

Isaacson: I'm very flattered. I actually should be introducing Bob Smith and Clarice because they are the ones who did so much to make this possible, and they are the two heroes here. I do take small credit that I did introduce them to the Benjamin Franklin Craven Street House and to Marcia years ago. I'd gone down to Mt. Vernon to talk and it was at the Robert Smith lectures that I did it and I've been involved a little bit with the Aspen Institute and Almagelden Horneshead. I had to talk to you about getting more involved with the Aspen Institute. And about half way through the conversation, you were talking about living in London right around the corner from Craven Street. And you were talking your passion for the founders, and I said wait a minute. This guy really should be involved with Craven Street and Benjamin Franklin. So I apologized to Bob Steele who has been the once and future chairman of the board of the Aspen Institute, now at the Treasury Department for not bringing you into the Aspen Institute but I'm actually very proud instead that you saved Marcia from having to raise the money dollar by dollar, and thank you so much for that wonderful stuff. I also want to thank Lady Manning, who I helped turn onto this project and she has been spectacular. Marcia I remember when I first went by and the house was a real mess and I brought my daughter, who was then about 12 years old and she said, no way. But you were able to pull it off. And it is really great to be here under the great David Martin portrait of Benjamin Franklin. You know Benjamin Franklin

was not a person who minded a little bit of flattery, and he would love this night because he would love to celebrate himself, especially under the great David Martin portrait, which painted when he was in London, living on Craven Street by the great artist. It does have Sir Isaac Newtown in the upper left hand corner to make sure you know that it was painted in London and that he was a man of the enlightenment. It was brought back by Franklin to Philadelphia when he came back right as the revolution began. And then was captured by Lord Hal when he captured Philadelphia. And they rushed into tell him that, when he was in Paris and hey the bad news that Lord Hal has taken Philadelphia. And Franklin paused and said, no on the contrary Philadelphia has taken Lord Hal. And it was indeed a quagmire for Lord Hal and eventually Franklin got the portrait back that Lord Hal had took.

I also want to thank Deputy Assistant Secretary Kurt Volker for giving my speech earlier this evening. Everything he said was right. I will now repay that by giving your speech on global warming, which will be a little bit better than the other speech, which is about a surge of troops in Iraq, which I won't be giving because it is already being given by another person tonight.

I was actually here early, I actually had lunch in this room, at this table today. So I feel other than breakfast I've been living in this room. It is because they announced the Benjamin Franklin Awards, Secretary Rice in this room announced that the Benjamin Franklin Awards for public

diplomacy. I know we have our public diplomacy people here. And it was very fitting that Benjamin Franklin would be the person who would give the name to this new award that the State Department is doing. Because he was somebody who believed very much in spreading the joy of the virtues and values of America, and I think that is the big lesson why we have Craven Street and why we celebrate Dr. Franklin. I'm a little intimidated doing this speech because I see the true biographer of Benjamin Franklin, Jim Shroods, the one in the bow tie there laughing at this. I do urge you, he is actually the better more charming writer about Franklin. I just had a better publicist. So you must go read Jim Shroods book, *The Essential Founder*. It is a delightful, wonderful, rollicking book, as charming as Ben Franklin, and may I say as charming as Jim Shroods is. So go out and get it tomorrow. He is also writing a biography of Einstein due out in a year or two.

Dr. Franklin, what made him interesting is that he was a great inventor. We talk about all the inventions he did in Craven Street, but I always thought that the best thing he invented was himself. He'd constantly reinvented who Benjamin Franklin was. Even as a kid, he was born the tenth son of a Puritan immigrant in Boston. He was the tenth son of Puritan, he was going to be his father's ties to the Lord. His father was going to send him to Harvard to study for the ministry. This is a very

long time ago, back when Harvard knew how to train ministers. But Franklin wasn't exactly cut for the cloth. At one point they were salting away the provisions for the winter in his father's house. He said to his father, how about if I day grace over them right now and we get it done with once and for all for the entire year. So his father realized it would be a waste of money to send him to Harvard so he did the next best thing, or probably a better thing. He apprenticed him to his older brother who ran a newspaper. So he became a journalist and a printer and a publisher. He decided to teach himself. This is part of the Franklin invention, how to be a greater writer, teacher. I mean a great writer and publisher. And so he would pull down the volumes of the Spectator, that great magazine that was being published in the early 1700's from England, read the essays by Addison and Steele and then try to recreate them in his own writing. And he said, usually I wasn't as good and I would correct myself but every now and then I got the impression that I could become a tolerable writer. Not only does he become a tolerable writer but he becomes the best writer in colonial America inventing a whole new vernacular of that, aw shucks, cracker barrel humor that really becomes part of the American character. And once he's done so, of course, he wants to write for his brother's newspaper. But as I mention his brother was an older brother and older brothers didn't like the bratty young Ben Franklin, so there was no way he was going to let Ben Franklin write for the paper. So Benjamin

Franklin had to disguise his handwriting and write under a pseudo name and slip it under the door in the print shop at the New England Current. So he disguises his handwriting and he writes under the name, Silence Dogood, widowed elderly woman living in the countryside of Massachusetts. Now this is true triumph of the imagination because here he is a 14 year old kid who has never left Boston, kind of naughty growing up on the docks. The writing under this voice and in those Silence Dogood essays you begin to see the virtues and values that Benjamin Franklin is bequeathing us. His very first one he says he wants to introduce himself, or rather she says she wants to introduce herself. He is writing in her voice, saying I have a natural aversion to tyranny. And that is how you know, any trampling of the rights of my fellow citizens makes my blood boil exceedingly, that's how you know I'm an American. In the second Silence Dogood, he makes fun of the connection between church and state and that theocracy of Massachusetts taking on Governor Dudley and saying, anybody who will go from the clergy into government will simply steal you money in two different ways, first under the guise of God and then under the guise of taxes. In the fourth Silence Dogood he makes fun of Harvard, which he couldn't go to and says it only knows how to turn out dunces and blockheads, who can enter a room genteelly, something they would have been better of learning in dancing school. And his brother finally, not being a total dunce or blockhead, figured it out it is Ben Franklin

doing it, the younger brother. So to move the story right along, as you know, he becomes the most famous run away in America at age 17, running away to Philadelphia. Just a few coins in his pocket, all bedraggled and wet. Landing there at the Market Street wharf and he says he gave one of the coins as a tip to the boatman, another he uses to buy those three puffy rolls that you remember from the autobiography. He gives one of the rolls away to a woman who is on the boat with him and a hungry child. And he said, when you are very, very poor you are always more generous than when you are very, very rich. Because you don't want people to think you are poor so you pretend to be rich. And this was Franklin inventing himself. And he becomes, and my favorite story about this notion of him inventing himself is, as a young printer in Philadelphia he finally becomes an apprentice, gets a job there, helps start a print shop. And he forms something called the Junta, or leather apron cloth. A group of friends who met every Friday evening to talk about public policy and science and everything else and they made a list of the virtues and values that they would need to become good Americans. Because they wanted to invent a new middle class of tradesmen and artisans, what Franklin called we the middling people? And the virtues are very famous if you look at the autobiography as honesty and frugality in industry. And he puts them on a chart because he's kind of a geeky guy and he marks every week how well he does on each one of those virtues. He puts a little block if he hasn't mastered

each of the virtues. And it takes him a while and he says he even transfers the chart to a piece of ivory slate so he could wipe it clean each week, another great American style of reinvention. But finally, and here is where cliché comes from, you know he comes up with a clean slate and he shows it around very proudly to all the people in the leather apron club how well he had done mastering each of these twelve virtues. One of the members of the club says to him, you know you've forgotten a virtue. You are missing a virtue that you might want to try. You might want to practice. And Franklin says, what's that? And the friend says, humility, you might try that one. And this is typical Franklin, he says, I was never very good at humility I was never able to master that virtue. But I could give the pretense of humility. I could fake it very well. And I learned that the pretense of humility was just as useful as the reality of humility because it caused you to listen to the person next to you. It caused you to think that they may have some ideas. It caused you to see if you could find common ground with people of different opinions. And that was the essence of the middling democracy that we were trying to form. Anyway, he becomes as you know successful enough and goes into not only print and publishing and stuff, but like a good media entrepreneur decides he needs to have the content as well as the print shop so he starts a magazine. Decides he wants to be publisher so he creates Poor Richard's Almanac on the very practical grounds that if you print the bible people buy it about

once a lifetime, but if you print an almanac they have to buy it every year. So he was selling 15,000 copies, which was a lot back then of Poor Richard's Almanac. And he decided like a media entrepreneur, I used to work at Time Warner, that he even needed to sort of franchise it. So up and down the coast with his relatives and there were print shops that would have the franchise content newspaper. And then he wanted to control the distribution system. And that is why he created the American Colonial Postal System, so he could control the distribution system between his post office. He becomes successful enough to retired, really in his early 40s, and devote himself to science, civic affairs or things that Kurt talked about in terms of founding the Volunteer Fire Department. We have people here from the University of Pennsylvania. He then called it the Academy of Philadelphia. His mother who is still Puritan back in Boston is kind of confused and writes him a beautiful, wonderful letter sort of explaining that you don't get to go to Heaven, that the doctrine of good works is a heresy, that God's grace comes to his chosen and select alone and that you can't achieve salvation through good works. It only comes through being part of the elect. And he writes a letter back saying, basically saying that's why I left Boston. I don't believe in that. I believe in the doctrine of good works. And I believe that the only way to serve God is in one simple way. He made all of these fellow creatures, therefore he must love them all. So if you serve your fellow man it is your best



way of serving God. And he said, and that's why I'd rather, the last line of this letter is, that's why I'd rather have it said of me that he lived usefully than that he died rich. And having done that, having become the great civic leader he finally is sent over as the envoy, ambassador and agent for the colonies, to try to avert the American Revolution. Because he was really a wise person who knew how to bring people together, who knew at times when people were tearing themselves apart, which is another of the lessons we have from Ben Franklin today, that there really is common ground based on values and you should try to avoid tearing things apart. So he goes to England, moves to Craven Street. Craven Street is so absolutely delightful because it is so Ben Franklin. He doesn't take a grand manor house. He doesn't take a grand embassy. It is a middle class wonderful house right there among a row of houses of people who, and he hangs around with the artisans and shopkeepers and leather aprons and writers and stuff. He has with him his son William, as Jim knows a wonderful tale, his illegitimate son, when he was living in Philadelphia before he had gotten married. He had had an illegitimate son who was unlike a lot of people of that age, Benjamin Franklin takes responsibility for his son, raises him, brings him into the household, dotes on William Franklin and then brings William Franklin over to live with him on Craven Street. But William Franklin despite the fact that, or maybe because of the fact that he was illegitimate born becomes very aristocratic, hangs around with

Dukes and the Earls and that sort of thing and actually doesn't love Craven Street. Now Marcia may correct me but is really hanging out at the more beautiful manor homes and the other parts of London. And is Franklin is trying to convince him that this type of life, this middle class wonderful working industrious life is better than being part of the idle aristocracy. In fact, if you want to appreciate that scene I mentioned before of him straggling up Market Street all bedraggled and wet with the three rolls and the autobiography, you just have to read the first two words of the autobiography, which are Dear Son. He is writing at that time when he is living in London. He is writing as if it is a letter to his son saying remember your humble roots. Remember where you came from. Remember we were proud to be hard working, diligent, industrious, honest. We are not trying to recreate an aristocracy in the new world the way they have it in the old world. So he celebrate, his of course doesn't listen his sons are wanting to do, goes off and becomes royal governor of New Jersey, stays very loyal to the crown. Those of you who read to the end of either James' book or mine know that Franklin is not successful in averting the American Revolution. We end up having a revolution breaking from England. So Franklin comes back in 1775 to Philadelphia, once again landing at the Market Street wharf there. And everybody is waiting to see because he really has been trying to hold this fine noble vase as he calls it, the British empire together. He doesn't want it to crack. He says

you'll never be able to get it back. They are wondering whether he is going to cast his lot on the side of revolution or stay loyal to the crown, as most Americans were in 1775. And when he gets to Philadelphia, Madison's letters are great. They are all wondering what the old Dr. Franklin is, which way he is going to go. And he doesn't say anything. He waits for about a week and a half until he can meet with his son William, who is still the royal governor of New Jersey. They meet finally in Bucks County in sort of the summit in order to decide what to do. And Benjamin Franklin tells his son that he is going to join the cause of revolution. He is going to become a patriot, a rebel, join the Continental Congress. And he asks his son to resign as royal governor and to join the revolutionary cause as well. And his son doesn't do it. His son decides to stay loyal to the crown. You see the personal and the political all coming together there. But making it all the poignant, at that meeting there is beautiful 17 year old kid, a beautiful 17 year old lad named Temple Franklin. He was actually the illegitimate son of William Franklin. William Franklin too had had an illegitimate son, had an illegitimate son when they were living in London. But unlike his father Benjamin Franklin, William Franklin didn't take responsibility for his son. Didn't raise him, didn't bring him into the household, but when he left to become royal governor, Benjamin Franklin did. Benjamin Franklin brings young Temple back from the boarding school or wherever he was let to go, and moves him into 36

Craven Street where they live with Polly and Margaret Stevenson and stuff. He dotes on this very good looking charming grandson and brings him back and there he is at age 17 now, at this summit conference in 1775. And caught between the father who he has never really met and the grandfather who raised him, and he shuttles back and forth from Philadelphia, where his grandfather wants him to go to the University of Pennsylvania to Perth Amboy, which is where the royal governors house was. And he wants him to go to Kings College, now Columbia, still loyal to the crown. Shuttling back and forth for a year, losing his luggage on the way. The letters between Benjamin Franklin and the son filled with vitriol about politics but then also about where Temple is now going to come back and see you but he lost his shirt. So all these sort of things that those of us parents of teenagers understand so well. But eventually after a year Temple Franklin casts his lot. He decides to cast his lot with Benjamin Franklin his grandfather and join the cause of revolution, and to become Benjamin Franklin's secretary when Franklin is part of the Continental Congress that is gathered in Philadelphia. That congress at that time, just as Temple moves back in, has created a committee to write a declaration explaining why we have a revolution. It may have been the last time congress created a good committee. It has John Adams, Thomas Jefferson and Ben Franklin on it, all of your friends Bob. And Jefferson gets to write the first draft, which Franklin loves cause Jefferson is his protégé and a person of the

enlightenment. They both kind of don't like, with all due respect to David McCullough, they both kind of don't like John Adams that much. Adams is a little bit jealous that Jefferson is getting to write this. But he sends it down Market Street from his rented rooms, Jefferson does, the great first draft of the Declaration. Said would the good Dr. Franklin please peruse this and make any changes he wants, and then added, because any measurably improved and blah, blah, blah. I was thinking when I read that, boy people were a lot nicer to editors back then than when I was an editor. But you can see in the editing of that document, I mentioned it today when we were doing the public diplomacy, what is the very first sentence they write? They say, what is this Declaration about? It is because a decent respect for the opinions of mankind and says that we explain our cause. It is a public diplomacy document. It shows that our values are going to be strong in saving us if we can just articulate them right.

The second paragraph, just the editing of it, those of us I say who editors love it, Jefferson writes we hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable. And you see Benjamin Franklin's black printers pen, it is a back slash that the printer used. Heavy dark ink, it is in the library of congress, its first draft. You go look at it. And it crossed out, it says we hold these truths and Franklin has written, to be self evident on top. He explains to the committee that we are trying to create a new type of

nation in which our virtues and values come from the consent of the governed and from rationality and reason not from the dictates and dogma of any particular religion. The sentence goes on and they are endowed with certain inalienable rights. And you see John Adams' handwriting, endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights. And there they are delicately balancing the role of divine providence and the grace of our Lord in creating our nation, as well as our own responsibilities and the enlightenment view of rights coming from consent of the governed. Today when we tear ourselves apart of whether the Ten Commandments should be on a steps somewhere or whatever and it becomes fodder for some cable TV shout shows. I like looking at how carefully and beautifully they use religion to bring us together as a country instead of to tear us apart. Another lesson.

Well in order to make that document a reality we had to get France in on our side in the revolution. Even back then France was a bit of a handful. So, he is in his 70s, they send him over and actually go outside you will see the Duplises portrait on the wall of this next room to the right. It is a beautiful portrait done in France. There he is, sort of the old man still with a couple of mistresses, but still he was having a good time there in France. And he has to bring France in on our side. And he writes these memos that in this room in the State Department they would truly appreciate to fine minister Berchon that talk about the

balance of power in Europe. And the Bourbon Pact nations, France, Netherlands, Spain and why it is in their interest to come in on our side and the balance of power against Britain, etc, etc. It is a real politic balance of power, diplomacy that would make a Matternick or Bismarck, or a Kissinger very proud. But then Franklin does something unusual. He goes back to Parche and builds a printing press. And he prints the Declaration of Independence and the other great documents coming out of America. And he spreads them throughout Europe as a great first act of public diplomacy because he feels correctly that if people understand the values for which we are fighting, liberty, equality, justice, these are welling up to in Europe, and they will naturally be on our side. And he was even a great public relations guy. I mean he realized the French had read Rousseau, perhaps once too often. And they thought of Americans as sort of wilderness philosophers prancing around in the forest.

Benjamin Franklin had lived only on the well named streets of Craven Street and Market Street in Boston, Philadelphia and London, never been to the wilderness hardly, except for once or twice; decides to wear a coonskin cap and a backwoods frock coat when he goes to the steps of the Academy Royale, the Hud Voltaire and doesn't wear the fancy clothing when he goes to Versailles, but he's dressed up as the backwoods frontier philosopher. And other than Jerry Lewis nobody

has ever pulled the wool over the eyes of the French the way he did. But they love him, the women start doing their hair as the coiffure a la Franklin done up as a coonskin cap and having the medallion to Franklin in Boston. And I think the king was so annoyed by this that when the Countess De Poliac was wearing her little thing and he had a porcelain chamber pot with the Franklin medallion embossed on the bottom of it to give to her.

But anyway, he finally comes back having gotten France on our side of the war. As Bob said, without France's help I think 90% of the gun powder we used was negotiated by Franklin when he was in France. I think Marquis de Lafayette, who Franklin recruited had as many French troops at Yorktown, the decisive battle as George Washington had Americans. So without their help we wouldn't have won the war. He says actually another year or so because he does have these two wonderful girlfriends, but eventually he gets back, just really right before the Constitutional Convention. The nation is tearing itself apart. Once last great thing he has to do because they are fighting over the big state, little state issue. He is very old, pushing 80. They carry him on a chair the 2 ½ blocks from his house to the what is now called Independence Hall, then called the State House in Philadelphia. The old man there at the Constitutional Convention watching in that hot



summer as they rip each other apart on this big state, little state issue and everything else.

And after the Connecticut compromise goes down in flames. Finally Ben Franklin gets up and this beautiful speech in which he basically says, I'm older than anybody here. He is like twice as old as the average age of everybody else. Almost 35, 40 years older than almost anybody in the room, as he is just pushing over 80. And he says, the older I get something really strange happens to me. I realize that I am fallible. I realize that occasionally I'm wrong. It is going to happen to you. You are going to get older and you are going to realize that sometimes you are wrong and that other people were right. So look at the people around you and suspect that maybe they have a point, and that they may be right and you may be wrong and we have to find common ground. He said we were young tradesmen in Philadelphia and we had to put together a joint in a table and it didn't quite fit, you'd take a little from one side and shave a little from the other, until finally you had a joint that would hold together for centuries. And so too we here at this Constitutional Convention must each part with some of our demands. And his point was that compromisers sometimes don't make great heroes, but they do make great democracies. So he proposes the compromise that has a House and a Senate proportional representation. He tells them to line up and sign it, and so they do. He does that

wonderful famous scene too, where he points to the back of George Washington's chair and he says I've wondered what was on the back of that chair that was rising or setting sun. And as they are all lining up to sign it, he says now I know it is a rising sun.

Mrs. Powell, one of the great old matrons of Philadelphia grabs him as they are coming out of Independence Hall, State House and says what have you wrought, what have you given us Dr. Franklin. He gives a great line, a republic madam if you can keep it. Because he believed it was up to each one of us, we the middling people he called it, to actually find that common ground, to have that tolerance, to make that sense that sometimes you have to give a little to make a joint that will hold together for centuries. Something we've lost in this town the past 20 years. And that's what his great thing to us was, was a sense of tolerance.

During his lifetime Benjamin Franklin donated to the building fund of each and every church that was built in Philadelphia. At one point they were building a new hall, it is still there, you look at Independence Hall, look a little bit to your left there is a building. It is called the new Hall. It was for itinerate preachers who might be coming to preach in Philadelphia and didn't have pulpit. And Franklin wrote the fundraising document, he said even if the Mufti of Constantinople were

to send somebody here to preach Islam to us and to teach us about Mohammed we should offer a pulpit and we should listen for we might learn. And on his deathbed he was the largest individual contributor to the Mica Israel Synagogue, the first synagogue built in Philadelphia. So when he died instead of his minister accompanying him to the grave all 35 ministers, preachers and priests, and the rabbi of the Jews linked arms to march with him to the grave.

It is that type of sense of understanding, of tolerance, of individual liberty that they were fighting for back then. And if I may so it is what we are fighting for now today in this world.

Thank you all very much.