

Benjamin Franklin

Sometimes when a country is just getting organized, its citizens are considered to be uneducated, out of touch or primitive. But exactly opposite was the truth when the great American experiment began to take shape. The world did not see America as provincial or simple and that is due to a large part to the work of the man many that many have called "The First American". That man was Benjamin Franklin.

Benjamin Franklin stands out amongst those we would call "The Founding Fathers" because he was neither a military man nor a politician. He was one of the few we think of as one of our nation's fathers that never served as president. But that does not mean that his contributions to the start of this great country were not profound and far reaching.

Benjamin Franklin could easily be described as what was popularly known in his day as a "renaissance man". He was truly proficient in many fields of discipline and he had a mind that was fascinated with all areas of study and knowledge. As such he brought to the discussions with his fellow founding fathers a knowledge of political theory, an awareness of history and an ability to speculate on the perfect union that was crucial to the laying the conceptual foundation of what America would come to be when it blossomed into reality.

For many, we remember Benjamin Franklin as a great scientist and inventor. And to be sure he qualified in that realm as well. Every school boy or girl has that image of him flying that kite to capture electricity to test his theories that is so popular in our mythology of his accomplishments. But these images are no myth for Franklin was truly a great inventor contributing to the world such important innovations as the lightning rod, swim fins, the catheter, the harmonica and bifocals. In that way, Benjamin Franklin had as much in common with Michelangelo as he did with Thomas Jefferson and indeed he was in good company if listed with either.

But it was as a political theorist and a philosopher that Franklin made huge contributions to the development of the American experiment in its early formations. It was he who was able to envision the concept of a new American nation. But his talents did not end at his ability to use his powerful mind to envision the future so well. He was also a talented communicator, writer and teacher so he was able to use his eloquence and magnetic personality to promote the idea of an American nation both within the colonies and internationally.

Benjamin Franklin was truly a citizen of the world as he was as comfortable in the courtyards of France as he was in the pubs of Boston. In fact, he was so

popular on both sides of the Atlantic that he served as America's first ambassador to France and therein lies one of his greatest contributions to the independence of the new country. He was able to use his vast popularity and his trained powers of persuasion to cause the French to enter the battle on the side of the colonies against the British which was a major contributor to the success of the revolution to free America from English control and launch the independent American nation.

Franklin's writings have become treasured documents among the archives of this important time in American history. But just as much as his written work, his influence as a thinker, an intellectual and an international diplomat set the standard for others to follow after him and truly established America as a member of the international community of nations.