

# Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution: Uncovering the Forgotten Truths

Benjamin Franklin, an iconic figure of American history known for his contributions to science, politics, diplomacy, and literature, played a significant role in the American Revolution. However, there is a lesser-known aspect of Franklin's life that often goes unnoticed – his relationship with slavery. In this article, we will explore the complex dynamics between Benjamin Franklin and slavery during the period of the American Revolution.

## The Enlightenment Ideals and Franklin's Anti-Slavery Sentiments

Benjamin Franklin was a man deeply influenced by the Enlightenment ideals of equality, liberty, and human rights. Despite being a slave owner himself, Franklin harbored an anti-slavery sentiment that developed over time. He considered slavery to be a contradiction to the principles of the American Revolution and recognized the inherent injustice and cruelty within the institution.

Franklin's anti-slavery activities gained prominence as he became increasingly involved in public affairs. He utilized his influential position to advocate for gradual emancipation and the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. Franklin's strong belief in the fundamental rights of all individuals prompted him to challenge the prevailing norms and engage in the fight against slavery.

### Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution

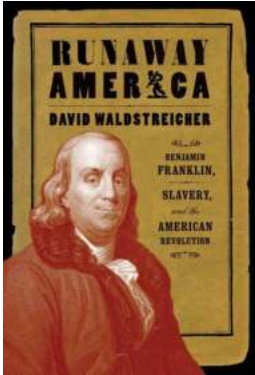
by David Waldstreicher (Kindle Edition)

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## Franklin's Participation in the Abolitionist Movement

During the 1760s and 1770s, Benjamin Franklin actively engaged in the abolitionist movement. He became an active member of various abolitionist organizations, including the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery. Franklin utilized his eloquence and persuasive skills to raise awareness about the atrocities of slavery and its moral implications. He diligently worked towards changing societal attitudes towards the enslaved population.

Franklin's 1787 publication of his essay "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, etc." further exposed his stance against slavery. Although addressing population growth, the essay delved into the troubling aspects of the transatlantic slave trade and outlined the detrimental effects it had on both the enslaved individuals and the larger society as a whole.

## Franklin's Personal Relationship with Slavery

Despite his anti-slavery sentiments, Benjamin Franklin owned several slaves throughout his life. Initially, his involvement in the institution was driven by societal norms and economic considerations. However, as his enlightenment ideals evolved, Franklin recognized the contradictions within his own actions.

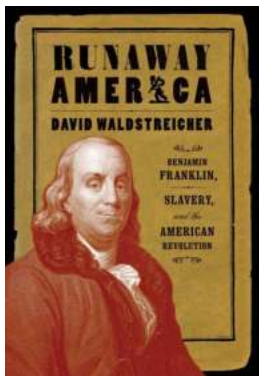
Over time, he gradually freed his slaves and passionately advocated for their rights and freedom.

Franklin's personal journey toward emancipation highlights the complexities surrounding the issue of slavery. It serves as a reminder that even those enlightened individuals who recognized the inherent wrongs of slavery were not immune to the socio-economic pressures and cultural context of their time.

## Legacy and Impact

Benjamin Franklin's contributions to the American Revolution extended far beyond his scientific inventions and political endeavors. His stance against slavery and advocacy for emancipation laid the foundations for future generations to fight for equality and human rights. Franklin's writings and actions sparked the abolitionist movement and fueled the ongoing struggle for racial justice.

As we reflect upon Benjamin Franklin's complex relationship with slavery, it is crucial to acknowledge both his flaws and his contributions. By shedding light on this forgotten aspect of Franklin's life, we deepen our understanding of the underlying complexities of the American Revolution and strive towards a more inclusive narrative of history.



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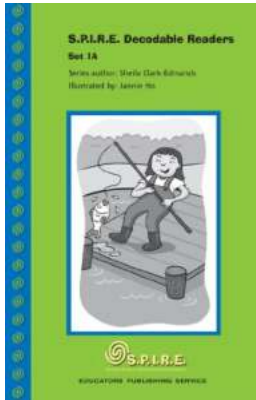
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Scientist, abolitionist, revolutionary: that is the Benjamin Franklin we know and celebrate. To this description, the talented young historian David Waldstreicher shows we must add runaway, slave master, and empire builder. But *Runaway America* does much more than revise our image of a beloved founding father. Finding slavery at the center of Franklin's life, Waldstreicher proves it was likewise central to the Revolution, America's founding, and the very notion of freedom we associate with both.

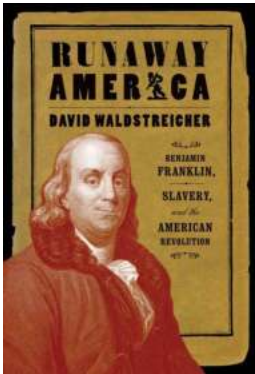
Franklin was the sole Founding Father who was once owned by someone else and was among the few to derive his fortune from slavery. As an indentured servant, Franklin fled his master before his term was complete; as a struggling printer, he built a financial empire selling newspapers that not only advertised the goods of a slave economy (not to mention slaves) but also ran the notices that led to the recapture of runaway servants. Perhaps Waldstreicher's greatest achievement is in showing that this was not an ironic outcome but a calculated one. America's freedom, no less than Franklin's, demanded that others forgo liberty.

Through the life of Franklin, *Runaway America* provides an original explanation to the paradox of American slavery and freedom.



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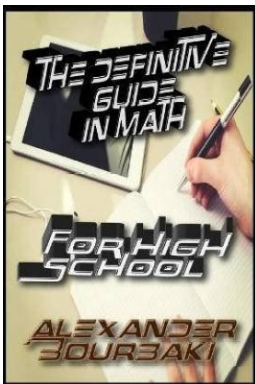
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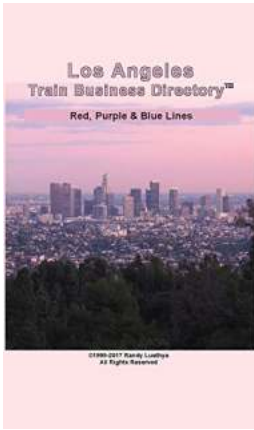
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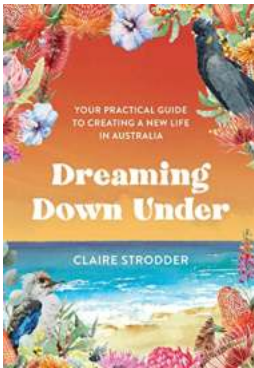
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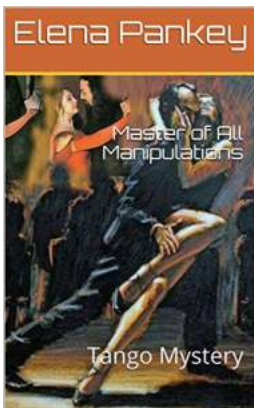
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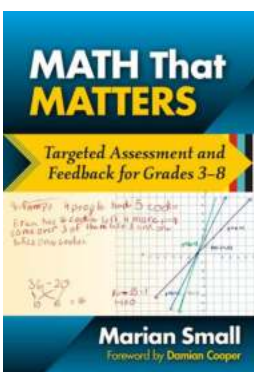
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