Chess”  
“The Whistle”  
“The Levee”  
(continued)

“Drinking Song”  
“On Wine”  
“Dialogue Between the Goat and Mr. Franklin”  
“The Handsome and the Deformed Leg”  
“Articles for a Treaty of Peace with Madame Brillon”  
Letter to Jane Mecom, 1/6/26-7  
Letter to Mary Stevenson, 3/25/63  
Letter to Georgiana Shipley, 9/26/72  
Murray, “On the Equality of the Sexes” (CR)  
Erkkilla, “Franklin and the Revolutionary Body” (CR)

Oct 16

Religion and Morals  
“A Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure and Pain”  
“Plan of Conduct”  
“Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion”  
“On the Providence of God in the Government of the World”  
“Doctrine to be Preached”  
“Men are Naturally Benevolent as well as Selfish”  
“Self-Denial Not the Essence of Virtue”  
“Dialogue Between Two Presbyterians”  
“A Letter from Father Abraham”  
“A Tale”  
Letter to Josiah and Abiah Franklin, 4/13/38  
Letter to Jane Mecom, 7/28/43  
Letter to Joseph Huey, 6/6/53  
Letter to \_\_\_\_\_, 12/13/57  
Letter to Lord Kames, 5/3/60  
Letter to Sarah Franklin, 11/8/64  
Letter to Ezra Stiles, 3/9/90  
Edwards, “Personal Narrative” (CR)  
Edwards, *Nature of True Virtue* (CR)

Oct 23

Public Life and Science  
“High Tide in Boston”  
“A Modest Enquiry into the Necessity of a Paper-Currency”  
“The Aurora Borealis”  
“Praise for William Penn”  
“On Constancy”  
“On Protection of Towns from Fire”  
“The Art of Saying Little in Much”  
“Essay on Paper Currency”  
“A Proposal for Promoting Useful Knowledge”  
“Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania”  
“Rules for Making Oneself a Disagreeable Companion”  
“Idea of the English School”  
“On a Pertinacious Obstinacy in Opinion”  
“Appeal for the Hospital”  
“The Kite Experiment”  
“Of Lightening”  
“Phonetic Alphabet” and “To Mary Stevenson”  
Letter to John Perkins, 2/4/53  
Letter to Cadwallader Colden, 2/28/53  
Letter to Mary Stevenson, 9/13/60  
Letter to Giambatista Beccaria, 7/13/62  
Letter to Noah Webster, 12/26/89  
Baker, “Franklin’s Autobiography and the Credibility of Personality” (CR)

Oct 30

Empire and Revolution

“Queries on a Pennsylvania Militia”  
“The Necessity of Self-Defense”  
“On Transported Felons”  
“Rattle-Snakes for Felons”  
“Observations on the Increase of Mankind”  
“Join or Die”  
“The Albany Plan of Union”  
“No Taxation Without Representation”  
“A Dialogue Between X, Y, and Z”  
“A Defense of the Americans”  
“Invectives Against the Americans”  
“‘Homespun’ Celebrates Indian Corn”  
“Causes of the American Discontents”  
“The Rise and Present State of Our Misunderstanding”  
“Rules by Which a Great Empire May Be Reduced to a Small One”  
“An Edict by the King of Prussia”  
“The Sale of the Hessians”  
Letter to James Parker, 3/20/50  
Letter to Timothy Folger, 9/29/69  
Letter to Josiah Tucker, 2/26/74  
Letter to William Strahan, 7/5/75  
Letter to Comte de Vergennes, 6/10/81  
Letter to William Franklin, 8/16/84  
Looby, from *Voicing America* (CR)

Nov 6

Race and Slavery

“A Narrative of the Late Massacres”  
“A Conversation on Slavery”  
“The Sommersett Case and the Slave Trade”  
“Remarks Concerning the Savages of North America”  
“An Address to the Public”  
“Plan for Improving the Condition of the Free Blacks”  
“Sidi Mehemet Ibrahim on the Slave Trade”  
Letter to John Waring, 12/17/63  
Letter to Anthony Benezet, 8/22/72  
Occum, *A Short Narrative of My Life* (CR)  
Equiano, from *Narrative of the Life of Gustavus Vassa* (CR)  
Waldstreicher, from *Runaway America* (CR)

Nov 13

Poetry (CR)

Moore, “The Female Patriots”  
Griffits, “Inscription On a Curious Chamberstove,”  
Griffits, “On Reading Some Paragraphs in ‘The Crisis,’ April, ‘77”  
Freneau, “The Power of Fancy”  
Freneau, “A Political Litany”  
Freneau, “The Wild Honey Suckle”  
Freneau, “On Observing a Large Red-streak Apple”  
Freneau, “The Indian Burying Ground”  
Freneau, “The House of Night”  
Warren, “A Thought on the Inestimable Blessing of Reason”  
Warren, “To Mr. Adams”  
Stockton, “Epistle to Mr. Stockton”  
Stockton, “Addressed to General Washington in the Year 1777”  
Stockton, “To Laura”  
(continued)

Stockton, "Sensibility, and Ode"  
 Fergusson, "On the Mind's Being Engrossed By One Subject"  
 Bleeker, "Written in the Retreat from Burgoyne"  
 Wheatley, 'To The University of Cambridge"  
 Wheatley, "On Being Brought From Africa to America"  
 Wheatley, "On Imagination"  
 Wheatley, "To the Right Honorable William, Earl of Dartmouth"  
 Wheatley, "On Recollection"  
 Wheatley, "To S.M., a Young African Painter, On Seeing his Works"  
 Morton, "Lines to the Breath of Kindness"  
 Drinker, "I Stay Much at Home"  
 Barlow, from *The Vision of Columbus*  
 Dwight, from *Greenfield Hill*

- Nov 20      Crevecoeur  
                  *Letters from an American Farmer*
- Nov 27      Jefferson and the Federalists  
                  *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Queries 1-6, 8, 11, 13-15, 17-19  
                  *The Federalist Papers*, 1-10, 14, 15, 35, 37-39, 47, 54, 57, 85
- Dec 4        Foster  
                  *The Coquette*
- Dec 11      Brown  
                  *Wieland*
- Dec 18      Conclusions  
                  Washington, "Farewell Address" (CR)  
                  Ames, "American Literature" (CR)  
                  Franklin, "Speech in the Convention at the Conclusion of its Deliberations"