What Politeness Demanded:
Ethnic Omissions in Franklin's *Autobiography*

Marc L. Harris
Penn State University

One of the most surprising aspects of Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* is one of its least noted: readers cannot possibly carry away from it the least inkling of Philadelphia's multi-ethnic nature. In Franklin's time this diversity was one of the city's signal features. The majority of people there and in Pennsylvania were neither English nor Welsh in descent but of German, Scotch-Irish, African, and other ethnicities. Franklin could not have omitted ethnicity from this autobiographical world out of ignorance. The real-life Franklin knew and dealt with Pennsylvania's ethnic groups every day of his career, and many of his writings show a strong awareness of their presence and even of their ways of life. But he wrote the *Autobiography* in such a way that his narrator, tracing the young character's development, refers only tangentially to ethnic groups and ethnicity without in any way indicating their significance in the city's life, and even avoids mentioning some important ethnic contacts in the real Franklin's career. As a result of this silent elision, Franklin's narration occurs against the backdrop of a Philadelphia without any apparent ethnicity.

It is possible to document Pennsylvania's ethnic diversity and to demonstrate that outsiders found it conspicuous. Franklin too was well aware of the ethnic population during the period the *Autobiography* discusses. The first part of this paper attempts to show this. But why did Franklin decide to write ethnicity out of Philadelphia, and what does his decision signify? These questions are very complex. To answer them the second part of this paper will examine the influence on Franklin of a new behavioral standard, politeness, which emerged early in the eighteenth century. Usually understood today to mean refinement, politeness was used by many of those who influenced Franklin to describe a particular kind of virtuous behavior and bearing. It grew out of urban life, and was meant to extend virtue through regulating the behavior of men in groups. I will argue that politeness is a major organizing principle of the *Autobiography*, paralleling Franklin's real-life

adoption of this standard by 1730, and that politeness and ethnicity were mutually exclusive categories. Both because the *Autobiography* is a polite narrative itself, and because it recommends polite behavior as a solution to American conditions in the 1780s when Franklin made his final revisions, ethnicity had to be excluded.

It is well-documented that both Philadelphia and Pennsylvania were home to a large and diverse non-British population during the eighteenth century. When Franklin arrived in the city in 1723, its population of about 5,000 already included large numbers of Germans and Scotch-Irish in addition to its English and Welsh inhabitants. Over the following thirty years, while Franklin became first a prominent printer and then a professional public figure and noted natural philosopher, the city was inundated by immigrants. Some 40,000 German-speakers landed at Philadelphia in the period and a further 30,000 Scotch-Irish migrants entered Pennsylvania, along with growing numbers of African slaves. While some mixing among these populations did occur, as Stephanie Grauman Wolf has shown, Pennsylvania was no melting pot. Around 1750, wrote Carl and Jessica Bridenbaugh, English Philadelphians were often contemptuous of immigrants, and especially of Germans. This was, they explain,

> the natural expression of suspicions engendered by the presence of an alien group with its own language and customs, which resisted amalgamation by the maintenance of its own schools, churches and press, and whose general poverty made it a potential problem to the community. To some extent this condescension was extended to include Ulster Scots and "bog-trotting Teagues."

Distinctions among English, Germans, Scotch-Irish, and Irish mattered a great deal at mid-century.[1]

By 1760, while Franklin represented the Pennsylvania assembly's interests in London and as British arms conquered French North America, migration had helped Pennsylvania become the third-largest British colony on the continent. A recent estimate holds that, of the province's 175,000 residents, about 25% to 30% were English or Welsh, about the same proportion Scotch-Irish, and about 40% to 45% were German immigrants or their descendants. About 5,500 black people also resided in Pennsylvania, virtually all slaves in the eastern part of the province.[2] Philadelphia numbered close to 19,000 residents, almost one in nine Pennsylvanians,

and had outstripped Boston and New York in both size and trade. In ethnic distribution its population seems to have mirrored the whole province, though it probably held a smaller proportion of Scotch-Irish residents and more Germans overall.[3] Thus, Franklin rose to prominence in a Philadelphia surrounded by an exploding population almost unique in British America in its ethnic diversity.

These developments, and their visible results, made a powerful impression on some of Franklin's philosophically-minded contemporaries. Doctor Alexander Hamilton, the chronicler of Annapolis's Tuesday Club, twice passed through Philadelphia on a round trip to New England in 1744, just before Franklin retired from active printing. An Edinburgh grandee by birth, Hamilton had the habit of classifying people by their ethnicity and was quick to note the many different groups he saw in the ordinary course of affairs. On his first Saturday in town, for example, he saw a fight between a master and a servant who, "by his dialect, was a Scotsman"; the next day Hamilton's slave attended the Lutheran church and heard the sermon in "High Dutch." On his return trip in the fall, a barber's "Irish brogue" so offended him that he gave it as an excuse to leave town as soon as he could. Hamilton was also careful to note some greater effects of the city's ethnic mix. "The Germans and High Dutch are of late become very numerous here," he wrote, with the effect that Quakers maintained political control by "making sure [of] the interest of the Palatines in this province, who of late have turned so numerous that they can sway the votes which way they please." The June 8th midday dinner at a local tavern sums up Hamilton's observation of Philadelphia's mixed ethnicity:

> I dined att a taveren with a very mixed company of different nations and religions. There were Scots, English, Dutch, Germans, and Irish; there were Roman Catholicks, Church men, Presbyterians, Quakers, Newlightmen, Methodists, Seventh day men, Moravians, Anabaptists, and one Jew. The whole company consisted of 25 planted round an oblong table in a great hall well sto[c]ked with flys.

In 1744, then, with at least three decades of polyglot immigration yet to come, the number and mixture of non-English people in Philadelphia already appeared extraordinary to Hamilton.[4]

Five years later the Swedish traveler Peter Kalm, who managed to visit Franklin, made similar observations. His travel account enumerates a multiplicity of churches,

including several Swedish and German congregations, and notes the cemetery for black Philadelphians on the outskirts of town. It also points out that the city supported a German weekly newspaper along with its two English-language weeklies. As to the population itself, Kalm summarizes: "The town is now well filled with inhabitants of many nations, who in regard to their country, religion and trade are very different from each other." [5]

The real-life Franklin clearly knew of the city's multi-ethnic character and was much more sensitive to its ramifications than either Hamilton or Kalm. Though not mentioned in the *Autobiography*'s account of his rise, this diversity was important in his business career and he had many kinds of contacts with the non-English population. By 1730, within two years of opening his own print shop, Franklin had developed a lucrative trade in German-language imprints. In the 1740s and 1750s he set up partnerships with German printers to serve that market. On two occasions he attempted to print German-language newspapers, though neither succeeded because the German sectarians preferred to deal with Christopher Saur. His proposals for civic improvement included several educational and civic projects specifically for the German population, and his pamphlet on the Pennsylvania stove offers as a selling point its similarity to the more healthful centrally-located stove used by Pennsylvania Germans. Contacts with Africans also go back to his active business days, when he advertised the contracts of some indentured servants, many of whom were black, and some slaves. Franklin himself owned at least two slaves for much of his adult life, a couple named Peter and Jemima, and the household owned at least five slaves at various times. In 1750 Franklin rented out one slave to a German printing partner, and he took Peter with him to England on his trips in 1757-62 and 1764-75. Nevertheless, as historians Gary Nash and Jean Soderlund discuss, Franklin did come to oppose slavery by the middle 1770s. [6]

Such real-life acquaintance with ethnicity emerges in many of Franklin's other writings, particularly those of the period discussed in Part III of the *Autobiography*. These publications demonstrate a sharp awareness of different ethnic groups and concern about their place in Pennsylvania society. His notorious derogation of "Palatine boors" appeared in the anonymous 1751 edition of his "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind," where he warned against the danger they presented to an English province because of their refractory nature. [7] With large numbers of English people available as potential migrants, he asks "why should the

Palatine Boors be suffered to swarm into our Settlements, and by herding together establish their Language and Manners to the Exclusion of ours?" The pamphlet continues:

> Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a Colony of *Aliens,* who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them, and will never adopt our Language or Customs, any more than they can acquire our Complexion?[8]

Franklin's antipathy to German immigrants at that time was not limited to published materials. In private correspondence in 1753 he approved a friend's proposals to discourage immigration and to allow office-holding only to those who could speak intelligible English. Franklin did think, however, that bounties to encourage intermarriage and erase ethnic distinctions would certainly fail, because neither English nor Germans would ever think members of the other group attractive enough to marry. In this case he was not only sensitive to such distinctions himself but aware of others' sensitivity to them.[9]

Other early writings confirm Franklin's consciousness of difference and his occasional willingness to appeal to prevailing ethnic stereotypes. The original concluding section of his "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind," for example, lays out a color classification system in which the entire human race, with only two exceptions, falls into the categories of "black," "tawny," or "swarthy." All Europeans, including Swedes and Germans, were swarthy, "the Saxons only excepted, who with the English, make the principal Body of White People on the Face of the Earth." The other races he deems inferior, though he does conjecture that this opinion may only reflect a "Partiality" on his part (*P*, 4:234). On the other hand, his earlier pamphlet "Plain Truth," written to urge adoption of a volunteer militia in 1747, praises the military qualities of the English, Scotch-Irish, and Germans (*P*, 3:188-204). To encourage a defensive spirit, he offers readers the lurid prospect of being "subject to the wanton and unbridled Rage, Rapine and Lust of *Negroes, Mollatoes,* and others, the vilest and most abandoned of Mankind" (*P*, 3:198). Aware of the nature of Pennsylvania's population, he was also concerned about the political and social effects of its diversity.

Almost no evidence of the real Franklin's concerns about race and ethnicity, however, or of his contacts with the ethnic population, made its way into the

Autobiography. Franklin's narrator does make explicit references to ethnicity or nationality on twenty-two occasions, but many of them are trivial. Nine are simple identifications. For example, his co-worker Hugh Meredith is introduced as "a Welsh Pensilvanian, 30 Years of Age," while a hapless character on Franklin's first journey to Philadelphia is described as "a drunken Dutchman." (The man's origin is understood to be the Hudson Valley.) Such identifications, with the possible exception of printer Samuel Keimer's as a French sectarian, seem to carry no particular connotations or attributions of character. Keimer's sect, the Camisards or "French Prophets," apparently had a reputation for enthusiastic excitability, and it may be significant that only he and Franklin's scientific enemy Nollet among those so identified have continental backgrounds.[10] On one occasion the narrator offers a joking remark that may be interpreted as an ethnic characterization. Slyly lamenting his early disputatious habits of speech, he says, "Persons of good Sense, I have since observ'd, seldom fall into it, except Lawyers, University Men, and Men of all Sorts that have been bred at Edinborough"; the university apparently magnified a Scottish propensity to quarrelsomeness (*A*, 12).

Another category of reference goes beyond simple identification and may be called "ethnographic curiosities" flowing from the narrator's philosophical character. There are six such observations in the *Autobiography*, half dealing with Euro-Americans and half with Native Americans. One approves and recommends the Dutch practice of training women in accounting, because it enabled the Dutch widow of Franklin's partner to save a major investment for him (*A*, 95-6). Another admires the Dunkers' wisdom in refusing to publish their doctrine. This group, identified only as "another Sect among us" (without mentioning that it was a German one, and rendering its leader Michael Wohlfahrt's name as "Welfare"), thereby managed to avoid the kind of problems faced by the Quakers, who were forever bound by having once printed a renunciation of all wars of all kinds (*A*, 115-6). The last such ethnographic curiosity about Europeans summarizes the submission to their community of the Moravians at Bethlehem, who lived and worked in common and whose elders decided whether prospective marriages were suitable (*A*, 149-50). The context, by reference to nearby Gnadenhut, makes reasonably clear that the sect was German and not located in Philadelphia. As in the case of the Dunkers, however, the important attribution is sectarian or religious rather than ethnic.

While he discusses Dunkers and Moravians as sects "among us," Franklin's narrator clearly sets Native Americans apart even in noticing "ethnographic curiosities" about them. Preparing for treaty negotiations, the narrator mentions that Indians "are extreamly apt to get drunk, and when so are very quarrelsome & disorderly," and then describes an exemplary debauch by the "savages." In war, as he tried to warn General Braddock, they "are dextrous in laying & executing" ambushes through "constant Practice." They also, he notes admiringly, developed ingenious ways both to keep warm in winter without letting fires give away their positions and to keep their gunlocks dry in wet weather (*A*, 120-121, 139, 147-8, 146). Non-ethnographic references to Indians simply state that unspecified groups have massacred whites, at and near Gnadenhut and at Fort George (*A*, 145-6, 161). Additional references mention that the Albany Conference of 1754 was conducted between colonial officials and the Six Nations, and that Indians initially accompanied Braddock into the wilderness (*A*, 130, 139). In all cases it is clear that Indians, even when allied in war, were outside Philadelphia and outside the bounds of the society Franklin's narrator moved in.[11]

Two other ethnic references defy classification. In one case, Franklin's narrator trades quips with political opponents about whether the Assembly's members resembled black slaves enough to be sold for refusing to obey the governor (*A*, 134). The other is the single instance in which Franklin's narrator explicitly recognizes a major ethnic or linguistic division within Pennsylvania society. As part of the province's preparation for a French invasion in 1747 he proposed a day of fasting. The proclamation he wrote was "translated into German, printed in both Languages, and divulg'd thro' the Province" (*A*, 111). While the narrator here acknowledges the presence of Germans, their role is passive and may not even extend into Philadelphia itself.

Ethnic references in the *Autobiography*, in sum, are rarely more than incidental. Where groups can be portrayed in religious rather than ethnic terms Franklin has chosen to do so, and the one identifiable group of ethnic sectarians clearly does not live in Philadelphia. It is at least theoretically possible that this picture of Philadelphia was inadvertent. However, Franklin's own practices make this unlikely. As many scholars have noted, Franklin habitually assumed a persona appropriate for whatever purpose he was writing, ranging from Polly Baker and Richard Saunders through the careful, detached observer of his scientific papers. In no major work is he now

understood to have spoken without artifice or pose, on a straightforwardly personal basis. Even in his private letters he adopted a textual pose that varied with circumstances, and many such letters were probably intended for circulation and possible publication as was common at the time. As Ormond Seavey and Michael Zuckerman have pointed out, Franklin had no confidant; Zuckerman has even suggested that Franklin did not have a "private self" in the sense we now understand. Whether he did or not, he surely took pains not to reveal himself directly to anyone else. Thus, it makes no sense to treat the *Autobiography*'s narrator as anything other than a textual persona on the order of Richard Saunders.[12]

For many modern readers it can be as frustrating as it is necessary to separate the narrator from the writer so radically. Such readers, living under a Freudian shadow, expect autobiographies to bear hints and traces of sincere confession, however much the account itself obscures and prevaricates. It is more consonant with Franklin's history and with eighteenth-century practice, however, to treat the *Autobiography* as the presentation of an exemplary life. But Franklin has enormously complicated the matter because all three personages involved with the *Autobiography* share the name Benjamin Franklin. First is the character Benjamin Franklin, the young man whose life, opinions, and development are narrated in the book. Second is the narrator Benjamin Franklin, the old man who describes and comments on the younger character's trajectory through the world. Third, and most difficult, is the real-life writer named Benjamin Franklin, who created the other two and the world in which they moved. As Ormond Seavey has written of the author, "the *Autobiography* deliberately fabricates an identity, purporting to be that of Franklin as a boy and a man." The real Franklin, with his reputation and stature in the real world, stands behind the *Autobiography* and lends force to the system of life espoused there. The real Franklin, however, is not identical with the narrator; his decisions shape the account which the narrator presents. He does not speak as the narrator Benjamin Franklin, in other words, but *through* the narrator and the text because he has decided what the narrator and character say and do. Thus the narrator must be regarded as a created character and the world in which he and his younger self moved as a created world. That being the case, Franklin's purposes in portraying a Philadelphia without apparent ethnicity are important in understanding the work.[13]

One possible purpose is a tactical retrospective polishing of the author Franklin's image. In presenting the career of the character Benjamin Franklin, the author

clearly wanted to portray his alter ego as a benevolent, humble, and popular figure. Attending to the city's ethnic divisions, especially when he began writing in 1771, might have recalled some unpopular and divisive political maneuvering on his part in the 1750s and 1760s. As a factional politician he had relied on a voting coalition of German sectarians and Philadelphia Quakers, and to retain power this group refused to extend representation to Scotch-Irish and German settlers on the frontier. In the war crisis of 1755, the German sectarians threatened to desert his coalition, ally with the frontiersmen, and seize control of provincial politics. Franklin survived only by forcing the Quakers to allow passage of a defense bill. He then rebuilt his coalition using German and Scotch-Irish votes. But he never forgave the Germans for their perfidy, either then or in 1764, when Philadelphia Germans defected from him and cost him his seat in the Assembly. (From that point until the Constitutional Convention we recall that he served most of his public career abroad, and some of it under a cloud.[14]). Attention to these dealings might also have opened up controversial aspects of his career less closely tied to ethnic groups but equally destructive of the autobiographical persona of modest geniality, ingenuity, and efficiency he so clearly wishes to present.[15]

Although such practical considerations had their place in shaping the role of ethnicity in Franklin's narrative, scholars agree that there are deeper issues at work. Jack P. Greene has called attention to Franklin's "greater British Empire" loyalty to the "dispersed polity" as it existed before the revolutionary crisis, and Esmond Wright has stressed Franklin's self-identification as an "Old England" man whose mental geography continued to center on England and its metropolis. Franklin, after all, lived in England for all but two years from 1757 to 1775. Whatever label we apply, it is important to recall how well-integrated he was into the wider Atlantic world before the empire exploded after 1773. He had worked in London print shops and even taken part in pamphlet controversies as a very young man there; later he rubbed shoulders with imperial rulers (and raised their backs) as a colonial agent, held the imperial post of colonial postmaster, and gloried in his honorary Oxford doctorate and election to the Royal Society. Membership in that society capped and validated his life-long efforts in the trans-national and trans-Atlantic republic of letters, which for him centered on London. When he began his memoirs in 1771 he hardly expected a revolution against this world; only in revision, in the 1780s, did he insert some small premonitions of discord.[16] Greene's and Wright's

accounts together suggest that Franklin began in 1771 by presenting himself as an exemplary public man of the "Old England" tradition. Accordingly, he then implicitly modeled Philadelphia's public life on London, a capital where imperial business was done in English by Englishmen (and Scotsmen). The lack of apparent ethnicity must be understood as Anglophilia in this context.[17]

In another vein, Christopher Looby has recently written about Franklin's life-long need to reduce conflict and achieve harmony through language events. He did this directly, Looby argues, in his plan to rationalize spelling by creating a phonetic English alphabet, and more indirectly in the *Autobiography* by eliding or deferring discussion of the single most important conflict of his time, the Revolution. In this sense his memoir's silence about ethnicity may be taken as another linguistic deferral or denial of actual conflicts. Thus this portrayal would be partly a deliberate choice, having definite political and social goals, and partly an unconscious one, with both aspects rooted in Franklin's personal psychology. Franklin's attention to harmony is very important to the *Autobiography*, and may well be partly psychological in origin. However, as I will attempt to show, a desire for outward harmony is also related to very powerful cultural developments which found extended expression in the *Autobiography*.[18]

The most important of these cultural developments was politeness. Richard Bushman has recently traced one important aspect of this eighteenth-century behavioral ideal. In mid-century colonial gentry and would-be gentry imported and adopted standards of politeness or gentility to differentiate themselves from the common sort. They learned these new behavioral forms from conduct books and conversation manuals originally developed for courtiers, and Bushman argues that the books beckoned readers into a world of courtliness, exclusivity, and refinement.[19]

Such manuals, however, beckoned other readers in other directions. They guided the conduct of early modern literary societies and later of other self-selecting, self-organizing groups. Such groups often pursued goals with political implications, and Jürgen Habermas has identified them as key elements in the development of the "public sphere" through which the modern state emerged as a new institution apart from the sovereign. Conduct books, and particularly conversation manuals, helped the new institutions of the public sphere to order themselves and to conduct their business without reference to the court or its ways. Instead, they acquired

internal order through the newly-emerging practice of "sociability." Politeness, in this sense, was a means to develop public personality and public influence, but within a context of self-direction and self-regulation of small groups. This practice was implicitly, and often explicitly, seen as a model for how an entire society might best be organized.[20]

As it was concerned with self-regulation, this sort of politeness also spoke to the contemporary concern for virtue. At the hands of its most influential interpreters, Joseph Addison and the Earl of Shaftesbury—both of whom Franklin read avidly as a young man—politeness made it possible to believe that political and social virtue no longer had to be based on rusticity, as English oppositionists and legions of Americans pamphleteers calling themselves "Farmers" believed. Rather, Addison and Shaftesbury argued that the practice of politeness could create virtue in commercial and urban societies, and that such virtue would preserve liberty in the same way rural virtue was thought to do. Lawrence E. Klein summarizes Shaftesbury's pivotal role in this development: "In his writings, the virtuous manners of classical republicanism (independent, simple, frugal, martial, and public-minded) gave way to polite manners (sociable, conversible, urbane, decorous, and, in their own way, virtuous). Moreover, the semantic character of politeness allowed him to make this shift without threat to the concept of liberty . . . to cast politeness itself as a form of liberty. This move obviated the tension between liberty and politeness, indicating the way in which a people might be both free and polite." [21] By severing politeness's connection with the court, in other words, Shaftesbury argued that its practice would safeguard liberty. It would create self-aware, self-directing individuals who would serve the wider good as virtue required.

Such sociable, virtuous politeness was widely practiced in the American colonies. It was centered in an area of life only recently being recovered, the early and middle eighteenth-century "club culture" described by David S. Shields and J. A. Leo Lemay. Small groups of men, like Franklin's Junto, convened for literary, philosophical, and convivial purposes. Some club life revolved around manuscript literature, some around ritual enactments, some around political debates and plans, and others around public amelioration projects. Whatever their focal activity, however, clubs shared a central conceit of sociability, the idea that they represented an equality shared within doors; whatever their status in the public world, individuals were presumed equal within the club. Their equality was based on "friendship and

politeness" and actualized through conversation. Such private clubbable equality was supposedly not available in the public world of court, government, and ascribed status. However, early eighteenth-century newspapers, which served Franklin as models, allowed their wide readership to participate vicariously in club life.[22] Such publicity further complicated a very complex interplay between the clubs' apparently private nature and widespread public knowledge of their existence and sometimes of their membership. Most important for our purposes, both members and the literate new public learned, through direct participation and through eavesdropping on discussions such as Addison's and Steele's, both the actual practice and the importance of being polite. Polite conversation was most important because people in groups ordered themselves through conversation. Politeness and polite conversation were thus inclusive as well as exclusive; politeness could and did function in England as an alternative means of entry into public life for those not born into high status. By adopting these behavioral standards, an individual's claim to participation in the public sphere could be legitimated. Franklin's Junto and other colonial groups operated on the same model.

Franklin does not actually use the term "politeness" to describe his own behavior in the *Autobiography*. Rather, the work's narrator portrays the character Franklin as someone deeply concerned with the major complex of issues which the politeness of club culture condensed. Especially important for the narrator are issues of virtuous behavior and comportment or self-presentation.[23] So important is this complex of issues that the author Franklin has his narrator discuss the young character's adoption of polite behavior twice in Part I and again as the major subject of Part II. As he mentions in an authorial aside, Franklin wrote these treatments thirteen years apart. When he originally wrote Part II he had no clear idea just what material he had already covered because the earlier work was not available to him. But when he pulled all his work together in 1788 he not only let the multiple discussions stand but altered them for effect. The real Benjamin Franklin, writing in the twilight of his life, wishes to indicate that the character Franklin's decisions about behavior were crucial to his life path.[24]

With this in mind, and knowing the central standing of politeness at the time and on some of Franklin's influences, the *Autobiography* can be read as a conversion narrative with politeness standing in for religion. The character's adoption of politeness is pivotal to the life portrayed and, in the telling, it seems to carry some

of the intensity of religious conversion. Other material written during the period of his "conversion" (about 1728 to 1730), such as his newspaper essays and private devotional notes, supports such an interpretation, as I will argue.[25]

The themes of virtuous behavior, comportment, and self-presentation first arise in the *Autobiography* when Franklin's narrator discusses how his character cured himself of argumentativeness. He reports that he had learned the habit of disputation from reading his father's Puritan tracts and dearly loved to argue with his friend Collins. Collins, however, often got the better of him through grammatical and rhetorical skills rather than substance, and in self-defense Franklin cures his prose by recopying and paraphrasing articles in Addison and Steele's *Spectator*. He credits this drill for helping him become a "tolerable English Writer." But in conversation he merely refined his old ways by adopting the Socratic manner to entrap others, thereby "obtaining Victories that neither my self nor my Cause always deserved" (*A*, 13-14, 16). He refers here to the Franklin of about 1721. But, the narrator reports, he later decided to abandon the whole idea of gaining sophistic victories in conversation:

> I continu'd this Method some few Years, but gradually left it, retaining only the Habit of expressing my self in Terms of modest Diffidence, never using when I advance any thing that may possibly be disputed, the Words *Certainly, undoubtedly,* or any others that give the Air of Positiveness to an Opinion; but rather say, *I conceive,* or *I apprehend* a Thing to be so or so, *It appears to me,* or *I should think it so or so, for such & such Reasons,* or *I imagine it to be so,* or *it is so if I am not mistaken.* [A, 16]

Making a rare leap ahead of temporal sequence, Franklin's narrator inserts here his later decision to give up entrapment in favor of a more seemly diffidence in conversation. It is a calculated diffidence, as he disarmingly admits, but also one with a theoretical underpinning:

> This Habit I believe has been of great Advantage to me, when I have had occasion to inculcate my Opinions. . . . And as the chief Ends of Conversation are to *inform* or be *informed,* to *please* or to *persuade,* I wish well meaning sensible Men would not lessen their Power of doing Good by a Positive assuming Manner that seldom fails to disgust, tends to create Opposition, and to defeat every one of those Purposes for which speech was given to us, to wit, giving or receiving Information or Pleasure. [A, 16]

Practically speaking, too dogmatic a manner defeats the broader purposes of conversation because it discourages those who would honestly exchange views and offends others besides.

Here the *Autobiography*'s narrator further stresses the importance he attaches to diffidence by quoting one of the greatest contemporary authorities on conduct in the English language, Alexander Pope, who "says, judiciously, *Men should be taught as if you taught them not,/And things unknown propos'd as things forgot;—* further recommending it to us, *To speak, tho' sure, with seeming Diffidence*" (*A*, 16-17). This digression out of narrative time repeats and enlarges upon the earlier cavil on his disputatiousness with Collins. Underscoring the importance of this point is the fact that Franklin rewrote his paragraph on Collins when he revised the whole text in the late 1780s. The late additions make it a commentary on correct conversation by adding material which points out Franklin's and Collins's love of argument, its effect in "souring & spoiling the Conversation," and the origins of this habit in religious tracts which Franklin had read as a child (*A*, 12). The narrator writes that he adopted a diffident manner sometime between about 1728 and 1730, when he was in his early twenties; in it is perhaps recognizable the persona sweetening Poor Richard's didacticism.[26]

So important is the idea of politeness in conversation that when Franklin's narrator returns to a temporal sequence later in Part I, he restates it as the crucial point of conduct adopted by the Junto which made its survival possible. After a difficult first year, Franklin's essay and reading society adopted a code in 1728 requiring it to discuss members' essays "in the sincere Spirit of Enquiry after Truth, without fondness for Dispute, or Desire of Victory; and to prevent Warmth, all Expressions of Positiveness in Opinion, or of direct Contradiction, were after some time made contraband & prohibited under small pecuniary Penalties" (*A*, 61). The year which elapsed between the Junto's formation and its outlawing of contentiousness is significant. It closely places the group's decision both in the narrative and in narrative time with the Franklin character's personal decision to abandon deistic freethinking in favor of a "religion" of useful virtue. As the narrator relates, having glimpsed the anarchy of a deist universe, "I grew convinc'd that *Truth, Sincerity, & Integrity* in Dealings between Man & Man were of the utmost importance to the Felicity of Life" (*A*, 58-9). He thereupon begins his project in self-perfection. This juxtaposition closely ties diffidence in conversation to outward

virtue. Both are further linked to happiness in life, and to the smooth functioning of small societies and by implication society at large.

In Part II's famous *Art of Virtue* discussion, Franklin's narrator again juxtaposes personal, social, and conversational virtues in the decisions he took during the late 1720s, and carefully narrates his techniques of putting them into practice. He discusses the subscription library project as an example of the importance of diffidence because it overcomes the resistance he ran into while collecting funds: "I therefore put my self as much as I could out of sight, and stated it as a Scheme of a *Number of Friends*, . . . In this way my Affair went on more smoothly, and I ever after practis'd it on such Occasions; and from my frequent Successes, can heartily recommend it. The present little Sacrifice of your Vanity will afterwards be amply repaid" (*A*, 75). That this entire passage was inserted as a revision underlines the importance Franklin's authorial self attached to displaying his character's adoption of a diffident public comportment.

Following a brief discussion of the material self-improvement his character gains through being known for diligence in study and work—that is, comporting himself publicly as a diligent man—Franklin's narrator next discusses his systematic attempt to reach moral perfection in personal conduct. At several points in this discussion he places particular emphasis on conduct in conversation. The second virtue he proposes to practice, silence, will enable him to listen and learn in company and "break a Habit I was getting into of Prattling, Punning & Joking, which only made me acceptable to trifling Company" (*A*, 80). He also proposes to adopt sincerity and to speak "innocently and justly" (*A*, 79). But most important, a friend convinces him to append a new thirteenth virtue, humility, by showing him that "I was generally thought proud; that my Pride show'd itself frequently in Conversation; that I was not content with being in the right when discussing any Point, but was overbearing & rather insolent" (*A*, 89).[27] In response, the Franklin narrator writes once again of his earlier self's deliberate cultivation of diffident speech, using terms almost identical to those he had used thirteen years before. To be sure, he admits, he never became inwardly meek, but he did learn to manage the externals very convincingly: "I cannot boast of much Success in acquiring the *Reality* of this Virtue; but I had a good deal with regard to the *Appearance* of it," a feat on which he perversely professes to pride himself (*A*, 90). His admission is not merely self-deprecating irony, for it points to a tremendous internal struggle within the real

Franklin over his general comportment. As he wrote in 1784, this humble behavior, "which I at first put on, with some violence to natural Inclination, became at length so easy & so habitual to me, that perhaps for these Fifty Years past no one has ever heard a dogmatical Expression escape me" (*A*, 90).[28] To this "*Appearance*" of humility Franklin's narrator ascribes his worldly reputation and success in gaining his civic ends.

In the context of eighteenth-century polite conversation this acquired diffidence corresponds to the important virtue of "complaisance." The development of this virtue is, as we have seen, presented at least three times in the narrative as the pivotal event in Franklin's public development. The balance of the *Autobiography* in effect portrays the character Franklin going about his public business, exercising complaisance together with good judgment, rational virtue, and inventiveness, in a variety of different circumstances.

The point in life when the character Franklin is shown repeatedly to have adopted a complaisant manner corresponds to a period in which the real Franklin preoccupied himself with problems of carriage, comportment, and virtue, elements of Addisonian politeness. His 1728 book of private devotions, the "Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion," is a case in point. It includes an elaborate series of prayers designed to encourage virtuous behavior. We may note that it postulates as the starting point for sincerity the idea that chosen comportment may directly shape inward condition:

> Being mindful that before I address the DEITY, my Soul ought to be calm and Serene, free from Passion and Perturbation, or otherwise elevated with Rational Joy and Pleasure, I ought to use a Countenance that expresses a filial Respect, mixed with a kind of Smiling, that signifies inward Joy, and Satisfaction, and Admiration. [*P*, 1:104]

In private prayer Franklin must, he declares here, mold his face to the expression which God desires to see before he can talk properly to Him. He believes that he can do so deliberately and premeditatedly, and that doing so will affect his inward state of being because the inner man will follow the outward expression. All this will follow from a rational decision about his bearing, and Franklin can therefore affect his inward state by rationally deciding what behavior to adopt.

The prayer book's opening credo also shows the concurrence of behavioral choices with virtue in Franklin's mind. He wrote that the Creator wished people to be happy and to take innocent pleasures, but that "I think no Pleasure innocent that is to Man hurtful" (*P*, 1:103). Here he has already given up his deistically-inspired "existential freedom" and adopted instead the memoir's insistence on avoiding "hurtful Deceits" and belittling of others.

In early 1729 Franklin elaborated on this complex of issues for publication in the "Busy-Body" letters. He wrote them for his rival Andrew Bradford's *Weekly Mercury* in order to frustrate his greater rival, Samuel Keimer, for stealing Franklin's plans to start a newspaper. Franklin intended from the first to emulate the earlier English moral journals, and their influence clearly shows in the "Busy-Body." The second letter, for example, echoes number 23 of *The Spectator*, expounding the need not to offend others by contrasting apparent wit with real conversational virtue. The false wit "shall give himself an Hours [*sic*] Diversion with the Cock of a Man's Hat, the Heels of his Shoes, an unguarded Expression in his Discourse, or even some Personal Defect" in order to embarrass someone for idle amusement. Raillery of this kind discourages modest, capable men from assuming their rightful positions because they cannot hope to compete "in a Place where a Pun or a Sneer shall pass for Wit, Noise for Reason, and the Strength of the Argument be judg'd by that of the Lungs." The true "good-natur'd" conversationalist, by contrast, "never spoke yet but with a Design to divert and please; and . . . takes more Delight in applying the Wit of his Friends, than in being admir'd himself." The good-natured man also changes the subject if it edges too close to a friend's sensitivities. Foreshadowing the *Autobiography*, Franklin's Busy-Body here maintains that because raillery excludes people rather than including them, it is not a fit mode of public life. He concludes that its practitioners "deserve to be kick'd, rather than admir'd, by all who have the least Tincture of Politeness" (*P*, 1:117-8).

The next "Busy-Body" takes up the troubling relation between inner and outer man which we have seen broached in Franklin's devotions. In this case, however, Franklin's virtuous exemplar, a rustic[29] whom he calls Cato, reflects in his outward bearing the inner grace of meaning well to others. "He always speaks the Thing he means, which he is never afraid or asham'd to do, because he knows he always means well; and therefore is never oblig'd to blush. . . . A mixture of Innocence and Wisdom makes him ever seriously chearful." The inner and outer man correspond,

and Cato's virtue affects his very face as well as his bearing; the Busy-Body writes, "I believe long Habits of Virtue have a sensible Effect on the Countenance: There was something in the Air of his Face that manifested the true Greatness of his Mind; which likewise appear'd in all he said, and in every Part of his Behaviour, obliging us to regard him with a Kind of Veneration." In these discussions Franklin expounds connections between outer carriage—refusing to offend or put oneself forward, being unselfish in conversation, assuming a proper expression—and inner virtue. This relationship would appear to work reciprocally, except that in Cato's case he seems to argue that everyone must recognize a pure knowledge of good intent, and that inner virtue and public esteem flow from that knowledge. Again, however, these are the concerns we have seen discussed in the *Autobiography*'s treatment of the years from about 1728 to about 1730 (*P*, 1:118-120).

In the fourth "Busy-Body" one of Franklin's most characteristic polite literary personae emerges: the author who exercises improving influence by presenting elliptically diverting entertainment with an explicit moral. This letter replies to a shopkeeper distressed because her guests habitually overstay their welcome. She is at a loss how to deal with such impolite behavior, and Franklin answers with the sort of oblique story at which he came to excel. He begins by justifying his approach, writing that "as I know the Mob hate Instruction, and the Generality would never read beyond the first Line of my Lectures, if they were usually fill'd with nothing but wholesome Precepts and Advice; I must therefore sometimes humour them in their own Way." His roundabout reply thus begins by discussing a Turkish farewell ritual in which hosts pass around a dish of steaming aloe vapors in which guests steep their beards. But as this particular signal of farewell seeming inappropriate to Philadelphia, the Busy-Body proposes instead to circulate brandy and citron-water to shoo his guests on their way. Then "I'll expect all Company will retire, and leave me to pursue my Studies for the Good of the Publick" (*P*, 1:122-6). Franklin's Busy-Body has here found a polite solution to a problem caused by impoliteness and lack of consideration, and has offered it in the elliptically polite form of a half-parable, half-discursive story which exemplifies Pope's meaning of "diffidence." Franklin has become, as he writes of Poor Richard in his memoir, "both entertaining and useful" (*A*, 93). By the eighth "Busy-Body" letter his approach is smooth and practiced, and he sustains a long exhortation against the idle dream of digging for buried treasure in a light, non-moralizing essay concluding with the famous remark

by a farmer that he has dug up much gold from his land by digging only as deep as his plow (*P*, 1:134-9). The much earlier "Silence Dogood" papers, by comparison, are straightforward satires. In the interim Franklin has developed a polite textual pose that embodies his objections to dogmatism, disputation, and raillery.

Franklin's intersecting contemporary concerns about bearing, conduct, and virtue came together in the essay "On Conversation" which his *Pennsylvania Gazette* printed in October 1730. Leonard Labaree and the Yale editorial staff attributed this essay to Franklin because "the opinions expressed in this essay are exactly those Franklin is known to have held and which he set down in his autobiography and elsewhere" (*P*, 1:177). E. W. Pitcher has recently discovered that they erred in this attribution, but the erratum is instructive in the present context for precisely the reasons stated by the editors.[30] The original essay appeared in a London newspaper in the fall of 1729, so Franklin could not have seen it until early the next year. But it appeared at precisely the time he was most deeply concerned with problems of comportment and virtue, and more specifically with how to advance his own ambitions without being hurtful to others and to help others actively without arousing their resentment.

It would be too much to claim that the London essay itself solved Franklin's problems. However, its author does bring together many of the concerns that preoccupied the young printer and prescribes a mode of behavior and a rationale to which Franklin could and did subscribe and which his memoir credits for his gains in life. The essay states that a basic conversational aim is to please other people and then offers specific techniques to achieve that end:

> The two grand Requisites in the Art of Pleasing, are *Complaisance* and *Good Nature. Complaisance* is a seeming preference of others to our selves; and *Good Nature* a Readiness to overlook or excuse their Foibles, and do them all the Services we can. . . . The common Mistake is, that People think to please by setting themselves to View, and shewing their own Perfections, whereas the easier and more effectual Way lies quite contrary. [*P*, 1:178]

One must *seem* to prefer others' priorities and *seem* eager to help them, in order to please them. This is, of course, precisely the code of conduct Franklin's autobiographical narrator advises in order to advance in life and to benefit society. Moreover, the London author's recommendation to avoid self-display corresponds

quite well with Franklin's strategy of assuming other print personae rather than speaking as himself.

The essay goes on to enumerate a number of specific faults that displease people, such as talking too much, talking only of one's own trivial concerns, prying (which "is usually attended with an ill-natur'd, ungenerous, and mischievous Desire of exposing and aggravating the Mistakes and Infirmities of others"), rambling, being disputatious, using raillery, and scandal-mongering. Franklin's autobiographical narrator criticizes all of these practices at one point or another. The London essayist's conclusion, offering suggestions to the man who wants to be accepted, begins: "Let his Air, his Manner, and Behaviour, be easy, courteous and Affable, void of every Thing haughty or assuming; his Words few, express'd with Modesty, and a Respect for those he talks to" (*P*, 1:181). Taking such an approach, a complaisant man would get along in order to do good, and would not knowingly do any harm.[31]

The *Autobiography* synthesizes those concerns about comportment, virtue, and complaisance which the real Franklin resolved by espousing polite conversation. It recommends a course of behavior which can be rationally adopted, or at least striven for, and which will produce useful results both personally and socially. Rationally-assumed behavior may at first do "violence to natural Inclination," but if practiced long enough will become "so easy & so habitual" that it may be or seem the expression of an inner state (*A*, 90). But Franklin was less concerned with the inner person than with behavior; people must decide to behave virtuously. Their "long Habits of Virtue" may have "a sensible Effect on the Countenance" and so may presumably change the inner person. Franklin, however, leaves it to the *Autobiography*'s readers to decide the state of his own inner man (*P*, 1:119).

In the exemplary life he wrote, Franklin chose to model the adoption of politeness and the behavior it entailed, paralleling what he did in real life. Why then did he choose to portray Philadelphia as a city apparently lacking in ethnicity? And why did he think politeness so important in the late 1780s, when as an old and sick man he made major revisions to emphasize the need for it? These questions may be answered in several related ways. First, because the *Autobiography* is not a handbook of polite behavior but an exemplary life story which illustrates the importance of becoming polite (not in the sense of refined, again, but of complaisant, sociable, beneficent, and virtuous), it must also be a polite narrative in itself. Thus

Franklin's narrator is a complaisant man, diffident most of the time and engagingly disarming when he cannot be diffident. Such an exemplifier of polite principles judges only individuals' actions, not external circumstances or accidents of birth like ethnicity. Where he uses ethnic labels, he does so in the context of describing the person's actions or simply for identification rather than characterization. Keimer's personal defects, for example, are not attributed to his being a Camisard but to him personally. Likewise, an author espousing politeness through narrative must avoid characterizations that might create discord between the narrator and his readers. Franklin's narrative avoids not only ethnic characterizations but also those about classes of people altogether, whether rich or poor, fat or thin, clever or dull. To mention ethnicity would defeat the narrative's exemplifying purpose.

Second, to illustrate the benefits of becoming polite, the city functions as a place in which politeness can be effective. It does so in the context of a need to distinguish what is polite from what is not polite. Here we remember that politeness of the sense discussed concerned a kind of public life, and that public life meant primarily life in the city. Even though it contains individuals who are not polite, the city itself is shown as a venue which is fit for polite action. Divisions and disharmonies seldom appear in the Philadelphia of the memoirs. Those which do appear are traceable to such un-polite behavior as religious enthusiasm, dogmatism, or selfishness. Divisions based on ethnicity or clashing interests, which existed in the real Philadelphia but do not appear in the *Autobiography*, would show the city not to be a polite venue. Because it is one, however, those who act politely as the character Franklin learns to do can achieve cooperation, harmony, and benefits for the entire society. His honest tradesman can advance in life and reputation by being and acting diligent. Franklin finds fertile ground for literary societies and subscription libraries which benefit the entire community. He also finds a community receptive to such small improvements as better street lamps and methodical street-sweeping. Politeness is an inherent characteristic of the city which makes it suitable for such initiatives.

By contrast, Franklin's narrator can discuss the Moravians of Bethlehem in a way which implicitly recognizes their different ethnicity because they live far from Philadelphia. No one can expect them to live according to polite norms, nor does their extended private household meet that standard. But Franklin's narrator, a polite and open-minded man, has no trouble recognizing that their way of life has

many virtues.[32] He can do so largely because their world is a rural curiosity, not part of the public, urban world. It is not just their ethnicity, nor that of the Native Americans, which sets them outside the bounds of polite society, but also their rural location. Both the ethnic and the rural are demarked as part of the un-polite world outside the city.

The polite urban world of the *Autobiography*, for all that it apparently lacks ethnicity, bears an implicit Anglo-American character. On the surface it is open, inclusive, and available to any man[33] who learns to behave properly; implicitly, however, proper behavior is English or Anglo-American because public life was implicitly Anglo-American, as Franklin would have expected his readers to know. Its legal, political, and juridical forms were English-born, and its public and commercial practices grew out of the British empire. Hence the Franklin character, reared in Yankee Boston, has no trouble understanding where he is or how to function as he moves to Philadelphia, then to London, and back to Philadelphia. He moves through a relatively homogeneous urban world in all three places. To become polite and complaisant and to move into the public world means adopting those forms. To display visibly non-Anglo-American characteristics would be inconsistent with such a public life and unsuitable for portraying within the city, a zone of politeness.

Franklin, writing from his sickbed, had reason to believe that such urban politeness was adaptable and suitable to American conditions. He knew it could be adapted, because he had already done so in his personal life and in his earlier writings. His models, particularly Shaftesbury, Addison, and Steele, showed that the emerging world of commerce could remain a world of liberty through a form of virtue based in politeness. Such a virtue was particularly suited to the diversity and growing commercialism of mid-eighteenth-century Pennsylvania; it could be adopted and used by all who were willing, regardless of sect, status, or state of salvation. It needed, however, to be adapted to American conditions first. To do so, Franklin extended the achievements of his models in creating a print persona of consummate politeness, Poor Richard. Poor Richard served him as an inoffensive, entertaining, and diffident instructor in civic behavior for a wide and growing colonial reading public. Through Poor Richard he was able to urge readers to participate in public life and adopt the form of behavior he thought best suited to it.[34]

In the 1780s, differences in public life between America and England loomed very large and demanded an adapted politeness even more urgently. The major difference, of course, was self-government, but two further differences were especially important for Franklin in making his last revisions. As he portrays it in the *Autobiography*, America's public life is much more extensive than England's, and it extends far beyond anything his Old World contemporaries knew. In England, broadly speaking, private people could choose to remain private, going about their business within the security of law and custom, or they could seek entry into the public world if they chose. But in the *Autobiography* Franklin treats as public virtually anything outside the immediate household. This especially includes reputation. When, for example, he describes how the character Franklin gained a reputation for diligence early in his printing career, he writes of him acting consciously under the gaze of others even though he was really a private person by the standards of the time. "I took care not only to be in *Reality* Industrious & frugal, but to avoid all *Appearances* of the Contrary. I drest plainly; I was seen at no Places of idle Diversion," and when he did amuse himself he debauched with books because, he says, "that was seldom, snug, & gave no Scandal," meaning that no one else could see him. His point is not that he could have neglected his business, because the next paragraph describes how Keimer ruined himself by not keeping to business, but that he wanted to gain "Credit and Character as a Tradesmen [*sic*]" which mere good diligent work could not gain him by itself (*A*, 68).

This sense of constant scrutiny by others hovers throughout the *Autobiography*. In a number of incidents it appears as the explanation for why people approached Franklin. Philadelphia in 1730 was small enough that a young printer might realistically be shown as meeting the governor and the leading people, but we also find that he is being watched. Governor Keith, for example, first approaches Franklin because his brother-in-law has carried good reports of the printer to him. The Quaker woman who rescues Franklin from the alluring but dangerous women on shipboard had been impressed by his consideration for her and thus continued to watch him. In another case he gains the provincial printing contract and other business because the "principal People" decide to keep an eye on him and recognize that he writes well and sets elegant print (*A*, 28, 31, 64).

Franklin shows his character adopting politeness in part as a response to this expanded notion of public life. Politeness gives his character a way to balance his

own position as an object of surveillance with his concern for the general welfare. He constructs his carriage and comportment to manage others' perceptions of him, but he never loses sight of others' needs or of the public good. Politeness as a source of virtue allows the Franklin character to act with near-total freedom but without essentially deceiving others. The truly polite man's pure intent to do good, like that of the "Busy-Body's" Cato, avoids the "hurtful Deceit" against which he enjoins in Part II (*A*, 79). His deceit is instead helpful; it is, in Myra Jehlen's felicitous phrase, a "benevolent hypocrisy." [35]

American public life also differed from England's because it encompassed a far greater proportion of the population. England's public world was very small. It centered on the extremely small political nation, and even where new men made their way into public life—often through the world of polite letters, as with Samuel Johnson, Pope, and many others—the public sphere remained small. Pennsylvania in the revolutionary era was another matter entirely. Because of its structure of government, it had a large and growing political nation which derived from many different backgrounds and spoke many different languages. Because most men had a reasonable chance to acquire property and with it political personality, the political nation was likely to enlarge even more and become even more difficult to harmonize. Moreover, Philadelphia's rapid growth in the revolutionary era and its status as a mercantile and artisanal capital made it a particularly volatile place seething with likely conflicts.[36]

The Revolution made this potential snakepit a self-organizing, self-governing state of (theoretically) equal individuals within a nation of similar states. America's extended public sphere, or "country," no longer had a court to play off, and in the absence of a court it needed another principle on which to order itself because the people were now the rulers. If the nation could not find such a principle, it had no hope. Pennsylvania and its capital, like the rest of America, needed people to recognize some behavioral limits so that society would not disintegrate into a chaos of individuals and groups acting in their own short-term interests. What could be more perfect than Franklin's principles of good will, complaisance, and diffidence? They, like nothing else universally accessible at the time, would allow Americans to order and govern themselves in harmony. Franklin's *Autobiography* proposes that Americans need only put on, like actors, the character of emollient politeness by which individuals would lubricate their own self-interested calculations with

observable care for each other. In this character, an expanding group of politically active people could function virtuously under intense scrutiny from each other, serving their own and the common need. They would discover themselves acting in concrete ways for mutual benefit, and would not need to worry about their inner state. If they changed morally, so much the better; if not, at least they would not be "hurtful" to each other.

It was in this radically extended public world now become self-governing, where all life outside the household was public life, that Franklin saw the danger. He identified it when he spoke to the Constitutional Convention's last session in 1787: "Most men indeed as well as most sects in Religion, think themselves in possession of all truth, and that wherever others differ from them it is so far error." [37] Self-righteous advancement of self, sect, region, state, ethnic group, or any subordinate unit of society were equally dangerous. To defeat such self-righteousness Franklin proposed the ideology of behavior he had adopted in his mid-twenties and adapted to American conditions thereafter. In Convention he recommended diffidence when he pleaded with any delegate who doubted the Constitution to "doubt a little of his own infallibility" instead,[38] and at about the same time he made revisions in his manuscript *Autobiography* which most closely focused the work on the civil conversation and politeness which, with few exceptions, had prevailed at the Convention. In the real world he could urge an entire society to begin governing itself as small societies had earlier learned to do. To do so, the created world of Franklin's *Autobiography* presents an urban space in which men can adopt politeness and through it achieve reputation, personal advancement, and social harmony. Ethnicity, like other ascribed social characteristics, had no place in that created space.

Notes

The author thanks Michael Zuckerman, Carla Mulford, John Frantz, Arnd Bohm, J. B. Dallett, Peter King, and the Carleton University History Department Colloquium for helpful suggestions.

1. Stephanie Grauman Wolf, *Urban Village: Population, Community, and Family Structure in Germantown, Pennsylvania, 1683-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 131-33; Carl and Jessica Bridenbaugh, *Rebels and Gentlemen: Philadelphia in the Age of Franklin* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1942), 16.

2. City and provincial population estimates are in Susan E. Klepp, "Demography in Early Philadelphia, 1690-1860," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 133 (1989): 85; ethnic proportions are in Alan Tully, *William Penn's Legacy: Politics and Social Structure in Provincial Pennsylvania, 1726-1755* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 54-55; black population statistics are in Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and its Aftermath* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 5, 18. Klepp consolidates the work of Gary B. Nash, Billy G. Smith, Marianne Wokeck, and others along with her own.

Although much is coming to light about immigration and Pennsylvania's ethnic composition, Tully's comment remains largely accurate: "despite the obvious cultural diversity . . . of Pennsylvania, there are few modern works that deal effectively with the interaction of the different national groups" (249). With the major exception of Gary B. Nash's *Urban Crucible,* ethnic groupings are primarily important for political historians as determinants of political behavior; see, for example, Tully, *William Penn's Legacy;* James H. Hutson, *Pennsylvania Politics 1746-1770: The Movement for Royal Government and Its Consequences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972) Philip S. Klein and Ari Hoogenboom, *A History of Pennsylvania* 2nd. ed. (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1973); Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979). Most social historians have held that occupational groupings were more important than

ethnicity in early Philadelphia; see esp. Klepp, *Philadelphia in Transition: A Demographic History of the City and Its Occupational Groups, 1720-1830* (New York: Garland, 1989); Wolf, *Urban Village,* esp. 131; James T. Lemon, *The Best Poor Man's Country: A Geographical Study of Early Southeastern Pennsylvania* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972).

3. In 1790 Philadelphia County, comprising the city and immediate area, was estimated to have about 25% to 40% each German and English (including Welsh) population, 10% to 24% Scotch-Irish, and 4% to 6% black: *The Atlas of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 88, 90, relying on the 1790 federal census. By 1790 the city itself counted about 44,000 residents of the state's 308,000; Klepp, "Demography in Early Philadelphia," 95. Although the Welsh population is conventionally included among Pennsylvania's English residents, there is some controversy in the larger imperial context whether this is appropriate.

4. Carl Bridenbaugh, ed., *Gentleman's Progress: The Itinerarium of Dr. Alexander Hamilton, 1744* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948), 24, 192, 30, 22.

5. *Peter Kalm's Travels in North America: The English Version of 1770,* ed. Adolph B. Benson, 2 vols. (New York: Wilson-Erickson, 1937) 1:20-25, 31, 32.

6. On Franklin's trade with and knowledge of Germans, see Carl Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Garden City Publ., 1941), 138-9; Esmond Wright, *Franklin of Philadelphia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 52; Henry A. Pochmann, *German Culture in America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961), 42-44; "The Pennsylvania Fireplace," in Peter Shaw, ed., *The Autobiography and Other Writings by Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Bantam, 1982), 204; Glenn Weaver, "Benjamin Franklin and the Pennsylvania Germans," *William and Mary Quarterly,* 3d. ser., 14 (October 1957): 536-59. On Franklin and his slaves, see Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees,* ix-xiv; Van Doren, *Franklin,* 129, 197-8.

7. "Boors" might not have had quite the derogatory force it does today, but indicated some combination

of agricultural livelihood, rusticity, low social status, and lack of education or breeding; cf. *Oxford English Dictionary.*

8. *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin,* ed. Leonard Labaree, et al., 28 vols. through 1990 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959-), 4:234. Further references to this source will appear in the text as *P.*

9. Discussed in Wright, *Franklin,* 83-4.

10. J. A. Leo Lemay and P. M. Zall, eds., *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin: A Genetic Text* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 53, 103, 21. All further references to this edition of the *Autobiography* will be given in the text cited as *A.* Such identifications also include an Irish co-worker named John, a Scottish Dr. Baird who admires Franklin's diligence, the philosophical French Abbot Nollet, and the English Dr. Wright: 27, 53, 63, 154, 155. An implicit attribution is the mention of Franklin's replacing a Moravian on the meeting house board, but the context makes clear that Moravians are to be considered a religious, not an ethnic, group, 118. In a doubtful case George Croghan, a frontier scout, is identified as Braddock's "Indian Interpreter," 139. The place of Ireland among the "British" peoples, as that of Scotland and Wales, is a matter of some dispute; it might be pointed out that Hemphill, being identified as Presbyterian, is to be presumed Scotch-Irish.

11. On the issue of Franklin's view of Native Americans, see Carla Mulford, *"Caritas and Capital: Franklin's Narrative of the Late Massacres,"* in J. A. Leo Lemay, ed., *Reappraising Benjamin Franklin: A Bicentennial Perspective* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1993), 347-58; Van Doren, *Franklin,* 209.

12. Franklin's habitual use of well-crafted print personae is discussed by many commentators; see esp. J. A. Leo Lemay, "Benjamin Franklin," in Everett Emerson, ed., *Major Writers of Early American Literature* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1972), 205-43, and "The Theme of Vanity in Franklin's *Autobiography,*" in Lemay, ed., *Reappraising Franklin,* 372-87; Robert F. Sayre, "The *Autobiography* of Benjamin Franklin," in Michael T. Gilmore, ed., *Early American Literature: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1980), 84-97; Joseph Fichtelberg,

"The Complex Image: Text and Reader in the *Autobiography* of Benjamin Franklin," *Early American Literature* 23 (1988): 202-26; Malini Shueller, "Authorial Discourse and Pseudo-Dialogue in Franklin's *Autobiography,*" *Early American Literature* 22 (Spring 1987): 94-107. On confidants, see Ormond Seavey, *Becoming Benjamin Franklin: The Autobiography and the Life* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1988), 151; Michael Zuckerman, "The Selling of the Self: From Franklin to Barnum," in Zuckerman, *Almost Chosen People: Oblique Biographies in the American Grain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 145-74. For a Freudian reading of the memoirs, see Ada Van Gastel, "Franklin and Freud: Love in the *Autobiography,*" *Early American Literature* 25 (1990): 168-82. For a reading of Part I as truly a private letter, see William H. Shurr," 'Now, Gods, Stand Up for Bastards': Reinterpreting Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography,*" *American Literature* 64 (September 1992): 433-51.

13. Seavey, *Becoming Franklin,* 43, 46. The *Autobiography*'s world is also, as a number of commentators have remarked, largely devoid of women as significant characters. I believe that it is much more difficult to find a basis for this particular aspect of the *Autobiography* in the theme of "politeness" because women were not so totally absent from the English literature. It may be significant here that Franklin did use female print personae, such as Polly Baker, in other writings. On the other hand, public personality in the American colonies was much more closely tied to land and property than in England, and these were generally male preserves. The culture of colonial clubs, which were a major vehicle of politeness as discussed below, followed their English models in being almost exclusively male. In this respect both differed fundamentally from the pre-revolutionary French salons portrayed by Dena Goodman, who argues that specifically female qualities were thought necessary to govern civil conversation: Dena Goodman, "Governing the Republic of Letters: The Politics of Culture in the French Enlightenment," *History of European Ideas* 13 (1991): 183-99. Much remains to be done in this direction, which is unfortunately outside the bounds of this study.

14. Franklin's political enemies suspected that he wanted Pennsylvania taken from the Penns and made into a royal colony in order to sit as its first royal governor; his son William had by this time been appointed New Jersey's governor at an unusually young age, and Franklin himself held an important position as Postmaster of the colonies. Moreover, he was in Britain when the Stamp Act passed into law despite his lobbying efforts, and he counselled the colonies to obey the new law rather than resist. This recommendation put him in a difficult public position and even led to suspicions that he somehow allowed the act to pass as part of a deal for the governorship. See Klein and Hoogenboom, *History of Pennsylvania,* 82-4; Wright, *Franklin,* 222-8.

15. Klein and Hoogenboom, *History of Pennsylvania,* 49-85; Wright, *Franklin,* 103-9, 134-51; Nash, *Urban Crucible,* 282-91. Other potentially controversial episodes include two occasions on which a long-standing deadlock between the Penn family and the Assembly held up needed military appropriations and left the colony's defenses down. In each case (1747 and 1755) Franklin's "Quaker faction" apparently used the emergency to try to force concessions from the Penns; in 1755 Braddock's army was actually preparing and provisioning its Fort Duquesne campaign even while the Assembly adamantly refused to provide supplies, so Franklin's genial inspiration to persuade farmers to volunteer supplies to the army (*A,* 136-9) solved a desperate situation he had helped create; Klein and Hoogenboom, *History of Pennsylvania,* 55-6, 68.

16. An example is the famous speculation that his brother James's tyranny might have given him "that Aversion to arbitrary Power that has stuck to me thro' my whole Life" (*A,* 18-19). But this passage was added in revision and makes most sense in light of his peremptory trial and barracking before the Privy Council by Alexander Wedderburn in early 1774; see Van Doren, *Franklin,* 456-78, and Alfred Owen Aldridge, *Benjamin Franklin: Philosopher & Man* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1965), 234-7.

17. Jack P. Greene, "Pride, Prejudice, and Jealousy: Benjamin Franklin's Explanation for the American Revolution," in Lemay, ed., *Reappraising Franklin,*

119-142; Wright, *Franklin,* 149-50, 222-8. Edmund S. Morgan essentially agrees with this view in "Secrets of Benjamin Franklin," *New York Review of Books,* 31 Jan. 1991, 41-6.

18. Christopher Looby, "Phonetics and Politics: Franklin's Alphabet as a Political Design," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 18 (Fall 1984): 1-34 and " 'The Affairs of the revolution Occasion'd the Interruption': Writing, Revolution, Deferral, and Conciliation in Franklin's *Autobiography,"* *American Quarterly* 38 (Spring 1986): 72-96; Lewis P. Simpson, "The Printer as a Man of Letters: Franklin and the Symbolism of the Third Realm," in J. A. Leo Lemay, ed., *The Oldest Revolutionary: Essays on Benjamin Franklin* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976), 3-20.

19. Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), esp. 30-60. A similar argument is made for the nineteenth century in John F. Kasson, *Rudeness & Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990).

20. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society,* tr. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989) esp. 27-88; Dena Goodman, "Public Sphere and Private Life: Toward a Synthesis of Current Historiographical Approaches to the Old Regime," *History and Theory* 31 (1992): 1-20; Peter Burke, *The Art of Conversation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), esp. 112-120; Arnd Bohm, "German Poets and the Republic of Letters (Gelehrtenrepublik) to 1850" (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1983), 102-78; Margaret Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). On the development of a public sphere in the American colonies, see Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990). A political philosopher has recently revived politeness as a principle of public order; see Mark Kingwell, "The Polite Citizen: Or, Justice as Civil Discourse," *The Philosophical Forum* 25 (Winter 1993): 241-66. I would like to thank Prof. Arnd Bohm for this

reference. See also references to "sociability" in note 22 below.

21. Lawrence E. Klein, "Liberty, Manners, and Politeness in Early Eighteenth-Century England," *The Historical Journal* 32 (1989): 586-7; see also his "The Third Earl of Shaftesbury and the Progress of Politeness," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 18 (Winter 1984/5): 186-214, "Berkeley, Shaftesbury, and the Meaning of Politeness," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 16 (1986): 57-68, and *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994). On the problem of commerce from a classically rural perspective see J. G. A. Pocock, "Virtue and Commerce in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 3 (Summer 1972): 119-34. On Franklin's closeness to Shaftesbury see A. Owen Aldridge, "The Alleged Puritanism of Benjamin Franklin," in Lemay, ed., *Reappraising Franklin*, 362-71, esp. 366.

22. Shields, "The Tuesday Club Writings and the Literature of Sociability," *Early American Literature* 26 (1991): 276-90, quote on 279; see also his "Henry Brooke and the Situation of the First Belletrists in British America," *Early American Literature* 23. (1988): 4-26, and *Oracles of Empire: Poetry, Politics, and Commerce in British America, 1690-1750* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), *passim*; Alexander Hamilton, *The History of the Ancient and Honorable Tuesday Club*, ed. Robert Micklus, 3 vols. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990). On European societies and club life see Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment*, 3-22, 96-119; Bohm, "German Poets," 130-178. On the legal background to early eighteenth-century newspapers, see Daniel L. McDonald, "Introduction," in McDonald, ed., *Selected Essays from "The Tatler," "The Spectator," and "The Guardian"* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973), xi-xxi.

23. The *Autobiography*'s espousal of social virtues has been perspicuously noted, but without linkage to the larger context of politeness, in Myra Jehlen, "'Imitate Jesus and Socrates': The Making of a Good American," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 89 (Summer 1990): 501-24; Michael Zuckerman, "Doing Good While Doing Well: Benevolence and Self-Interest in Franklin's *Autobiography*," in Lemay, ed., *Reappraising Franklin*, 441-51; Steven Forde, "Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* and the Education of America," *American Political Science Review* 86 (June 1992): 357-68. The question of self-presentation perhaps arises in the context of developments discussed by Jean-Christophe Agnew in *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

24. Lemay and Zall's genetic text is specifically organized to show the sequence of revisions and insertions. I have relied on this work for the discussion of Franklin's manuscript revisions which follow.

25. For a contrary view see Seavey, who argues that the *Autobiography* has no "grand conversion experience"; *Becoming Franklin*, 60.

26. William Pencak, "Politics and Ideology in *Poor Richard's Almanack*," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 116 (April 1992): 183-211, esp. 190-91 on the instructional uses of humor.

27. Lemay believes that this reported exchange never took place because Franklin had discussed his adoption of diffidence earlier in the text. This may overlook the gap between the time Franklin adopted Socratic methods and the time he jettisoned them in favor of diffidence. Whether the exchange in fact occurred, however, is not material to the argument presented here. The fact that it is narrated, whether true or not, further underlines a conversion theme; Lemay, "The Theme of Vanity in Franklin's *Autobiography*," in Lemay, ed., *Reappraising Franklin*, 382.

28. Zall recognizes the nature of this difficulty and considers it a step in Franklin's maturing process: *Franklin's Autobiography: A Master Life* (Boston: Twayne, 1989), 54. Politeness may help to describe the specific shape Franklin's "maturity" took.

29. A point made by Seavey, *Becoming Franklin*, 148-9.

30. E. W. Pitcher, "The Essay on Conversation in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*: A Wrong Attribution," *ANQ* n.s. 1 (April 1988): 55-6. It appeared as an unsigned essay in *The Universal Spectator* on October 11, 1729. Pitcher believes that

the actual author was Henry Baker.

31. The author's leading epigram consists of five lines from the opening scene of Terence's *The Woman of Andros* which presents as good a summary of Franklin's memoiristic recommendations as any. An anonymous prose translator renders it:

> This was his life: he bore and forbore good-naturedly with all men; he made himself agreeable to any society into which he was thrown; he accommodated himself to his friends' wishes; he quarrelled with no man, and never put himself before others; that is the easiest way to win praise without jealousy and gain friends.

In George E. Duckworth, ed., *The Complete Roman Drama*, 2 vols. (New York: Random House, 1942), 2:145.

32. Poor Richard: "He is not well-bred that cannot bear ill-breeding in others"; November, 1748.

33. This term is used deliberately.

34. Pencak, *"Poor Richard's Almanack."*

35. Jehlen, "'Imitate Jesus and Socrates,'" 513.

36. On Philadelphia's artisanal political economy, see Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); on Philadelphia's tensions in this era, see Nash, *Urban Crucible, passim;* on the precariousness of traditional order in the late colonial and early national era, see Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1992).

37. James Madison, *Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787,* ed. Adrienne Koch (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1966; repr. NY: Norton, 1969), 653.

38. Madison, *Notes,* 654.