

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

GREAT AMERICANS AND THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS

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LESSON 04 SESSION 02

4.4 Benjamin Franklin

Benjamin Franklin manifested the qualities characteristic of the American. Genius he possessed, but it was the genius of hard work. He was a self-made man. At the age of 17 years, he came from Massachusetts to Philadelphia, which became his lifelong residence.

4.4.1 Printer, publisher, philanthropist.

A journeyman printer by trade, he ultimately became the author and printer of Poor Richard's Almanac, a publication of homely philosophy which contains many gems of wisdom and good advice as applicable today as in his time. Franklin was identified with the Pennsylvania Gazette. He founded the Saturday Evening Post, the University of Pennsylvania, and the Philadelphia Public Library. He was the first postmaster general of the Colonies.

4.4.2 Scientist.

With all these activities he still found time to devote to science. The flash of lightning in a thunderstorm caused him to wonder rather than to fear. In it he recognized a mighty force; his philosophic mind concluded that in some way the flash of lightning (electricity) could be controlled and brought into the service of mankind. It pays to think. Creative minds, as exemplified in Franklin, rather than manual labor, have produced the great achievements of all time.

4.4.3 Political philosopher.

Benjamin Franklin was too busy to be idle. Absorbed with the affairs and welfare of the Colonies, he proposed in 1754 that the Colonies be formed into a Union. Franklin believed that had this proposition been accepted, a separation from the British Empire would never have taken place. Twenty years later a call for a general congress of the Colonies was issued by Virginia, at the instigation of Franklin, and held in Philadelphia in May 1774.

Benjamin Franklin took an active part in framing the Declaration of Independence, of which he was one of the signers.

4.4.4 Diplomat.

Two years later he went to France, where, in fur cap and homespun clothing, he, the typical American commoner, created a wave of enthusiasm which won the French to the cause of the Colonies.

4.4.5 Member of Constitutional Convention.

At the age of 81 years this old young-hearted philosopher took a most prominent part in the deliberations of the constitutional convention held in Philadelphia from May to September 1787. His wisdom and counsel often prevailed in those long and stormy sessions. His love of country and faith in democracy gave him a vision of the future greatness of America that few in his time possessed.

4.5 John Marshall

The life work of John Marshall is intimately blended with the Constitution. He ranked high as a soldier, legislator, diplomat, historian, and statesman. As a jurist and magistrate, he ranks first. For 34 years he served as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, leaving a record for constructive results in the Government of the United States second only to that of Washington.

4.5.1 Soldier.

He began the study of law at the age of 18 years, but soon left his studies to enter the Revolutionary Army. His experiences, with their heroisms and hardships, "broadened his views and quickened his insight in governmental questions." He said, "*I entered the Army a Virginian and left it an American.*"

4.5.2 Member of assembly.

After the war he was elected a member of the Virginia Assembly. During his remarkable career he served in the legislature for eight sessions. He continually emphasized his conviction that for efficiency a strong central government was necessary.

4.5.3 Ratification of the Constitution.

As a member of the State convention, in 1788, which met to discuss the ratification of the Constitution of the United States, through the power of his convincing logic, the ratification of the Constitution was accomplished over the determined opposition of its enemies.

4.5.4 Member of Congress.

At the urgent request of Washington, he became a candidate and was elected to Congress, where he became the greatest debater on constitutional questions.

4.5.5 Interpretation of the Constitution.

In 1829, through his wisdom and moderation, he did much to prevent radical changes in the State constitution of Virginia, thwarting the attempts of politicians against the independence of the judiciary. Because of his exceptional understanding of the philosophy of the Constitution of the United States, his counsel was of prime importance.

His deep convictions and illuminating arguments contained in his decisions concerning constitutional questions, at a period when the powers of the Constitution were ill defined, were of inestimable value in the formation of a well-organized Federal Government. "He made the Constitution live. He imparted to it the breath of immortality. Its vigorous life at the present time is due mainly to the wise interpretation he gave to its provisions during his term of office."

The most notable products of Marshall's unprecedented judicial career may be summed up under two heads In the first place, he established the supremacy of Federal law within the entire circle of its jurisdiction, no matter whether it was opposed by the Congress or by a State legislature in the form of unconstitutional enactments, or by the President giving "instructions not warranted by law"; or by State supreme courts attempting to resist the mandates of the Supreme Court; or by the governors of States attempting to resist such mandates; in the second place, in defining the character of "the American Constitution." — *Origin and Growth of the American Constitution* — Hannis Taylor.

4.6 **Thomas Jefferson**

By reason of his ability as a thinker and speaker, Thomas Jefferson quickly gained a place of leadership, first in Virginia, then in the Colonies, where he was constantly employed in fighting oppressive British regulations and interference in the affairs of his country.

Staunch in his defense of the rights of the people, he caused Virginia to pass many laws of a revolutionary character, among which was the abrogation of the rights of nobility, entailed estates, and the absolute right of religious liberty.

4.6.1 Declaration of Independence.

He was a member of that famous group which, upon call of the resolution proposed by Richard Henry Lee, wrote the Declaration of Independence. Although the youngest, his dominant personality and exceptional ability caused him to be chosen chairman of that committee, which included such stalwarts as John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman, and Robert R. Livingston. The instrument practically as written by Jefferson was unanimously adopted to become for all time one of the immortal documents relating to human rights and self-government.

4.6.2 President of the United States.

In the trying days during and following the Revolutionary War Thomas Jefferson was a member of the Continental Congress, Governor of Virginia, ambassador to France, succeeding Franklin, and recalled to become Secretary of State in President Washington's Cabinet, where he bitterly opposed the policy of Alexander Hamilton in his endeavor to extend the powers of government over the people.

On a platform based upon his ideas and policies, he was elected the third President of the United States as a Democratic-Republican over his opponent, who as a Federalist espoused the principles of Hamilton.

4.6.3 Louisiana Purchase.

During the first, years of his two terms as President, he completed the negotiations with France for the purchase of the vast domain, over 900,000 square miles, lying west of the Mississippi River and east of the Rocky Mountains, known as "the Louisiana Territory." The purchase price of \$15,000,000 was, at that time, considered exorbitant and created much adverse criticism in which Jefferson was denounced as an "imperialist," and as having forsaken his democratic principles. The reasons for this action on his part were that he saw the advantage of gaining control of the Mississippi River and the port of New Orleans, and that by this purchase the United States would be left unhampered by foreign countries in developing her republican form of government.

4.6.4 Achievements.

The outstanding events of his public life are to be found in (1) the writing of the Declaration of Independence; (2) enactment of the statute for religious liberty; (3) founding the University of Virginia; and (4) the purchase of the Louisiana Territory.