Politics and Ideology in Poor Richard’s Almanac

"The greatest monarch on the proudest throne, is oblig’d to sit upon his own arse," Poor Richard reminds us in his almanac for 1737. Such a truism might pass unnoticed except as a bit of humor. However, it serves as a sign of Benjamin Franklin’s political and ideological agenda in preparing his annual collection of proverbs, anecdotes, astrological charts, and miscellaneous information. Besides urging us to be virtuous, diligent, and frugal, Franklin was doing something with his almanacs that only Philadelphia’s William Birkett seems to have done previously. He proclaimed the superiority of the common man who practiced those precepts to his putative betters, and urged common men to assume roles in the "public sphere" and shape their own destinies. Poor Richard went further by responding to changes in the Pennsylvania political scene from 1733 to 1758, choosing his stories to persuade his readers to adopt his views on public affairs. Thus, in both their general socio-political outlook and their opinions on particular public events, the almanacs illustrated Franklin's own efforts toward shaping the mentality of a provincial society that purchased thousands of Poor Richards.

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1 There are four readily available versions of Poor Richard’s Almanack: facsimiles of the originals in the American Antiquarian Society reprint series, Clifford K. Shipton, ed., Early American Imprints, 1639-1800 (Worcester, 1959), microfiche edition. Numbers for the almanacs are: 1733 (3541); 1734 (3657); 1735 (3786); 1736 (3903); 1737 (4017); 1738 (4141); 1739 (4247); 1740 (4364); 1741 (4513); 1742 (4719); 1743 (4956); 1744 (5189); 1745 (5398); 1746 (5597); 1747 (5751); 1748 (5952); 1749 (6139); 1750 (6320); 1751 (6502); 1752 (6539); 1753 (6670); 1754 (6845); 1755 (7196); 1756 (7420); 1757 (7668); 1758 (7899). Poor Richard Improved begins in 1748. The almanacs, minus calendars and other weather information, lists of courts, markets, kings, etc., are also published in Leonard W. Labaree and Whitfield J. Bell, eds., The Papers of Benjamin Franklin (New Haven, 1959- ). For examples of Franklin’s wit and wisdom, see Richard Saunds, ed., Poor Richard: The Almanacks for the Years 1733-1758 (New York: Bonanza Books, 1976), with illustrations by Norman Rockwell, and J.A. Leo Lemay, Benjamin Franklin’s Writings (Library of America, New York, 1987), 1181-1303, is the most accessible version of the almanacs now in reprint.

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When Franklin’s first *Poor Richard* appeared in 1732, its author had already demonstrated remarkable success. Aged twenty-six, he had previously published the “Silence Dogood” letters in his brother’s Boston newspaper, visited England, and put out the *Pennsylvania Gazette* for three years. Young Franklin was at the top of his profession. He had bested his first employer, Samuel Keimer, and taken over the printing of Pennsylvania’s official business in 1730 by demonstrating the superiority of his work, based upon the latest English techniques, to both Keimer and Andrew Bradford. Franklin was able to exercise a tremendous role in public life because printing and information diffusion, especially of matter not authorized by the government on the one hand or imported from England on the other, was in its infancy in Pennsylvania although the province was a half-century old. The *Pennsylvania Gazette* was only its second newspaper. Franklin was its third permanently established printer.²

In the field of almanac publishing, however, Philadelphia boasted no fewer than five regularly issued contenders when *Poor Richard* appeared on the scene in 1733.³ Samuel Atkins’s pretentiously titled *Calendarium Pennsilvaniense* only lasted one year, 1686, but at least it claims the honor of being Pennsylvania’s first almanac. Daniel Leeds’s *Almanack* appeared in 1687, and it was printed in Pennsylvania until 1700 and thence in New York until his retirement in 1714. It was taken over by his son Titan (a fifteen-year-old protegé) in 1715, returned to Philadelphia, and retitled *An American Almanack*. Jacob Taylor began his Almanac in 1700 as a rival to Leeds’s: in 1705 he joked how “Leeds exerts a Thumping Wit/Above all vulgar measure,/Moves Nature in a jumping fit/According to his pleasure.”⁴

³ I refer to an almanac by its current year of use. Like calendars of today, almanacs were published late in the previous year.
Taylor’s editions continued until his death in 1746. John Jerman entered the lists in 1721, William Birkett in 1729, and Thomas Godfrey in 1730 with works simply entitled An Almanack. Jerman’s lasted until 1757, Birkett’s until 1752 (he became “Poor Will” in 1739), Godfrey’s until 1736. Godfrey’s was the first almanac to be printed by Franklin and Meredith, although he switched printers in 1732. (Birkett and Leeds remained loyal to Andrew Bradford and his heirs.) With the exception of Leeds’s and Birkett’s, few copies of these almanacs survive, suggesting those two were the most popular and interesting versions besides Franklin’s.  

It was customary for almanac writers to criticize, either sardonically or light-heartedly, the personalities, abilities, and predictions of the writers of other almanacs. Even though Franklin printed Jerman’s work, he chided him for irrefutable weather forecasts (“Snow here or in New England”—1737), for poor cures for horses’ ailments (eggs or broth—1739), and for becoming a Roman Catholic (1742 and 1744). The last charge was of course absurd, for Jerman had merely referred to “All Hallows Day” and prayed to the Virgin Mary as would any good Anglican. William Birkett came in for criticism of an apparent drinking problem in 1740: Poor Richard foresaw that on September 7 he “shall be sober 9 Hours, to the Astonishment of all his Neighbours.” Through such references to their rivals in their annual prefaces, Philadelphia’s philomaths drummed up business not only for themselves but for their trade.

Titan Leeds’s An American Almanack was Philadelphia’s most illustrious before Poor Richard. Leeds put out a first-class product. Compared with Nathaniel Ames’s Astronomical Diary, in Boston, and Poor Robin, published by Franklin’s brother James in Newport, Rhode Island, Leeds’s contained much more information. He did not just print sunrise and sunset, the phases of the moon, and the sort of speculative predictions which either could not go wrong or could not be taken seriously (colonial almanacs are ideal for people who enjoy

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5 Publishing history of these almanacs can be found in Drake, Almanacs, 911 ff; Marion Barber Stowell, Early American Almanacs (New York, 1977), 67-72, 301-306, 315-320; C. William Miller, “Franklin’s Poor Richard’s Almanac: Their Printing and Publication,” Studies in Bibliography: Papers of the Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia 14 (1961), 97-107.
Leeds's most serious rival was William Birkett. He anticipated Franklin by posing a populist challenge to Leeds: "What pleases Madam disgusts the honest country Farmer for whom this is purely intended," his first issue advertised. "Whoe'er Wealth and gaudy Pomp desire,/ More than Pure Need or Decency require/ May fitly be compared to the Silly Ass," he proclaimed. The following year, Birkett continued in the same vein: "The Father that Dyeth and leaveth his Son poor and wise leaveth him enough; but He that Dyeth and leaveth his Son rich and foolish leaveth him Nothing." Birkett differed from Franklin in the intense moralism of his almanac, which included a heavy dose of poems and proverbs on obedience, chastity, humility, preparation for death, and so forth. If Franklin borrowed from Birkett his detestation of the idle rich, his ideal common man rose to civic prominence through effort instead of resting devoutly in his place.

Franklin also picked up ideas from Leeds. For instance, he pointed to the litigiousness of Pennsylvanians' neighbors in New Jersey. Leeds's 1727 almanac contained a long poem lamenting that New Jersey "has been Govern'd on a Shatter'd Frame/ And so Confused that few can tell the Same." After recounting the misdeeds of numerous governors, however, he sought to put himself in the good graces of incumbent William Burnet (Leeds lived in Burlington, across the river from Philadelphia, where his work was published) by praising that "Learned and Generous" man, "Sent by King George to make us Rich and Great." Similarly, Franklin dedicated a satirical poem in his first (1733) almanac, "The Benefit of Going to Law," to the counties of Kent and Hunterdon in New Jersey. It told of a blind and
a lame beggar who litigated over an oyster. When the courts were through with them, the result was "A Shell for him, a Shell for thee,/ The Middle is the Lawyer's Fee." Such criticisms of the folly of going to court were by no means new to Franklin or America; English almanacs had so warned their readers for over a century. Franklin's first application of the rule to contentious New Jersey illustrates the general belief that the land of Penn enjoyed a tranquility denied to its neighbor.

Franklin also followed Leeds in fulsome praise for his adopted province. In 1730 Leeds had included in his almanac a poem modelled on English Augustan patriotic odes:

Teach me, o Goddess, in harmonious Lays, To sing thy much-lov'd Pennsylvania's Praise; Thy Philadelphia's Beauties to indicte In Verse as Tuneful as her sons write . . . . The plan by thee continued, O Penn, the same, A Word immortal, is the Founder's Name; 'Tis here Apollo does erect his Throne, This his Parnassus, this his Helicon.

Much as Franklin would a quarter-century later in his famous essay "Observations concerning the Increase of Mankind" (1755), Leeds predicted that the center of civilization would move across the Atlantic: Europe "her antient Fame denied" as Philadelphia became "the Ath- ens of Mankind." Leeds noted Pennsylvania's unique pacifism: "Peace her Downy Wings about us Spreads, / While War and Desola- tion widely reigns,/ And Captive Nations groan beneath their Chains." He praised the "Happy Constitution," which secured "Our Lives, our Properties, and All that's Ours," and concluded by thanking William Penn "for this, first perfect Scheme of Liberty." The only fault he could find is that perhaps the people had it too good: "Thine [Penn] was the Danger, Thine was all the Toil,/ While we, ungrate- ful, we Divide the Spoil." Leeds or his anonymous contributor was not a great poet. However, this effort reflects, if not a sense of American nationality and greatness, the belief that Pennsylvania had surpassed its European progenitors. Further, its grandeur lay in earthly peace,

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8 Franklin satirized the courts and lawyers in most Poor Richards. For English antecedents, see Bernard Stuart Capp, Astrology and the Popular Press: English Almanacks, 1500-1800 (London and Boston, 1979), 97-98, 106-109.
9 Discussed in Van Doren, Franklin, 216-218.
prosperity, and liberty rather than in the fulfillment of a religious mission. Except for Penn, no Quakers are mentioned.

Franklin printed a similar poem in *Poor Richard* of 1752, at the time when he was thinking about his essay on America's population and the future of its civilization. He depicted a land where "PUBLICK SPIRIT" was the "Parent of Trade, Wealth, Liberty, and Peace." He proceeded to dwell on some recent civic achievements in which he himself had played a major role, such as the hospital and almshouse "Where the sick Stranger joys to find a Home,/ Where casual Ill, maim'd Labour, freely come." Franklin extended his vision of Pennsylvania as an asylum, even to men both red—"Do you the neighbouring blameless Indian aid/ Culture what he neglects, not His invade"—and black—"Nor let me Afric's sable children see,/ Vended for Slaves, though form'd by Nature Free." He concluded the poem by dubbing Penn the greatest of lawgivers, excelling Moses, Lycurgus, and Numa.

Yet Franklin did much more than borrow from Birkett and Leeds. He improved on what were already the finest almanacs in the colonies. As C. William Miller has noted, "The single greatest reason for the success of the *Poor Richards* was Franklin's ability to spice the prosaic matter of the ordinary almanac with more engaging commentary than his competitors could write." His use of the pseudonym "Poor" Richard Saunders is significant. Having journeyed to England in 1726, Franklin observed the many almanacs published there and adopted the best features. People in England could select from over a dozen—a few went in and out of print every year—each of which catered to a particular taste. (Indeed, some readers, such as the Princess Sophia, bound them all together in an annual collection.) For instance, *The Woman's Almanack* is filled with elaborate riddles and puzzles, both verbal and mathematical. It clearly was written for educated women who sought intellectual diversion rather than practical information. Several almanacs, notably Francis Moore's *Vox Stellarum* and John Partridge's *Merlin Liberatus*, spent most of their free

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10 Miller, "Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanac*," 111.
11 I have consulted English almanacs for the years 1723, 1725, 1727, and 1733 at the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, DC. This is my source for all references to English almanacs.
space bashing the supposed cruelties and absurdities of Roman Catholicism. Moore in 1725 mourned how “under Popish Kings just Men must live,/ How they with Hell do faithfully conspire.” In 1727 Partridge mocked the notion of transubstantiation: “So here the Popish priest, by Trick as Odd,/ Puts in a Wafer and pulls out a God.” Parker’s Ephemeris, published since 1689, gave correct coach and boat fares for London, along with useful tips on how to avoid being cheated. The Union Almanack was subtitled “Being Chiefly to Promote Trade and Business.” It listed distances between towns as well as dates and locations for every fair and market in England and Scotland. Most almanacs also included predictions of war or peace, plagues, and various forms of weather (usually in no particular location, which guaranteed accuracy), and praise of “George, by Heaven form’d, great Crowns to wear . . . [who] With Grace and Majesty fills the British Throne,” as Moore wrote in 1727.

Two English almanacs stood apart from the rest, and they were poles apart from each other: Poor Robin’s, published intermittently since 1664 and annually since 1689, and Richard Saunder’s Apollo Anglicanus, which appeared from 1684 until “his” death in 1736. Poor Robin indeed seems to have been the poor, or at least the middle-class, man’s almanac, although Princess Sophia bound it in her collections. Poor Robin specialized in reporting the assize of bread, for reasons he explained in 1725:

As Bread’s the Stuff which Hunger doth Supply, And Beer’s the chief Support when we’re a Dry, These two main Pillars should be Regulated, And Care be taken People not be Cheated.

Poor Robin was the most humorous of the almanacs. It referred to that “ne’er-to-be-forgotten Charitable Corporation . . . [the] South-Sea Bubble” (1733). Robin grossly described how “the loving Wife looks Sweet upon her Husband, invites him to drink a dish of Tea with her, and then after, if her Stock is low, to give him an opportunity of seeing how the craving bowels of her almost empty Canister want to be replenished” (1723). He also included funny “Epistolary Dedications” or prefaces (“An Almanack without a Preface looks like a Face

12 For more information on these two almanacs, see Capp, Astrology, ch. 8 and 329, 378, 385.
without a Nose"—1733). The issue for 1725 boasted the presence of two calendars—"The good, old-fashioned English Honest Protestant account; and the foreign maggoty Jacobite account." Poor Robin mocked the chronologies of great events and rulers printed by his more serious competitors. In 1727, he listed the years "since Bakers began to make their Bread too large" ("00000000") and "since Cock-Fighting and throwing [sticks] at Cocks came into Fashion" ("368"). Poor Robin was filled with references to ordinary people and their occupations, although he did not glamorize them in Franklin's style. The closest he came was probably a 1694 satire proving "a beggar's state most happy is" because he did not have to worry about borrowing, lending, or the disposition of his estate. Robin did enjoy satirizing the high and mighty, as in a prediction for August 1725—when Parliament had closed for its summer recess—that "We cannot expect much State Matters will be debated except in Plays or Puppet-Shows, where Harlequin can strut and talk as great as Julius Caesar." His guide for those on the road from riches to poverty appeared in 1733: "From Riches to Covetousness; from Covetousness to Ambition; from Ambition to Infatuation; from Infatuation to Stock-Jobbing of Bubbles; from Stock-Jobbing of Bubbles to Scraps of Paper; and from thence to Poverty." Franklin would later reverse the scheme in "The Way to Wealth" in 1758.

Unlike Poor Robin, Richard Saunder's Apollo Anglicanus was the most serious and intellectual of all English almanacs. Saunder brought to his readers the latest scientific developments, treatises on how weather really occurred, and discussions of the physical properties of clouds, rainbows, and the cosmos. Bigotry, jingoism, prophecies, and jokes did not compromise his integrity. If I do not quote Saunder, it is because his almanacs read like scientific textbooks.

Franklin, by choosing Richard Saunder (Franklin added the "s") as the fictitious author of his almanac, but adding "Poor," thus symbolically conveyed the message that his would be an almanac for ordinary people. But he would not simply amuse or reflect their prejudices, he would instruct and elevate them. Absent from Poor Richard are the portrayals of giants, dwarves, freaks of nature, fabulous beasts, and

13 Ibid., 130.
incredible events with which other almanac writers titillated their readers.\textsuperscript{14} In the preface to the first \textit{Poor Richard}, Franklin declared that Titan Leeds had died, that an imposter was publishing his almanac, and that \textit{Poor Richard} was now the almanac of choice.

Leeds did not take kindly to all this. He had already been plagued by unauthorized, pirated editions. His own brother had set up as a rival and produced a grossly inferior product. Franklin borrowed the hoax of slaying his competitor as well as the names Richard Saunders (and Bridget, his wife) from two of Jonathan Swift's fictional characters.\textsuperscript{15} Nevertheless, the concurrence of Swiftian precedent with the name of almanac-maker Richard Saunders perfectly suited Franklin's aim of assuming a dominant position in the one major aspect of Philadelphia's print trade that had eluded him.

Leeds was no easy mark. He not only continued to publish almanacs until his death in 1738 but retained a sufficient reputation that Andrew Bradford (in Philadelphia) and William Bradford (in New York) continued to print almanacs bearing Leeds's name until 1746.\textsuperscript{16} (Perhaps the Bradfords were trying to cut in on Franklin's profits to repay the young interloper who had done Andrew a similar favor when he took over the province of Pennsylvania's printing contracts.) Franklin thus set himself the highest standards. Only a new god could slay a Titan. He planned to be an almanac innovator by fusing the instructional content of Saunders with the down-to-earth humor of Poor Robin, by combining the wit and information of Leeds with the appeal to ordinary folk of Birkett.

In addition to synthesizing the best features of contemporary British and American almanacs, Franklin drew eclectically on history, the classics, English tradesmen's manuals, and Augustan literature. But three other sources stand out: the Puritanism of Massachusetts where he had spent his childhood, the proverbs William Penn had published in \textit{Some Fruits of Solitude}, and the ideology set forth by John Trenchard

\textsuperscript{14} See, for example, Stowell, \textit{Almanacs}, 211-218.
\textsuperscript{16} Stowell, \textit{Almanacs}, 304.

Franklin did not laud common folk indiscriminately. The good man was diligent in his calling. He prospered but still lived frugally as a servant of his community. Poor Richard supported Max Weber’s analysis in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, which shows how Franklin’s own path to prominence, which he described in the Autobiography, had deep Puritan roots. The almanac abounds with proverbs such as “All things are easy to Industry, All things difficult to Sloth” (1734) and “The diligent Spinner has a large shrift” (1756). It includes proverbs that warn against greed and ostentation: “A wise Man will desire no more, than what he may get justly, use soberly, distribute cheerfully, and leave contentedly” (1756); “The D——l wipes his B——h with poor Folk’s Pride” (1743). Such warnings suggest Franklin was disenchanted with some of his fellow inhabitants’ sloth, drunkenness, and extravagance. The “good life” belonged to those who applied themselves, but many refused. Franklin’s ideology reflects the mentality of early America as described by historian James Henretta: “Bonds among family, neighbors, and fellow church members were informal; nonetheless, they circumscribed the range of individual action among the inhabitants of Pennsylvania.”

Opportunity, of course, existed in the “best poor man’s country”—but it was dependent upon obligations to the larger community. Absent from Franklin’s puritanical emphasis on hard work in a communal setting is any sign of the intolerant religiosity of his almanac forbears. This would have gone over poorly in diverse Pennsylvania, and in any case young Franklin was a Deist. Instead, the principal religious source for Poor Richard is William Penn’s Some Fruits of

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Solitude, a collection of 407 maxims published in 1693, expanded to 855 maxims in its 1702 edition. In this, "William Penn's most enduring work, reprinted and read far more widely than any of his other tracts," the editors of Penn's papers note, Penn laid down the behavior necessary for the flourishing of his "Holy Experiment" in pacifism and toleration. Penn's proverbs are generally longer and less pithy than Franklin's; they also stress Christianity, brotherhood, and harmony among families, friends, and neighbors to a greater extent than Poor Richard. Nevertheless, a good number of Franklin's thoughts echoed Penn's: "Hear no ill of a Friend, nor speak any of an Enemy" (1739); "A quarrelsome Man has no good Neighbours" (1746); "A little well-gotten will do us more good, / Than lordships and scepters by Rapine and Blood" (1743). If Franklin gave less attention than Penn to achieving social harmony, perhaps it is because the Pennsylvania to which Franklin had come had to a considerable extent realized its founder's vision.

Poor Richard drew not only on religious thought from the past. The almanacs incorporated and helped to spread the "New Whig" ideology of the English political opposition. John Trenchard and William Gordon first published "Cato's Letters" in the Independent Whig between 1719 and 1723; no fewer than nine collections of their contents were reprinted before Poor Richard first appeared. The authors took to task the monarchs and governments of the world for squandering their peoples' blood in wars and for oppressing them in peace. They criticized the extravagance and corruption of aristocrats, hinting that English liberty itself was threatened by venal and power-hungry rulers. Trenchard and Gordon contrasted the sorry fate of most states with the prosperity and enjoyment of people who had the public-spirited virtue to keep their societies free of such parasites and govern themselves.

Bernard Bailyn, Gordon Wood, and J.G.A. Pocock have shown Trenchard's and Gordon's influence on the "Country" ideology of resistance which led to the American Revolution. They looked


22 The literature on eighteenth-century country, commonwealth, or republican ideology (as it is variously called) is voluminous. For good, short introductions, see Bernard Bailyn, The Origins of American Politics (New York, 1968), ch. 1; Gordon S. Wood, "Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style: Causality and Deceit in the Eighteenth Century," The William and Mary
mainly at the colonies' pamphlets and newspapers. However, Poor Richard ought not to be ignored. Sixteen-year-old Franklin was already quoting from "Cato's Letters" in his 1722 "Silence Dogood Letters" in the New England Courant. When he visited England four years later, he was directly exposed to a political atmosphere in which opposition leaders applied Cato's lessons to the supposedly corrupt ministry of Sir Robert Walpole which threatened the nation's free institutions. In Poor Richard, Franklin mentioned Cato explicitly on only two occasions: "Think Cato sees thee," he wrote in April, 1741, calling attention to the noble Roman who lived simply and put the preservation of Roman republican liberty above all else. He also praised Cato's willingness to share his soldiers' hardships in 1756. There was a reason for this limited use of Cato: the farmers and tradesmen who formed Franklin's principal audience were not experts on classical antiquity.

Franklin thus chose Penn as his principal virtuous statesman, and he offered contemporary "villains" such as Louis XIV and Louis XV as the despoilers of their country. The almanacs are filled with generalizations deductible from Whig ideology. In 1756, Franklin described the "Man of Honour" whom "The Fury of the Populace defies, / And dares the Tyrant's threatening Frown despise. / Always himself, nought can his Virtue move, / Unsway'd by Party, Hatred, Gain or Love." A 1751 poem mocked "Party Zealots," men with "Club Nonsense and impetuous Pride," who "vent your Spleen as Monkeys." Most of Poor Richard's references to party, tyrants, and virtuous people stem from the years after 1747 when the almanacs became more explicitly political.

In fact, a case could be made that Franklin and the almanac makers who succeeded him after 1758 played a more important role in spreading Whig ideology to the common man than did the more learned pamphlets so often quoted and discussed by scholars. Historian David Hall, in his discussion of colonial reading habits, points out that the estate inventories of ordinary folk contain few books, and these were mostly the Bible and religious tracts. (Almanacs had high circulations,
but few survived, for they were usually destroyed at year's end.) When colonials read, they read a few items over and over, slowly, and frequently out loud to an audience, so that proverbs and striking phrases became part of the common vocabulary. For instance, the famous Lexington alarm soldier, Levi Preston, interviewed by Mellen Chamberlain, claimed to have read "only the Bible, the Catechism, Watts' Psalms and Hymns, and the Almanack."

Almanacs circulated in the thousands. William J. Gilmore has plausibly shown that sixty to seventy-five percent of all households in Northern New England around 1810 bought them, an area which (like Franklin's Pennsylvania) had been settled for about fifty years but was far more remote from publishing centers. Of course, by 1810, farmers had a wider choice of reading materials. If anything, almanacs probably circulated more widely when fewer books and pamphlets were available.

Poor Richard circulated the most widely of all. As a printing entrepreneur, Franklin set up satellite printers in business in other cities—in Charleston as early as 1733, in New York in 1742, and also in Antigua, Newport, Lancaster, and Williamsburg. He provided them with his almanacs and other printed material. Franklin also prepared slightly revised Poor Richards with information on court sessions, fairs, and roads especially useful for inhabitants of New York, New Jersey,

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Maryland, New England, and Virginia. In his *Autobiography*, Franklin estimated the circulation of *Poor Richard* at "near ten thousand" and said that "Scarce any Neighborhood in the Province" lacked it.\(^{27}\) No other almanac of the era enjoyed a similar intercolonial circulation.

Thus, almanacs in general and *Poor Richard* in particular played a key role in transmitting political ideas from metropolitan England through provincial seaports to the majority of colonials who lived on farms and in small towns. However, as David Hall notes, publications in pre-revolutionary America were sufficiently few and society small-scaled enough that no divorce between elite and popular culture could feasibly be maintained.\(^{28}\) If almanacs conveyed Whig ideology and scientific treatises to the farms, they also brought to the cities and to the elite the sense of self-worth felt by farmers and tradesmen to which both almanac writers and colonial politicians seeking votes appealed. The extent to which Franklin and his fellow philomaths both reflected and shaped provincial mentality can never be definitively disentangled. However, their key role in linking colony and metropolis, city and farm, and the elite with the common people cannot be denied.

Indeed, because Franklin’s almanacs told ordinary people that they were basically good and better than their "betters," it can be argued that a key function of almanacs was to spread populist ideology up the social ladder. Franklin established this pattern in his very first almanac, where he included Richard Saunders—that is, Benjamin Franklin—at the end of a list of European monarchs. Although he diffused the idea of *lese majesté* by placing himself at the bottom and describing Saunders as "an American Prince, without Subjects, his Wife being Viceroy over him," the point was clear. And he gave 1684 as his date of birth—the year Richard Saunder first published *Apollo Anglicanus*. In 1734, the theme of exalting the lowly and debunking the great continued with proverbs: "Bucephalus the Horse of Alexand. hath as

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lasting fame as his Master”; “an innocent Plowman is more worthy
than a vicious Prince.” In 1735, Franklin wrote that “The King’s
Cheese is half wasted in pairings; but no matter, ’tis made of the
people’s milk,” thus calling attention to monarchs’ parasitical and
extravagant existence. He also attacked Louis XIV, who “Paid
Learned Men for Writing,/ And valiant Men for Fighting,” although
he “Himself could neither write nor fight,/ Nor make his People
happy.” Only “Fools will prate, and call him Great,/ Shame on their
Noddles Sappy.” Actually, despite his belligerence, Louis was an
excellent soldier and diligent, literate ruler. But Franklin’s depictions
of monarchs who arrogated the people’s goods to themselves while
sending the people off to war mark the audience of Poor Richard as
susceptible to Whig propaganda.

Similar observations decrying sybaritic, war-mongering rulers and
their dependence on virtuous subjects dot the quarter-century of Poor
Richard: “Caesar did not merit the triumphal car more than he that
conquers himself” (1738); “You may be more happy than Princes,/If you will be more virtuous” (1738); “Codrus confirm’d his Country’s
wholesome Laws,/ Caesar in Blood still justified his Cause/ Yet
following Kings ne’er ’dopted Codrus’ Name,/ But Caesar, still, and
Emperor’s the same” (1739); “Thou hadst better eat salt with the
Philosophers of Greece, than sugar with the Courtiers of Italy” (1740).
And Franklin could not have made a typographical error in 1754
when he referred to England’s homosexual “Queen” James I. A poem
for 1741 summed it up:

The Monarch, when his Table’s spread, To th’ farmer is oblig’d for
Bread; And when in all his Glory drest, Owes to the Loom his royal
Vest: Do not the Mason’s Toil and Care Protect him from th’inclement
Air? Does not the Cutler’s Art supply The Ornament that guards his
thigh?

The common man, on the other hand—or rather the hard-working,
intelligent common man—reached his apotheosis in the 1752 poem
about Pennsylvania:

But who her Sons, that to her Int’rest true, Still plan with Wisdom, and
with Zeal pursue? These found most frequently in Life’s Middle State,
Rich without Gold, and without Titles great: . . . When Gifts like
these conferr’d by bounteous Heav’n, Talents and Will to the same
Person giv’n, That man ennobled doth an HERO rise, Fame and his
Virtues lift him to the Skies . . . . O! were I form’d to share his heav’n’ly Fire, In Parts and Pow’rs strong as in Desire; Moses, Lycurgus, Numa I revere, Their Wisdom great, their Love to Man sincere, By publick spirit rank’d the first of Men, Yet I’d not envy them, not even P[enn].

The hero mentioned is, of course, Franklin himself. The sayings of Poor Richard mark but one chapter in Franklin’s lifelong crusade to bring down the mighty and to extol ordinary people. In his first important writing, the “Silence Dogood” letters, the sixteen-year-old Franklin became an uneducated but wise old woman who observes that money rather than ability gets people into Harvard College and that they learn little while there. I find this passage not only humorous, but heartbreaking; the brilliant young Franklin, thirsting for knowledge at the age when he ought to have gone to college, must become a printer’s apprentice.29 Again, on October 20, 1737, Franklin published a satirical piece in the Pennsylvania Gazette, “Upon the Talents Requisite in an Almanack Writer.” The first qualification was that “he should be descended of a great Family, and bear a Coat of Arms.” This “gives Lustre and Authority to what a Man writes, and makes the common People to believe, that certainly this is a great man.”30 Of course, Franklin had always claimed to be poor Richard, which showed the common people much preferred one of their own.

This idea that authority came not from a specific religious or government official of high status but from an anonymous man who published and who identified himself as “Poor Richard,” “a Citizen,” “a Countryman” concerned with the public good was an important innovation in eighteenth-century America. Richard D. Brown has shown how authorities in seventeenth-century New England sought to control public access to information as a means of maintaining order: Franklin and his brother James were two victims of this effort. Poor Richard was an important step in initiating what Michael Warner has described as the new style of impersonal, “private sphere” political discourse which removed from traditional governmental and ecclesiastical powers the

30 “Talents Requisite in an Almanack Writer” reprinted in Lemay, Benjamin Franklin’s Writings, 271-274.
exclusive right to speak in political debate, and opened it to the body
of literate inhabitants who were to judge arguments on merit. Kenneth
Lockridge has also linked the spread of literacy with increasing interest
in politics and the wider world and less willingness to accept traditional
truths and local hierarchy among colonial Americans.\footnote{31}

Fifty years later, at the Constitutional Convention, Franklin still
championed the common man as a better source of political knowledge
and republican virtue than those above him.\footnote{32} Emphasizing the "virtue
and public spirit of our common people, of which they displayed a
great deal during the war," Franklin took the lead in expressing "his
dislike of everything that tended to debase the spirit of the common
people":

\begin{quote}
If honesty was often the companion of wealth, and if poverty was exposed
to peculiar temptation, it was not the less true that the possession of
property increased the desire of more property. Some of the greatest
rogues he was ever acquainted with, were the richest rogues . . . . This
constitution will be much read and attended to in Europe, and if it
should betray a great partiality to the rich—will not only hurt us in the
esteem of the most liberal and enlightened men there, but discourage
the common people from removing to this country.
\end{quote}

The most populist of the Founding Fathers, Franklin was willing to
trust the fate of the world's only major republic to its own common
folk. He had no qualms about security, were the rest of the world to
join in.

However, Franklin's "public sphere" had its limitations, as does the
scholarly concept itself.\footnote{33} For all his openness, celebrated by main-


\footnote{33} For critiques of the "public sphere" theory as developed by Warner, \textit{Letters of the Republic} and Jurgen Habermas, \textit{The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere}, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), see Joan Landes, \textit{Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution}, (Ithaca, 1958), esp. 5-9, 39-45; Terry Eagleton, \textit{The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson} (Oxford, 1982), esp. 6-7; and Nancy Fraser, \textit{Unruly Practices: Porter, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory} (Minneapolis, 1989), esp. 122-130. I thank Michael Morantz for these references, and his help and Peter Thompson's in enlightening me on the limits of the public sphere.
stream scholars of American culture as the essence of "the adaptability, the opportunism, the passion for self-improvement and for doing good, the versatility, the homespun democracy, the good humor" for which the United States flatters itself, Franklin, like his world, circumscribed the right to participate in political dialogue by gender, class, and race. Middle-class white males, Poor Richards on the make or who had already arrived, led the good society and kept it that way by excluding the unfit. The almanacs' contents testify vividly to Franklin's belief in an aristocracy ostensibly based on merit.

Franklin's women, like his men, had a vocation that they too could either follow or spurn. The best women found fulfillment as honored and respected helpmates of their husbands. "A good Wife and Health, is a Man's best Wealth," Poor Richard wrote in 1746. That year's preface praised his own spouse: "Thanks to kind Readers and a careful Wife,/With Plenty bless'd, I lead an easy Life/My Business Writing, hers to drain the Mead." Conversely, no one was more miserable than "Doris a Widow, past her Prime," subject of a 1737 poem. The lines "How should the helpless Woman rest?/One's gone; nor can she get another [husband]," exemplified Franklin's belief that if a man needed a woman for a satisfying existence, the reverse was even more true. Women who failed to become helpful homemakers merited the same scorn as did men who lacked industry, thrift, and public spirit. In the December poem for the very first almanac, Poor Richard listed the signs of a good-for-nothing female: "She that will eat her Breakfast in her Bed,/And spend the Morn in dressing of her Head,/And sit at Dinner like a maiden Bride,/And talk of nothing all Day but of Pride." His main point, however, was that such behavior harmed not the woman but her husband: "What a case is he that shall have her." To his credit, Franklin arranged for Bridget Saunders to answer her husband the following December (1734). She placed the shoe squarely on the other foot, condemning men who neglected their domestic responsibilities: "He that for sake of Drink neglects his Trade . . . . And ne'er regards his starving Family . . . . Woe to the poor Wife, whose Lot it is to have him." Poor Richard refers to Bridget as his "viceroy" (1733) and "duchess" (1734), suggesting that a woman's

34 The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin and Selections from His Writings, with introduction by Henry Steele Commager (New York, 1944), xii.
"political" role was in governing her husband. He was thus conforming to the stereotype that the household was indeed the woman's domain.

Despite her indispensable duties, a woman could not enter the public sphere. Franklin inadvertently implied this by mentioning women only three times in the post-1747 almanacs in which politics become more prominent. The first several years of Poor Richard abound with references to wives good and otherwise. But it seems that Poor Richard lost interest in the domestic sphere as his interest in public life grew, suggesting mutual exclusivity of private and public life, at least in his mind. All we have in later years are proverbs, like some from the 1750s: "An undutiful Daughter, will prove an unmanageable Wife" (1750), "A Man without a Wife, is but Half a Man" (1755), and "Dally not with other Folks' Women or Money" (1757). Perhaps the later emphasis upon public affairs is an indication of problems in Franklin's own marriage—he had several illegitimate children, and Deborah refused to accompany him on his extensive European trips beginning in 1758.35

Franklin's almanacs also exclude the idle and foolish, those who lack thrift, diligence, and moral virtue, from his political community. It is easy enough to applaud his numerous attacks on pernicious kings, quack doctors, shyster lawyers, hypocritical preachers, and rich wastrels. But the other half of Franklin's message is that the poor deserve, for the most part, to be poor. They have failed to take advantage of the opportunities that Poor Richard's career, and Franklin's own, demonstrated were available to those who applied themselves.

The apotheosis of Poor Richard's philosophy that the deserving will win out is "The Way to Wealth," written for the final almanac. Here Poor Richard is quoted by Father Abraham. Franklin here assumed the quasi-biblical persona and authority of the patriarch who led his people to the land flowing with milk and honey. Nor should the occasion for his advice be overlooked. Father Abraham is rebuking people who complained about the heavy taxes that, they contend, are ruining the country. Recapitulating a quarter-century of Poor Richard's wisdom, he retorts that "we are taxed twice as much by our Idleness, three times as much by our Pride, and four times as much by our

35 For Franklin's marriage, see Van Doren, Franklin, 50, 231, 250-253, 263-264, 300-301, 316-317.
Folly,” and he urges people to stop buying fripperies and stay out of debt. Totally absent is any sense that provincial taxation required by the French and Indian War was a real hardship, or that declining economic opportunity (documented by historian Gary B. Nash) in mid-eighteenth century Philadelphia was hardening class lines and rendering the path Franklin had ascended earlier in the century much steeper.36

The absence of injunctions to be charitable—traditional in English almanacs—in the December material of Poor Richard before the mid-1750s is impressionistic evidence that times were indeed becoming harder. Franklin terms charity to the poor a duty in 1754, a precept he repeats in 1757 and at the end of “The Way to Wealth.” Yet he does not view poverty as a serious social problem; rather, the poor provide an opportunity for the successful yet virtuous man to obtain “The Blessing of Heaven.” In 1757, Poor Richard writes that “At the Day of Judgment . . . it will more avail us, that we have thrown a Handful of Flour or Chaff in Charity to a Nest of contemptible Pismires, than that we could master all the Hosts of Heaven, and call every Star by its proper Name.” This passage can be read to mean that all a successful man need do is toss a bone to the poor, “contemptible” though they are. Similarly, in “The Way to Wealth,” charity is an afterthought, meriting exactly one sentence near the very end, and bestowed more for the welfare of the giver than the recipient: “Do not depend too much upon your own Industry, and Frugality, and Prudence, though excellent things, for they may all be blasted without the Blessing of Heaven . . . Therefore ask that Blessing humbly, and be not uncharitable to those that at present seem to want it, but comfort and help them. Remember Job suffered, and was afterwards prosperous.” Franklin comes close to saying that poverty is only a temporary problem for the deserving and that we ought to help the worthy poor as we, too, might suffer provisional misfortunes. He writes in the Autobiography that one of Poor Richard’s main purposes was to “include Industry and Frugality, as the means of procuring wealth

and securing Virtue, it being more difficult for a Man in Want to act always Honestly."

With one exception, Franklin did not belittle people of different nationalities and races in the almanacs. In 1739, he adopted a mock-Irish dialect to make fun of a "Teague" who criticized the creation story of Genesis on the grounds that God could not have made the sun, because the sun would not have been needed since it was light in the daytime, anyway. The denigration of particular groups would have been foolish. It would have limited the size of his readership in ethnically diverse Pennsylvania and in other colonies.

However, in other writings, Franklin creates scathing denunciations of "Palatine boors" (Pennsylvania Germans), "white, Christian savages" (Scotch-Irish frontiersmen), Indians (he wonders in the Autobiography if liquor was the means "of Providence to extirpate these Savages in order to make room for the Cultivators of the Earth"), and blacks ("Why increase the sons of Africa by planting them in America, where we have so fair an opportunity, by excluding all blacks and tawnys, of increasing the lovely red and white?"). To be sure, he also expressed sympathy for some of these groups—especially Indians persecuted by frontiersmen—and served as President of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1787. But Franklin never regarded such people in general as worthy of participation in a virtuous commonwealth, although individual members might successfully assimilate.

As Franklin was opening up the public sphere to men of ability and civic spirit, he was closing it to the vast majority of the population of North America. The voluntary associations he helped to establish, which gave form to the newly emergent society—the Junto, along with the library, college, fire, militia, and political organizations—were in theory open to everyone, but in fact drew their membership primarily from well-educated, elite-group white males, of English descent, inhabitants of Philadelphia rather than the countryside. Furthermore, unlike the traditional Old World public sphere of ecclesiastical and aristocratic/monarchical authority, Franklin's new order

attached a moral stigma to those who could not "earn" the right to participate in supposedly fair competition with their fellow inhabitants.

With twentieth-century hindsight, it is perhaps easy to judge the limitations of Franklin's commonwealth too harshly. In the eighteenth century, a political system that opened participation to middle-class white males who voluntarily assumed the burden of public service was still a revolutionary notion. They did not dream of admitting women, immigrants, and non-whites to the public sphere. Yet the logic of Franklin's arguments and the generosity of his temperament suggest that he would have welcomed a politically more inclusive society developed in dialogue with the principles of equality and self-government.

Poor Richard did more than express a general theory of society and politics, one that praised a Pennsylvania whose hard-working populace successfully reconciled public spirit and personal achievement. He also addressed the public issues of his day, both obliquely and directly. As Pennsylvania moved from the tranquil late 1720s and 1730s to the turbulent 1740s and 1750s, Franklin brought Poor Richard into provincial politics in conjunction with his own increasing involvement.

Franklin began to issue Poor Richard during a period of harmony in Pennsylvania politics. The departure of controversial Deputy Governor Sir William Keith in 1727 and his replacement with Major Patrick Gordon, who conceded to the Pennsylvania Assembly the legislative privileges of regular meetings, choice of a speaker, and initiative on money bills equal to the House of Commons, inaugurated a hiatus during which the competing Quaker and Proprietary factions had little to quarrel about. As Franklin's printing business and civic projects for Philadelphia depended on support from both groups, he remained outside politics and got on well with leaders of both sides.39

The 1739 outbreak of the War of Jenkins's Ear (later, King George's War) affected Pennsylvania little at first. Poor Richard in 1740 predicted "some ineffectual Treaties of Peace" and "pray[ed] Heav'n defend these Colonies from ev'ry Enemy." Three years later Franklin could poke fun at hostilities that had yet to trouble the Northern provinces in the poem "On the Florida War":

From Georgia to Augustine the General goes; From Augustine to Georgia come our Foes; Hardy from Charlestown back he flies; Forth from St. Simons then the Spaniards creep; Say Children, Is this not your Play, Bo Peep?

Franklin refers here to the inconsequential thrusts and counterthrusts made by the British against Florida and the Spaniards against Georgia during the years 1740-1742. His only other mention of the conflict was in 1745 when he noted simply that “War brings Scars.”

Similarly, Poor Richard remained aloof from the renewed struggle between the Quaker and Proprietary factions of the 1740s. This manifested itself most spectacularly in the 1742 Philadelphia election riot, when sailors sympathetic to the proprietor brawled with Quakers and their allies over access to the polling place. Trying to maintain good relations all around, Franklin confined his observations to a plea to keep “Free from the bitter Rage of Party Zeal, / All those we love who seek the publick Weal” (1746). He compared a Mob to a “Monster—Heads enough but no Brains” (1747).

Poor Richard’s turning point came in the 1748 almanac, published in 1747, which also marked a watershed in Pennsylvania history and in Franklin’s life. Franklin tells us in his Autobiography that he retired from business at age forty-two, in 1748, to devote more time to public life. With his partner David Hall managing the printing business, Franklin also had more time to write his almanacs. In 1748 Poor Richard became Poor Richard Improved, its length increased from twenty-four to thirty-six pages to accommodate both additional scientific essays and material bearing on Pennsylvania’s new problems.

In July 1747 French and Spanish privateers sailed up the Delaware, plundering on both land and sea. Pennsylvania had never needed military forces before. Whether or how to raise them proved a dilemma for the next decade. To simplify the complicated politics, the Assembly’s Quaker majority refused to vote funds unless the proprietor permitted his lands to be taxed; he, in turn, would not approve money bills which insisted on this. Franklin seized the initiative and, outside government channels, organized a voluntary militia in 1747. He

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40 For descriptions of these expeditions, see Labaree, Papers 2: 267.
41 For these incidents, see Illick, Colonial Pennsylvania, 187-191.
thereby solved the practical problem of defense but also established himself as an independent political force to be reckoned with. His action made for ambiguous relations with the Quakers. Some of them welcomed the private army as a neat way of protecting the province without compromising their personal pacifism. Others, however, scrupled either about allowing a military force to exist at all or about the manner in which Franklin's group undercut their battle with the proprietor. On the other hand, Franklin's volunteers, and his similar projects to raise a militia and supplies privately at the outbreak of the French and Indian War in 1754 and 1755, made Proprietor Thomas Penn his enemy. "He is a dangerous Man and I should be very Glad he inhabited any other Country .... However, as he is a Sort of Tribune of the People, he must be treated with regard," Penn wrote as early as 1748.43

Franklin envisioned his own role as a moderator, someone who pursued the public good independently of politics: "I like neither the Governor's Conduct nor the Assembly's, and having some Share in the Confidence of both, I have endeavor'd to reconcile 'em in vain," he noted in 1755, four years after he first won election as Assemblyman from Philadelphia.44 Poor Richard Improved, to judge by its content, assumed as one of its missions to achieve this reconciliation and to argue for unity in the face of military necessity.45 The first issue (1748) featured short biographies of great men nearly every month. Franklin lauded Copernicus, Isaac Newton, Joseph Addison, John Locke, and William Penn for their achievements in science, letters, and state-building. He contrasted these with condemnations of martial rulers, such as "the kings of France and Spain, and the Pope, and the Devil," who united to bring about the Spanish Armada. The contemporary equivalent, Louis XV of France, came off worst:

The present king of France, called his most christian majesty. He bids fair to be as great a mischief-maker as his grandfather; or, in the language

44 Hanna, Franklin, 51.
45 Franklin was not the first Pennsylvania almanac writer to introduce politics into his pages. As early as 1704, Titan Leeds satirized William Penn, George Fox, and the Quakers in general as being worldly hypocrites. See Stowell, Almanacs, 66, and Shipton, ed. Imprints, #1112.
of poets and orators, a Hero. There are three great destroyers of mankind, Plague, Famine, and Hero . . . . In horrid granduer haughty Hero reigns, And thrives on mankind's miseries and pains.

Rather than dealing directly with the issues of the day, Poor Richard frequently projected them into history. Writing about the English Civil War (still 1748), he tried to harmonize the historiography just as he sought to unite proprietor and Assembly. The Long Parliament "began the great rebellion, as some call it; or the glorious opposition to arbitrary power, as others term it." Oliver Cromwell was "the conqueror and protector (some say the tyrant) of three great kingdoms." The general lesson was that "Party is the madness of the many for the gain of a few." Franklin praised Oliver Cromwell's son Richard as wiser, if not greater, than his father: "Being of an easy peaceable disposition, he became a private man," seeing "great changes in government, and violent struggles for that, which, by experience, he knew could afford no solid happiness." In his sketch of the younger protector, one senses Franklin's reluctance to abandon the civic projects for which he was famous and enter the messy world of politics.

Franklin continued his biographical vignettes in 1749. Here he praised Luther and Calvin, attributing their success to being "remarkably temperate in meat and drink" in the former case and to eating "little meat, and [having] slept but little" in the latter. Judging by his own abstemiousness and sudden thrust into public affairs, Franklin probably brought up the two Reformation leaders to congratulate (or perhaps to convince) himself that he was on the right path in forsaking the private sphere. Poor Richard also voiced that year the general colonial dissatisfaction with the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle, which gained America nothing. Referring to the similar Peace of Utrecht of 1713 which ended Queen Anne's War, he remarked: "The Preliminaries of the new Peace are copied from those of the old one: 'tis to be hoped the Peace itself will be better."

Few in Europe or America were deceived that the peace was anything but a truce. It settled no major issue, such as the boundary of the English and French colonies. In this setting, Franklin denounced Pennsylvania for squabbling over defense policy. Poor Richard in 1750 explained the 1453 conquest of Constantinople by the Turks as follows:

When it was beseig'd, the Emperor made most earnest Application to his People, that they would contribute Money to enable him to pay his
Troops, and defray the expence of defending it; but they, through Covetousness refused, pretending Poverty. Yet the Turks in pillaging it found so much Wealth among them, that even their common Soldiers were enriched.

The message was obvious: defend yourself or be conquered. This parable seems more critical of the people (Assembly) than emperor (proprietor), but Franklin gave him a similar verbal thrashing the same year. He criticized a greedy ruler, the late Charles Albert, Elector of Bavaria, who sought territorial gain through conquest and wound up losing his throne:

This Man was rich, great, a Sovereign Prince: but he wanted to be richer, greater, and more a Sovereign. At first his Arms had vast Success; but a Campaign or two left him not a foot of Land he could call his own.

Here was a lesson for proprietor Penn: be content with your wealth and power. If you object to taxation of your property, you might lose the province. (A decade later, Franklin spent a good deal of his agency in England trying to turn Pennsylvania into a royal colony.) Franklin also included a plea for international peace in the 1748 Poor Richard through the medium of a sketch of Sweden’s King Charles XII. His so-called martial virtues “undid his Country . . . . Yet he still war’d on, in spite of Reason and Prudence, till a small Bit of Lead, more powerful than they, persuaded him to be Quiet.”

To compound Pennsylvania’s military and political distresses, ethnic tensions increased and a growing population put pressure on the frontier and threatened war with the Indians. As animosity among the province’s various groups rose, Poor Richard offered a mathematical argument for toleration in 1751. He supposed a person priding himself on his noble ancestry, tracing his lineage back twenty-one generations, roughly to the time of the Norman Conquest. Such a person would have over a million “noble” ancestors:

Carry the Reckoning back 300 years farther and the Number amounts to 500 millions; which are more than exist at any one Time upon the Earth, and shews the Impossibility of preserving Blood free from such Mixtures, and that the Pretension of such Purity of Blood in ancient Families is a mere joke . . . . continual Intermarriages for a Course of Ages rendering all the People related by Blood, and, as it were, of one Family.
While Franklin wanted Pennsylvanians to behave like members of a family, he nevertheless sought to keep out undesirables. One of his first deeds as an Assemblyman in 1751 was to draft a bill excluding from the province English convicts previously dumped on its shores. The long poem praising Pennsylvania (*Poor Richard* for 1752) also mentioned that the province’s peace “O’erstock’s us with Sons of Men.”

The last six years of *Poor Richard*, in part coinciding with the most critical period of the French and Indian War, continued to deprecate political partisanship while placing most of the onus for a nation’s woes on rulers and courtiers: Franklin would soon openly join those seeking an end to proprietary rule. “Ignorance leads Men into a Party, and Shame keeps them from getting out again,” he observed in 1753. “He that would rise at Court, must begin by Creeping” was a 1757 message. Franklin’s most transparent attack on Penn came in 1756 when he criticized rulers who would not share their people’s sufferings (pay taxes, in Penn’s case) in time of war:

> When an Army is to march thro’ a Wilderness, where the Conveniences of Life are scarce to be obtain’d even for Money, many Hardships, Wants, and Difficulties must necessarily be borne by the Soldiers; which nothing tends more to make tolerable, than the Example of their Officers. If these Riot in plenty, while those suffer Hunger and Thirst, Respect and Obedience are in Danger of being lost, and Mutiny or Desertion taking their places.

Franklin then refers to Charles XII of Sweden and to Cato, that paragon of Roman and Whig virtue, as commanders who partook of the rank-and-file’s privations. This passage might also have another meaning. Franklin could be criticizing those of his countrymen who were unwilling to supply General James Braddock’s unfortunate expedition of 1755.

Franklin’s essays in *Poor Richard* during the 1750s indicate that his rise to political prominence gave him a heightened sense of destiny. In July 1756, Poor Richard mused on biblical figures called by God.

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47 Joseph J. Kelly, Jr., *Pennsylvania: The Colonial Years, 1681-1776* (Garden City, 1980), 158-180, 243-249, has a good account of taxes and finance during the French and Indian War.
from humble stations to perform great deeds. After mentioning Saul, David, the Shepherds of the Nativity, and the twelve Apostles, Franklin concluded that “God never encourages idleness, and despises not persons in the meanest employments” who “have been busy in the honest Employment of the Vocation.” The following year, he tried to convince (or to congratulate) himself that his own spectacular rise was indeed destined to do good for his fellow countrymen:

*Ambition* to be greater and richer, merely that a Man may have it in his Power to do more Service to his Friends and the Publick, is of a quiet, orderly Kind, pleased if it succeeds, resigned if it fails. But the *Ambition* that has *itself* only in View, is restless, turbulent, regardless of publick Peace or general Interest, and the secret Maker of most Mischiefs, between Nations, Parties, Friends, and Neighbours.

As he assumed leadership of his province’s war effort and of the transformed Quaker group in the Assembly, Franklin saw himself, we realize by reading *Poor Richard*, as the living embodiment of the virtues preached in his almanac. The hard-working, economically successful, public spirited printer in effect supplanted the proprietor and Assembly as the most important political force in Pennsylvania. He would soon journey to London where he would represent the province, and then America, to England and, ultimately, the world. One can only wonder, as he left Philadelphia in 1758—not to return for sixteen years—whether he recalled the warning Poor Richard had voiced in 1734:

Some of our Sparks to London town do go Fashions to see, and learn the World to know; Who at Return have nought but these to show, New wig above, and new Disease below. Thus the Jack Ass a Traveler once would be . . . .

Franklin probably wrote this poem to put behind him his unhappy experiences in London as a young man. Arriving in London once more, aged fifty-two, he indeed appeared as “Poor Richard Improved.” The “HERO” by virtue of “PUBLICK SPIRIT” of the 1752 ode to Pennsylvania was about to contend with the military-dynastic “Hero” who “in horrid grandeur . . . reigns” (1748) on the world stage.

Put another way, Franklin’s hero of publick spirit and his anti-hero, the king and warrior, stand as symbols of the private and public spheres Jurgen Habermas has described for eighteenth-century Europe. A literate public, predominantly middle class, developed through litera-
ture, discussion clubs, salons, coffee houses, the Masonic Order, and other originally private-sphere institutions, and it began to question and judge the traditional public sphere of Church and State. Applying Habermas's theory to provincial America, Michael Warner has demonstrated that secular publications not sanctioned by the government were only beginning to appear in the 1710s and 1720s. The youthful Franklin's own Dogood Papers in his brother's newspaper were in fact among their first manifestations.

Moving to Pennsylvania, Franklin at first "invaded" the public sphere obliquely through praise of hard-working, civic-minded citizens and attacks on European kings. As he founded the Library, Academy, and his discussion club (the Junto) in addition to printing almanacs, newspapers, and pamphlets, Franklin became a key figure in developing the politically involved private sphere—with all its limitations of class, race, and gender—in provincial America. Given the wide circulation of Poor Richard and the numerous translations of parts of it, especially "The Way to Wealth," in several languages, the claim can be made that Poor Richard's Almanack played an important role in the international Enlightenment's questioning of traditional institutions. Franklin's almanacs thus emerge as the perfect symbol for his own career, in which the apolitical representative of the private sphere was transformed into an actor on the stage of world history. And when Bonhomme Richard became a ship that wreaked havoc on the coast of England during the American War for Independence, Poor Richard's role as a catalyst of what R.R. Palmer has termed "The Age of the Democratic Revolution" was clearly displayed to the entire world.

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48 Habermas, The Public Sphere, esp. 1-26.
50 Labaree, Autobiography, editors' note on 164. John Clyde Oswald, Benjamin Franklin, Printer (Garden City, 1917), 128.