

Laura Foti  
Benjamin Franklin Scholar Award  
Downingtown High School West  
Downingtown, PA

### Tracing the Footsteps of a Founding Father

As a young man, Benjamin Franklin boarded the worn planks of a ship destined for what is today known as the great country of the United States of America. As he breathed in the salty New England air, little did he know that his philosophies and words of wisdom would continue to influence and apply to today's world. Franklin's enlightened ideas are apparent in his statement that "God grant not only the love of liberty but a thorough knowledge of the rights of man may pervade all the nations of the earth, so that a philosopher may set his foot anywhere on its surface and say: 'This is my country'." The timeless themes of freedom, a conviction in education, and the belief in a unified world are portrayed in Franklin's quote, allowing his words and ideas to remain relevant. The struggle for freedom, a natural right of man, is a theme not only apparent in American history, but in the global destiny of mankind.

The search for freedom and equal rights, a reoccurring theme throughout history and present-day, grants Franklin's quote a lasting impact. People of every generation strive for religious, political, and civil liberties, all of which embody the essence of the free man who Franklin describes as having "the love for liberty". Franklin led by example, speaking out against British oppression, leading to the Revolutionary war and a democratic government for American colonists. Today, the United States of America continues to fight for freedom, combating terrorist groups in the Middle East. America's foreign policy of spreading freedom and democracy to dangerous and unorganized regions of the world proves that the struggle for freedom applies to every generation. Therefore, Franklin's declaration that the fight for liberty will never end is relevant to the present day, in which "freedom wars" are a necessity. Freedom, achieved through education, spreads the importance of individual rights and self expression prompts reform. Education, the foundation of Franklin's beliefs, remains an important component in the fight for a free world.

The importance of education, apparent in every generation, allows Franklin's views on education in his quote to remain relevant. The significance of education can be seen through public education programs in the United States, educating students on the importance of learning and a greater understanding of world cultures. Public education enlightens *all* students, regardless of financial and social status, promoting change in the world through the spread of knowledge. Franklin argues that "A thorough knowledge of the rights of man" is necessary in order to achieve unity and freedom. Through pamphlets, newspapers, and public libraries, Franklin spread the awareness of British tyranny, educating the thirteen colonies about the injustices of the time period. Today, the American Government carries on Franklin's belief that education is the key to unlocking the chains of oppression and ignorance, evident in foreign campaigns for the globalization of democracy. Through the democratic teachings in the Middle East, countries such as Iraq are on the path to becoming free, unified nations. Education breeds an awareness of social injustice, leading to reforms and ultimately freedom for people of any generation, making Franklin's ideas relevant to current affairs. The combination of education and independence results in Franklin's underlying goal, that the world will one day be defined not as separate establishments, but rather as a unified world.

Franklin's ideas displayed in his quote lay out a map of global unity for future generations. Franklin asserts his belief in global togetherness, explaining that he hopes one day "A philosopher may set his foot anywhere on its surface and say: 'This is my country'." With this statement, Franklin emphasizes his belief that each person should not be merely a citizen of a country, but a citizen of the world regardless of cultural or national boundaries. Franklin's decisiveness regarding this global standard exemplifies the need for a universal sovereignty, in which all of mankind is equal despite ethnicity, religious beliefs, or sexual orientation. This overwhelming ideal of a united world with free inhabitants would help prevent conflict, loss, and the domination of peoples. This ultimate goal of global unity coincides with the timeless fight for freedom and the importance of education and global awareness. Franklin's writings, his footprints on both America and the world, have set a precedent that future generations will follow. Today, we trace Franklin's footprints, hoping to achieve his ideal of a universal destiny: a free world where man is united by equality.