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Population Politics: Benjamin Franklin and the Peopling of North America

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and the Peopling of North America”

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“People are indeed the essential of commerce, and the more people the more trade; the more trade, the more money; the more money, the more strength; and the more strength, the greater the nation...All temporal felicities, I mean national, spring from the number of people.”

Daniel Defoe

Benjamin Franklin’s *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind* (1751) is a landmark in the history of modern demography, accurately predicting the relative and absolute rates of growth for Great Britain and North America into the middle of the nineteenth century. It is also a milestone in the history of immigration. Lamenting the “swarm” of German immigrants who threatened to make Pennsylvania “a Colony of Aliens,” Franklin called for policies designed to protect and increase the number of English settlers. These two dimensions of Franklin’s argument have been treated in relative isolation. Demographers have marveled at Franklin’s predictions, and identified the premise of his argument—that population grows up to, but cannot exceed, the limits of subsistence—as an important precursor to Malthus.¹ Historians of immigration and ethnicity, by contrast, have condemned Franklin’s nativism, and assigned him an important role in the development of assimilationist and exclusionary policies in North America.² There is a kernel of truth to each of these interpretations: Franklin was an

¹ James H. Cassedy, *Demography in Early America. Beginnings of the Statistical Mind, 1600-1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969); Michael R. Haines and Richard H. Steckel, *A Population History of North America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Joseph J. Spengler, “Malthusianism in Late Eighteenth Century America,” *American Economic Review* 25 (December 1935): 691-707; Conrad Zirkle, “Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Malthus, and the United States Census,” *Isis* 98 (March 1947): 58-62.

² Roger Daniels, *Coming to America. A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Ronald Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Knopf, 1979).

extraordinary social scientist, and sometimes expressed himself in ethnically charged terms. But the dichotomy underlying this intellectual division of labor—between, roughly, “science” and “prejudice”—obscures more than it reveals. By the early eighteenth century, the emerging discipline of political economy had established that trade and commerce were the keys to political power, and that governing population was the key to successful statecraft. Immigration policy—which, in North America, included traffic in slaves and the importation of servants and criminals as well as the movement of free men and women—was thought critical to the health and survival of the state. If we are to understand Franklin’s contributions to immigration history—and by extension, the complex politics of population at the dawn of modern politics—then we must recover this broader context of meaning.

This paper sketches the terrain. It is not a finished portrait, but a preliminary outline. I begin with a discussion of Franklin’s status as “the first American,” and the need to situate him in a broader social, political, and intellectual context. I then turn to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century arguments regarding the causes and consequences of population growth, and Franklin’s distinctive contributions to them. In the final sections of the paper I turn to Franklin’s reflections on race and ethnicity in colonial life. Throughout this paper I seek to emphasize the *politics* of population. In particular, I am interested in the relationship between population and the construction of commercial society.

I

Benjamin Franklin was born on 17 January 1706 in Boston, Massachusetts. The youngest son and fifteenth child of a tallow chandler and soap boiler, his formal education ended at the age of 10. Within two years he was apprenticed to his brother, a local printer. Despite these meager beginnings, Franklin led a life of extraordinary accomplishment. A writer of wit, grace and intelligence, he crafted a series of complex and distinct literary voices. An experimental scientist, he conducted original research on the nature of electricity, was elected to the Royal Society, and founded the first scientific society in America. A practical engineer, he invented the lightning rod, bifocal glasses, and the first truly efficient

wood-burning stove. A born improver, he fathered the first subscription library, the first volunteer fire department, and the first charity hospital. A political leader in colonial Pennsylvania and revolutionary America, he helped draft the Declaration of Independence, represented the United States in negotiations with France and Great Britain, and participated in the Constitutional Convention of 1787.

Franklin's political writings reflect his engagement with this wider world. He was not an abstract or systematic thinker. At no point did he articulate a developed conception of justice, or defend a theory of human nature. He wrote no *Republic* or *Leviathan*; his longest text is his *Autobiography*. As one historian mordantly observed, "the sum total of his strictly philosophical musings about government would fill, quite literally, about two printed pages."³ And yet *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*—now in its thirty-fifth volume, with nearly a decade of his life still to be covered—reveals a mind of extraordinary critical intelligence. By trade a printer, Franklin actively participated in the public sphere of news and communication. He wrote to influence opinions and shape events, to entertain friends and demolish enemies, to share ideas and attain commercial success. He addressed topics ranging from monetary policy to sexual mores, and from the conduct of business to the sins of slavery. He employed a wide array of literary forms, including journalistic essays, popular broadsides, public letters, political pamphlets, scientific treatises, and bagatelles. Well schooled in the use of irony, satire and invective—he taught himself to write by miming Addison's *Spectator*—he understood the value of a good hoax, and delighted in the construction of dramatic personae. Some of Franklin's most famous productions were "authored" by fictional characters like Silence Dogood and Richard Saunders.

Faced with these riches, scholars have found it difficult to agree on Franklin's contribution to the history of ideas. He has been cast as Puritan, Deist, and atheist; as Newtonian empiricist and Enlightenment rationalist; as democratic populist and liberal individualist; as petit bourgeois and proto-capitalist; as principled pragmatist and opportunistic scoundrel. The outpouring is extraordinary; scores

³ Clinton Rossiter, "The Political Thought of Benjamin Franklin," in Esmond Wright, ed., *Benjamin Franklin: A Profile* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1970), 149-50.

of monographs are published each decade. Despite this fact, Franklin has yet to be successfully integrated into the history of eighteenth-century political thought. One recent scholar, despairing of the task, simply proclaimed that “Franklin is in no sense our contemporary...He is really no one’s contemporary.”⁴

American popular culture has had an easier time of it. To adults Franklin is best known as prophet of the American dream: if you work hard and play by the rules, then you will succeed. Power and privilege are the fruit of industry and effort, not birth and ascriptive social roles. The ethos of the American dream is closely associated with Poor Richard’s most famous phrases: “A penny saved is a penny earned”; “There are no gains without pains”; “Time is money”; and “Early to bed and early to rise / Make a man healthy wealthy and wise.” The proof of these maxims is provided by Franklin’s own life. Rising from obscure poverty to political and intellectual prominence through industry and self-discipline, it affirms the power of individuals to shape their own destiny.

Franklin’s association with the American dream has made him a touchstone for public leaders and private corporations, radical egalitarians and economic conservatives, for over two centuries. But his appeal has not been limited to adults. Children’s literature—with titles like *Ben and Me: A New and Astonishing Life of Benjamin Franklin as Written by His Good Mouse Amos* (in which Amos assumes responsibility for Franklin’s discoveries and inventions), or *The Hatmaker’s Sign* (based on a parable Franklin told Jefferson when the latter balked at congressional attempts to edit the *Declaration of Independence*), or *Fart Proudly: The Writings of Benjamin Franklin You Never Read in School* (whose title derives from Franklin’s satiric proposal for the scientific study of flatulence, *Letter to the Royal Academy*)—testify to the complex emotional appeal of Franklin’s life and writings. With the possible exception of George Washington, none of Franklin’s contemporaries has played as important a role in the moral and political imaginations of Americans; and Washington, distant as Cato, lacks Franklin’s immediacy and intimacy.

⁴ Douglas Anderson, *The Radical Enlightenment of Benjamin Franklin* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), xv-xvi.

Ironically, Franklin's importance to American culture has made it more, rather than less, difficult to understand him. It has subtly yet profoundly shaped the texts we read and the ways we read them. This effect is particularly evident in D.H. Lawrence's well-known attack on Franklin's moral and political ideals. In the *Autobiography* Franklin described his "bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection," complete with a table of virtues and a method for rendering them habitual. Lawrence railed against the "barbed wire moral enclosure" that Franklin "rigged up."

The perfectibility of man, dear God! When everyman as long as he remains alive is in himself a multitude of conflicting men. Which of these do you choose to perfect, at the expense of every other? Old Daddy Franklin will tell you. He'll rig up for you, the pattern American...The soul of man is a vast forest, and all Benjamin intended was a neat back yard.

Why did Franklin do this? "Out of sheer cussedness." But not simply cussedness. Franklin "hated England, he hated Europe...he wanted to be an American," and his whole life was dedicated to "destroying the European past." Lawrence was a brilliant writer and a perceptive critic. But his interpretation rested on dubious interpretive protocols. Like many before and after, Lawrence reduced all of Franklin's writings to the *Autobiography* and the *Almanack*; and like many before and after, he naively (or—perhaps—mischievously) assumed that the man born in Boston was identical to the characters he created.⁵

Lawrence identified Franklin with the desire to be an "American," and this, too, is a stumbling block to our understanding. During most of Franklin's lifetime, the term "American" referred to an inhabitant of a geographic region, whether Native Americans or British colonists. Only in the wake of the imperial crisis of the 1760s, and the revolutionary struggles of the 1770s, did it begin to assume unique social, political and cultural meanings. Franklin certainly played a role in the construction of the type "American"—not least when, as minister to France, he played to European visions of natural genius by refusing to wear a wig and robe, sporting a beaver cap and simple wool coat instead. But for most of Franklin's life "America" lay in the future, and cannot be used to explain his deepest yearnings and

⁵ D.H. Lawrence, "Benjamin Franklin," *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York: Viking, 1923).

earliest aspirations. Moreover, the identification of Franklin with America confuses four potentially distinct things: the biographical origins of an author, the social and political problems that dominated his thoughts, the audience he addressed, and the intellectual resources he brought to bear on them. Franklin spent his first two decades in Boston, and the following three in Philadelphia. Throughout his life his attention was riveted on the dilemmas of civic life in North America. But during long missions to England (1757-62, 1764-75) and France (1776-85) he wrote at length and with great sophistication for European audiences. And there was nothing parochial about his reading habits. As a child, he eagerly read Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Plutarch's *Lives*, Mather's *Bonifacius*, and Defoe's *Essay on Projects*; as a lad of 18, in a journal kept at sea, he debated Machiavellian dicta; as a budding political economist of 23, he exploited the arguments of William Petty and Marchamont Nedham. Other early papers indicate familiarity with the poetry of Thomson, Waller, Cowley, Swift, and Pope. At his death he left a library of 4,276 volumes written in English, French, Italian, Latin, Spanish, and German.

There is one final dimension to the problems posed by Franklin's "American" identity, this time having to do with historiographical conventions and commitments. Beginning in the 1960s, widely shared principles governing the study of political thought came under fire. Rejecting approaches that drew their bearings from canonical texts and teleological narratives, scholars sought to recover the meaning of texts by focusing on the linguistic contexts within which they were written. The significance of a claim or utterance could be grasped only in relationship to the range of idioms available at a given point in time.⁶ Shop-worn distinctions between philosophy and history, or between reason and rhetoric, were called into question. Complex works of literature were placed alongside analytic texts. In England these arguments led to vital new interpretations of familiar writers like Machiavelli, Hobbes and Locke, and to the recovery of less well-known figures like James Harrington. In the United States the new histories of political thought coincided with—and were largely absorbed by—the "republican"

⁶ John Dunn, "The Identity of the History of Ideas," *Philosophy* 43 (April 1968): 85-104; Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 8 (1969): 3-53.

interpretation of the American Revolution. As late as 1955 Louis Hartz could argue that the key to American political thought was to be found in the writings of John Locke. But by the early 1960s scholars had discovered, in the pamphlet literature of the mid-eighteenth-century, a language of virtue and corruption that appeared to be distinct from and in tension with the liberal logic of rights and interests.⁷ Within a few short years, the concept of republicanism dominated the landscape. Taking cues from the path-breaking work of Bernard Bailyn, Gordon Wood and J.G.A. Pocock, historians and political theorists recast the Revolution (and virtually every subsequent conflict in American history) as a struggle to preserve republican liberty against the hazards of moral and political corruption.

Benjamin Franklin is a strikingly marginal figure in the pages of republican revisionists, and plays no greater role in the work of critics seeking to re-assert a liberal paradigm.⁸ There is a simple reason for this: he was neither a “classical republican” nor a “Lockean liberal.” Though concerned with virtue and corruption, he did not assume—as republican theory seemed to require—that a stable and successful polity rested on moral purity and selfless devotion to the commonwealth. Though dedicated to self-reliance and economic growth, he did not assume—as Lockean theory seemed to require—that property rights were natural, or that the language of natural jurisprudence fully captured meaning of modern citizenship.

Nearly a decade ago Daniel Rodgers suggested that the concept of republicanism was “perceptibly thinning out, like a nova entering its red giant phase.”⁹ The intervening years have confirmed this judgment, as scholars have cast about for new frameworks for making sense of eighteenth-century American political thought. To date, no clear alternatives have been proposed, much less

⁷ On the complex relationship between “liberal” and “republican” ideas, see: Alan Craig Houston, *Algernon Sidney and the Republican Heritage in England and America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

⁸ The most sustained effort to bring Franklin into the “republican” fold is Drew R. McCoy, “Benjamin Franklin’s Vision of a Republican Political Economy for America,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 35 (1978): 605-28. The most striking attempt to distinguish him from classical republicanism is John Patrick Diggins, *The Lost Soul of American Politics. Virtue, Self-Interest, and the Foundations of Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), esp. 20-21.

⁹ Daniel T. Rodgers, “Republicanism: The Career of a Concept,” *Journal of American History* 79 (June 1992): 11.

embraced. This dearth of integrating narratives may simply reflect a period of lassitude following the excitement of the republican revival. But it presents a window of opportunity. Freed from the confines of the liberalism/republicanism debate, it is now possible to use the tools of historical research to open new questions and frame new arguments.¹⁰

Throughout his life, Franklin was committed to personal and civic improvement. The language of improvement—of gain and profit, progress and perfection, increase and expansion, benefit and amelioration—runs throughout Franklin’s writings. It is important to note that its meaning was not simply, or even primarily, economic. In an influential essay on the emergence of “the peculiar modern Western form of capitalism,” Max Weber argued that Franklin exhibited, with “almost classic purity,” the ethos of rational acquisition. Franklin’s ideal was the “credit-worthy honest man”; all of life was subordinated to the task of earning “more and more money” while scrupulously avoiding “all spontaneous enjoyment of life.” This duty to a calling, once sanctified by Puritanism, had lost its religious basis by Franklin’s day. But it continued to mobilize men around the rational pursuit of profit.¹¹ There is much in Franklin to support this view, from *Advice to a Young Tradesman* (“Remember that Time is Money”) to the wildly popular preface to the 1758 edition of *Poor Richard Improved* (reprising approximately 100 prudential maxims and aphorisms, in the form of a harangue by “Father Abraham”). But the production of wealth was only part of the ethos Franklin sought to cultivate. He praised industry and frugality, but he also commended the pursuit of knowledge, the cultivation of friendship, and the satisfaction of need. “Improvement,” in Franklin’s lexicon, was nothing less than a shorthand for the civilizing process. It

¹⁰ Reflecting the limits of current historiography, Franklin plays no perceptible role in the narrative of two recent synthetic works: J.G.A. Pocock, ed., *The Varieties of British Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), or David Wootton, ed., *Republicanism, Liberty, and Commercial Society, 1649-1776* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994). Nor has he played a significant role in recent studies in American political thought: Michael Sandel, *Democracy’s Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); James P. Young, *Reconsidering American Liberalism: The Troubled Odyssey of the Liberal Idea* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996); Rogers Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

¹¹ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 2001).

captured his deepest values and commitments, linking moral psychology, political development and economic growth. And it provided a bridge to some of the most important debates of the eighteenth century.¹² It is in this context that we must consider Franklin’s reflections on population, immigration, and empire.

II

Populousness was one of the great desiderata of early-modern European statecraft. To give but three examples, reflecting the depth and breadth of interest in this topic:

“Fewness of people, is real poverty; and a Nation wherein are Eight Millions of people, are more then twice as rich as the same scope of Land wherein are but Four”; “the greatness and glory of a Prince lyeth...in the number, art, and industry of his people, well united and governed.”¹³

“Ein Staat, welcher nur de Hälfte der Einwohner hat, die er vermöge seines Umfangs und seiner Nahrungsmittel haben könnte, wird auch nur half so glücklich, mächtig und reich seyn, al ser seyn konnte und solte.”¹⁴

“Pour bein entretenir la Société, le premier soin doit être celui d’augmenter & de conserver le nombre de ceux qui la composent.”¹⁵

Europeans had, of course, long been concerned with population growth. All lived under the Biblical injunction to “be fruitful, and multiply,” as all knew that “in the multitude of people is the king’s honour.”¹⁶ Fertility was the work of Providence, a large and thriving population the sign of God’s grace and favor. These traditional perspectives on population survived into the eighteenth century, when English and French contested for bragging rights over whether London or Paris was the larger—hence

¹² James C. Riley, *Population Thought in the Age of the Demographic Revolution* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 1985), 3; Nicholas T. Phillipson and Rosalind Michison, ed., *Scotland in the Age of Improvement* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1970).

¹³ Sir William Petty, *A Treatise of Taxes & Contributions*, 1662, reprinted in *The Economic Writings of Sir William Petty*, ed. Charles Henry Hull, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1899), 1:34, 22.

¹⁴ Johann Peter Süssmilch, *Die göttliche Ordnung in den Veränderungen des menschlichen Geschlechts, aus der Geburt, dem Tode und der Fortpflanzung*, 3 vols. (Berlin: 1775-76).

¹⁵ Jakob Friedrich von Bielfeld, *Institutions politiques, ouvrage où l’on traite de la société civile*, 1760 (Paris, 1762): 1:161.

¹⁶ Genesis 1:28; Proverbs 14:28.

greater and more glorious—city. But during the seventeenth century perspectives began to change. Prior to about 1650, populousness, as a political objective, was subordinated to dominion. The continental wars and colonial ventures of early-modern kings and empires were organized around the pursuit of territory. The ideal of a “universal monarchy” united “spiritual dominion” and “a monopoly of territorial sovereignty.”¹⁷

By the middle of the seventeenth century it was increasingly clear that the strength, stability and grandeur of a state rested not on the acquisition of new lands, but on mastery of trade. The scale and duration of international wars demanded ever greater financial commitments from the states fighting them. The costs of war exceeded the fiscal capacities of existing states, and compelled reliance on a new and challenging source of wealth: the market. As David Hume observed, trade had become “an affair of state.” And “for the nation, the state...to ground its military strength, national glory, and political stability upon commercial success...created a wholly new situation. It required a redefinition, or at the least a significant modification, of the very notion of strength.”¹⁸

Early-modern interest in populousness was a direct outgrowth of this transformation in European statecraft. State survival rested on commercial success, pursued under conditions of menacing international rivalries. As Charles D’Avenant argued in 1699, in the wake of England’s war with France, “It is not extent of territory that makes a country powerful, but numbers of men well employed, convenient ports, a good navy, and a soil producing all sort of commodities.”¹⁹ A large population

¹⁷ Steve Pincus, “From Holy Cause to Economic Interest: The Study of Population and the Invention of the State,” in *A Nation Transformed: England After the Restoration*, ed. Alan Houston and Steve Pincus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World. Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c. 1500-c. 1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). Pincus skillfully demolishes the developmental chronology deployed by Michel Foucault. (See: “Governmentality,” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, Peter Miller [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991], 87-104).

¹⁸ David Hume, “Of Civil Liberty,” in *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. E.F. Miller (Indianapolis: 1985), 92, 88; Istvan Hont, “Free trade and the economic limits to national politics: neo-Machiavellian political economy reconsidered,” in *The Economic Limits to Modern Politics*, ed. John Dunn (Cambridge: 1990), 43-44.

¹⁹ Charles D’Avenant, *An Essay upon the Probable Methods of making a People Gainers in the Balance of Trade* (1699), in *The Political and Commercial Works of... Charles D’Avenant*, ed. Charles Whitworth (London:

contributed to a nation's strength in several distinct yet related ways. It increased the number of productive hands, extending a nation's tax base and enabling greater quantities of labor to be invested in commodities.²⁰ (Hence the concern with unproductive or idle hands. Mere numbers were not enough; as Gregory King famously argued, it was necessary to distinguish between those who "added to" and "subtracted from" the wealth of the kingdom.²¹) It increased the breadth and depth of a nation's internal market, enabling a more extensive division of labor and greater circulation of commodities within the realm.²² (Hence the growing interest in the moral psychology of emulation. Dense urban populations encouraged comparison and increased consumption.²³) Most important of all, a large population helped keep wages low. According to widely-accepted economic doctrines, the key to a nation's wealth lay in maintaining a favorable balance of trade.²⁴ A nation had to sell—and sell cheap—to maintain its advantage in a competitive international market. One of the most important factors in the price of a commodity was the cost of labor. The cost of labor, in turn, was inversely related to population. When workers were scarce, wages grew; when workers were plentiful, wages declined. A large population was

1771), 2:192. "Gold and silver are indeed the measure of trade, but the spring and original of it in all nations, is the natural or artificial product of the country; that is to say, what their land, or what their labour and industry produces" (Charles D'Avenant, *Discourses on the Public Revenues, and on Trade* [1698], in *Works* 1:354).

²⁰ Sir William Petty, *Political Arithmetick, or A Discourse* (1690), in *Economic Writings*, 1:307-09. "The wealth of all nations arises from the labour and industry of the people" (D'Avenant, *Public Revenues*, in *Works* 1:138).

²¹ Gregory King, *Natural and Political Observations and conclusions upon the State and Condition of England* (1696?), in *Two Tracts by Gregory King*, edited by George E. Barnett (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1936), 11-56. "The bodies of men are without doubt the most valuable treasure of a country...But a country may be populous and yet poor, (as were the ancient Gauls and Scythians) so that numbers, unless they are well employed, make the body politic big, but unwieldy; strong, but unactive; as to any uses of good government. Theirs is a wrong opinion, who think all mouths profit a country that consume its product: And it may be more truly affirmed, that he who does not some way serve the commonwealth, either by being employed, or by employing others, is not only a useless, but hurtful member of it" (D'Avenant, *Balance of Trade* 202-03).

²² "People are indeed the essential of commerce, and the more people the more trade; the more trade, the more money, the more money, the more strength; and the more strength, the greater the nation" (Daniel Defoe, *A Review of the State of the British Nation* (2 July 1709).

²³ "When *England* shall be thicker peopled...the very same People shall then spend more, than when they lived more sordidly and inurbanely, and further asunder, and more out of sight, observation, and emulation of each other; every Man desiring to put on better Apparel when he appears in Company, than when he has no occasion to be seen" (Petty, *Political Arithmetic*, in *Economic Writings*, 1:290). In Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*, the triumph of virtue over vice – of honesty and simplicity over vanity and pride – leads directly to depopulation.

²⁴ Thomas Mun, *England's treasure by forraign trade* (London: 1664).

a critical mechanism for keeping wages low and commodities cheap.²⁵ (Hence too the importance of the concept of a subsistence wage. Many writers assumed that laborers preferred leisure to labor, and that the amount of work they were prepared to undertake was directly related to the amount of money required to satisfy a basket of basic needs. High wages simply decreased the number of hours an individual was willing to work.²⁶)

The importance of population helped spur the emerging discipline of “political arithmetic.” As Charles D’Avenant put it in 1698, “by Political Arithmetic, we mean the art of reasoning by figures, upon things relating to government...The foundation of this art is to be laid in some competent knowledge of the numbers of the people.”²⁷ From its inception in the work of John Graunt and William Petty, “political arithmetic” sought to quantify life expectancy and population growth on the basis of a distinction between natural and artificial, or restrained and unrestrained, growth. Graunt’s *Natural and Political Observations made upon the Bills of Mortality*—predicated on the belief that “the Art of Governing, and the true *Politiques*, is how to preserve the Subject in *Peace and Plenty*”—sought to “understand the Land, and the hands of the Territory to be governed, according to all their intrinsick, and accidental differences.”²⁸ The life expectancy of an individual represented an intrinsic potential, from which he or she might deviate due

²⁵ Thus John Locke: “in all manufactures the greatest part of the value lies in the labour. Where therefore labour is cheapest there ‘tis plain commodities may be afforded [at] the cheapest rates and here I demand whether plenty of hands do not everywhere make work cheaper. And what soever at market can be afforded cheapest shall of course be first sold and beat out others of the same sort” (John Locke, “For a General Naturalisation,” 1693, in *Political Essays*, ed. Mark Goldie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 323. See also: Daniel Statt, *Foreigners and Englishmen. The Controversy over Immigration and Population 1660-1760* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1995), 44-47; Hont, “Free Trade,” 44.

²⁶ John Hatcher, “Labour, Leisure and Economic Thought Before the Nineteenth Century,” *Past and Present* 160 (August 1998): 64-115.

²⁷ D’Avenant, *Public Revenues*, in *Works* 1:128.

²⁸ John Graunt, *Natural and Political Observations made upon the Bills of Mortality* (London: 1662), 78. “Sir Francis Bacon, in his *Advancement of Learning*, hath made a judicious Parallel in many particulars, between the Body Natural, and the Body Politick, and between the Arts of preserving both in Health and Strength: And it is as reasonable, that as Anatomy is the best foundation of one, so also of the other; and that to practice upon the Politick, without knowing the Symmetry, Fabrick, and Proportion of it, is as casual as the practice of Old-women and Empyricks” (Sir William Petty, *The Political Anatomy of Ireland* [1691], in *Economic Writings* 1:129). For Süssmilch’s “Manichaeon” contrast between “natural, uncorrupted, rapidly growing but sparsely populated” regions and “manmade, corrupt, stagnating or declining, and evil societies,” see: Riley, *Population Thought*, 27-28.

to the accidents of disease and misfortune. The rate of reproduction for groups possessed an intrinsic potential as well. The latter was typically expressed in terms of a group's "doubling rate," or the period of time required to double its current population. And it was almost universally agreed that observed doubling rates were substantially below "that in Natural possibility."²⁹

The bound of nature was an imaginary ideal, given practical content by contemporary observation. For British writers, the distance between actual and potential was graphically demonstrated by the demographic paradox of London. As Graunt observed in 1662, London's bills of mortality recorded far more burials than christenings, while its building rates soared. The former indicated population loss, the latter population gain. The solution to this puzzle, Graunt argued, was "that *London* is supplied with People from out of the Country." And supplied it was. According to the work of contemporary demographers, London grew from approximately 190,000 inhabitants in 1600 to approximately 550,000 in 1700. This extraordinary growth occurred against a backdrop of relative stagnation in England's population as a whole. Having reached a peak of 5.5 million in the 1650s, England did not begin to grow again until the middle third of the eighteenth century. Given its high mortality rates, London's growth during the seventeenth century was purchased through the migration of nearly 900,000 souls from outside the metropolis. As Graunt concluded, the population growth in "the Country" was sufficient to provide "the People, both of *London*, and it self."³⁰

What accounted for the unnatural and low birth rate of London? Explanations varied. To some it was a problem of public health. London's air and water were notoriously bad, exposing its inhabitants to

²⁹ Sir William Petty, *Another Essay in Political Arithmetic, Concerning the City of London* (1683), in *Economic Writings*, 462. According to R.R. Kuczynski, there was a "consensus of opinion among British demographers in the century preceding the Industrial Revolution that fertility, i.e. the actual production of children, lagged considerably behind fecundity, i.e. the child-bearing capacity" ("British Demographers' Opinions on fertility, 1660 to 1760," in *Political Arithmetic. A Symposium of Population Studies*, edited by Lancelot Hogben [London: George Allen & Unwin, 1938], 283.

³⁰ Graunt, *Natural and Political Observations*, 52-53; C.G.A. Clay, *Economic Expansion and Social Change: England 1500-1700*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 1:20; R.A. Houston, *The Population History of Britain and Ireland 1500-1750* (London: Macmillan, 1992), 28-32. See also: Statt, *Foreigners and Englishmen*, 74-76.

all manner of illness and diseases. Others viewed it as a problem of residency. English men trooped to the city for months on end to conduct business, leaving their wives in the countryside. Some thought that hard labor made men more fertile, and that the relatively sedentary life of the city lowered the birth rate. To these (and many other) factors were added the moral and physical hazards of prostitution and fornication. Sex that was too frequent, or with too many partners, were thought to render men and women barren.³¹

Regardless of the impact of environment or sexual mores, however, it was generally agreed that the greatest impediment to population was the difficulty of marriage. Between the 16th and 18th centuries, a distinctive form of household emerged in north-west Europe in which “social and cultural norms dictated that couples wishing to marry and procreate should possess sufficient resources to establish an independent household.” The norm of the “simple nuclear family” meant that individuals married on the expectation of economic independence and well-being. Changes in marriage—hence changes in the birth rate—were tied to perceptions of economic opportunity.³² As Edmund Halley remarked in 1693, “the Growth and Encrease of Mankind is not so much stinted by any thing in the Nature of the *Species*, as it is from the cautious difficulty most People make to adventure on the state of *Marriage*, from the prospect of the Trouble and Charge of providing for a Family.”³³ A host of policies were put forward to enable earlier marriages to more citizens. Marriage taxes, passed in time of war, should be revoked. New duties

³¹ Thus Graunt: “As to the causes of Barrenness in *London*, I say, that although there should be none extraordinary in the Native *Air* of the place, yet the intemperance in feeding and especially the Adulteries and Fornications, supposed more frequent in *London* then elsewhere, do certainly hinder breeding. For a Woman, admitting 10 Men, is so far from having ten times as many Children, that she hath none at all. Add to this, that the minds of men in *London* are more thoughtfull and full of business then in the Country, where their work is *corporal* Labour, and Exercises. All which promote Breedings, whereas *Anxieties* of the minde hinder it” (*Natural and Political Observations*, 56). See also: Thomas Short, *New Observations on the City, Town and Country Bills of Mortality* (London: 1750), 1.

³² Houston, *Population History* 77-78. “The first command of God was to encrease and multiply. Wherefore he law for marriages is that which will cause the most encrease of people” (Sir William Petty, “Concerning Marriages,” *The Petty Papers*, ed. Marquis of Lansdown [London: Constable & Company, 1927], 2:49); population is dependent upon “the number and fruitfulness of marriages, and on the encouragement given to marry” (Robert Wallace, *A Dissertation on the Numbers of Mankind* (1753), 2nd ed., revised and corrected [Edinburgh: 1809], 19).

³³ Edmund Halley, *Degrees of Mortality of Mankind* (1693), ed. Lowel J. Reed (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1934), 20.

imposed on bachelors any anyone else who chose to remain celibate. Bounties should be offered to those with large families. Ready employment should be offered the poor.³⁴ Sir William Petty thought that Ireland's population could be dramatically increased by encouraging "short marriages," dissolved after six months should the couple fail to conceive. Petty even entertained the possibility of "Californian Marriages" in which six men and six women were "conjugerted" in a complex pattern "in order to beget many and well conditioned children."³⁵ Petty's proposals might seem outlandish, but they reflected a growing willingness to view marriage in terms of its contribution to the public weal. The family was more than a metaphor for politics; it was a human institution, subject to regulation and manipulation, through which children were produced and cared for.³⁶

To many European observers, efforts to directly manipulate population through policy governing family, taxation, sexuality, and immigration were inadequate. It appeared, particularly during the first half of the eighteenth century, that Europe's population was declining, giving rise to one of the great intellectual "set pieces" of the period: the debate over the populousness of the ancients and the moderns. In the *Persian Letters* Montesquieu had wondered "why it is that the world is so thinly populated in comparison with former times?" Nature itself seemed exhausted and decayed: the ancient world held times as many men, and if the present rate of decline continued, the world would soon become "a desert." But the burden of responsibility for the earth's depopulation fell not on nature, but on humans and the customs, habits, and forms of government they imposed on themselves. "Gentle methods of government have a wonderful effect on the propagation of the species," while "arbitrary power" led to poverty and depopulation.³⁷ In the *Spirit of the Laws* Montesquieu extended the psychological and political range of

³⁴ Graunt, *Natural and Political Observations*, 61; Halley, *Degrees of Mortality*, 20; D'Avenant, *Balance of Trade* 190-92; Short, *New Observations* 159.

³⁵ Sir William Petty, "Of Marriages" and "Californian Marriages with the Reasons Thereof," in *Petty Papers* 2:50-52.

³⁶ Rachel Weil, "The Family in the Exclusion Crisis," *A Nation Transformed*, ed. Houston and Pincus.

³⁷ Charles-Louis de Secondat, baron de Montesquieu, *The Persian Letters* (1721), trans. C.J. Betts (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), letters 112, 122.

this argument. The fertility of animals, he argued, is relatively constant. “But in the human species, the way of thinking, character, passions, fantasies, caprices, the idea of preserving one’s beauty, the encumbrance of pregnancy, that of a too numerous family, disturb propagation in a thousand ways.” Political centralization and territorial expansion, pursued by the kings of France, rendered life precarious. Fear and anxiety, no less than war and destruction, undermined population. New “laws are needed to favor the propagation of the human species.” Montesquieu was doubtful of success; “an almost incurable ill is seen when depopulation is of long standing because of an internal vice and a bad government.” He imagined but one possibility, modeled on the practice of the Romans: distribute land “to all of the families who have nothing” so that “not a moment for work is lost.”³⁸

Montesquieu gave intellectual weight to the depopulationist argument; others extended its range and compass. Population was an index of social health; depopulation indicated decay and corruption. Though Montesquieu did not indict commercial society in the name of population, his proposed solution to depopulation was distinctly agrarian and non-commercial. Others made the connection explicit. According to Robert Wallace, “The question concerning the number of mankind in ancient and modern times...is not to be considered as a matter of mere curiosity, but of the greatest importance; since it must be a strong presumption in favour of the customs or policy of any government, if, *caeteris paribus*, it is able to raise up and maintain a greater number of people.” Wallace’s *Dissertation on the Numbers of Mankind* was written to demonstrate that “ancient policy, ancient manners, and ancient customs, were better calculated to make nations great and populous, than modern policy, modern manners and modern customs.”³⁹ By “modern” Wallace meant the whole cluster of customs, habits, and policies associated with commercial society.

³⁸ Charles-Louis de Secondat, baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, trans. Anne Cohler, Basia Miller, Harold Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), book 23.

³⁹ Wallace, *Dissertation on the Numbers of Mankind*, 14n, 81. The most famous version of this argument was Rousseau’s; see especially the comments on population and political health in *On the Social Contract*, II:9.

David Hume recognized the importance of this challenge. “Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations”—written in response to a manuscript presented by Wallace to the Philosophical Society of Edinburgh in the summer of 1751—is the longest and most historically detailed of his *Essays*.⁴⁰ Hume accepted the principle that “the happiness of any society and its populousness are necessary attendants.” But he thought it improbable that the ancients were happier; “their wars were more bloody and destructive, their governments more factious and unsettled, commerce and manufactures more feeble and languishing, and the general police more loose and irregular.” By contrast, the “improvements and refinements” of modern society “seem all extremely useful to the encouragement of art, industry, and populousness.”⁴¹

At stake in this debate was the nature of and justification for commercial society. There were proximate, though no less important, concerns for both Wallace and Hume, however, and they complicate the picture. In 1745 the Scottish Highlands had served as a staging ground for the last Jacobite rebellion. As in 1715, the rebellion was crushed, and scores of rebels were either publicly executed or hunted down and killed. Jacobitism, already weak in Britain, lost its threat. But the behavior of the Scots prompted reflection on the character of the Highlands and the causes of disobedience. According to Wallace, the highlands were “almost a desert...whose present inhabitants are overwhelmed with ignorance and barbarity.” The “late unprovoked rebellion” had prompted laws by which “the inhabitants of the Highlands may be brought from a state of barbarity and of slavery, to a state of civility and of independence.” But the effects of those laws were limited to the most populous regions. It was necessary to “make opulence and industry penetrate into their innermost and most distant parts.” Highlanders “can only be civilized, by being made industrious.”⁴² Economic development and political integration

⁴⁰ Hume, “Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations,” *Essays* 377-464.

⁴¹ Hume, “Populousness,” *Essays* 387 n.17, 421, 420. The transforming power of commerce is brilliantly explored in the first nine essays of part two of the *Essays*, notably “Of Commerce” and “Of Refinement in the Arts” (*Essays* 253-80).

⁴² Wallace, *Numbers of Mankind* 157-61. “Through want of Improvement, Trade, and Converse with Mankind, are not the Vulgar of the Inhabitants, rude, uncivilized, cruel, barbarous, given to Robbery, Sedition, Rebellion, and

encouraged work and labor, softened manners, and taught the virtues of citizenship. As Hume—and Montesquieu and so many others—had argued, these were the strengths of a commercial society.⁴³

III

Into this fray stepped Benjamin Franklin. Franklin had long been interested in “political arithmetic.” As a boy of 16—in the guise of “Silence Dogood”—he approvingly re-printed Defoe’s scheme for insuring widows.⁴⁴ His first political pamphlet demonstrated close familiarity with the writings of Sir William Petty.⁴⁵ Many of the civic schemes he proposed to his fellow Philadelphians during the 1730s and 1740s rested on calculations of life-expectancy. Sometime during the 1740s he turned his attention to population growth. *Poor Richard* for 1750 printed population statistics and bills of mortality for several of the colonies, and wondered what “the natural Increase of Mankind” might be. The following year he drafted his answer, in the form of a brief pamphlet: *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, &c.*⁴⁶ It was to be his most influential work of social analysis. In it Franklin made two predictions that have proved remarkably accurate: that the population of the United States would double every 25 years, and that the population of North America would outstrip that of Great Britain within 100 years. Each of these predictions drew its significance from the widely-

Murder, meer two-leg’d Savages?” (Short, *New Observations* 130). “It is remarkable, that in some districts bordering upon the Highlands, where within memory the inhabitants spoke the Irish Language, wore the Highland dress, and were accustomed to make use of Arms, upon the accidental introduction of industry, the Irish language and Highland dress gave way to a sort of English, and lowland Cloathing; the Inhabitants took to the Plough in place of Weapons; and tho’ disarmed by no Act of Parliament, are as tame as their Low Country neighbours” (Duncan Formes [?], “Some Thoughts concerning the State of the Highlands of Scotland,” 1746, quoted in Eric Richards, “Scotland and the Uses of the Atlantic Empire,” in *Strangers within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire*, ed. Bernard Bailyn and Philip Morgan [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991], 106).

⁴³ Albert Hirschmann, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

⁴⁴ “Silence Dogood, No. 10,” (13 August 1722), in *Papers* 1:32-.

⁴⁵ *A Modest Enquiry into the Nature and Necessity of a Paper Currency* (3 April 1729), in *Papers* 1:139-.

⁴⁶ Benjamin Franklin, *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, &c.* (1751), in *Papers* 4:225-34.

shared assumption, outlined above, that the key to public prosperity and national independence lay in the proper governance of population.

If a growing population was the key to prosperity, then by the middle of the eighteenth century the Anglo-American world suffered from an embarrassment of riches. The combined population of the British Isles and mainland North America grew from roughly 8.4 million in 1700 to 13.3 million in 1770. This growth was unevenly distributed in space and time. It was most visible in North America, which grew from 1/20th the population of the British Isles in 1700 to nearly one-fifth in 1770. Its impact was often devastating. In Scotland and Ireland, shortages of land drove thousands numbers into poverty, and spurred waves of emigration to in the decades prior to the Revolution. From Germany came thousands more, pushed by war and poverty and religious persecution, and pulled by independent immigration brokers who exchanged ocean passages for a term of indentured servitude. In the backcountry of North America, restive settlers seeking land pressed up against Native Americans, prompting increasingly hostile and frequently violent conflicts. These phenomena were unexpected and only dimly understood. They challenged the capacities of basic social and political institutions on both sides of the Atlantic.⁴⁷

The British government, fearing depopulation and economic devastation—a labor shortage would drive up the price of wages, rendering British manufactures uncompetitive in the world market—sought to stop immigration and impose strict limits on American economic development. One long-standing bone of contention was the production of iron. The mineral resources of the colonies were well known, but English manufacturers feared the consequences of competition. As sources of raw materials (pig iron), the colonies were invaluable; but as a manufacturers of finished products (bar iron, as well as

⁴⁷ Bernard Bailyn, *The Peopling of British North America. An Introduction* (New York: Knopf, 1986); Bernard Bailyn, *Voyagers to the West: Emigration from Britain to America on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1986); Gordon S. Wood, *The American Revolution* (New York: Modern Library, 2002); Marianne Woceck, “Harnessing the Lure of the ‘Best Poor Man’s Country’: The Dynamics of German-Speaking Immigration to British North America, 1683-1783,” in *To Make America: European Emigration in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Ida Altman and James Horn (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Pres, 1991), 204-43; Eric Hinderaker and Peter Mancall, *At the Edge of Empire. The Backcountry in British North America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

manufactured goods such as nails), they were a threat. As Joshua Gee put it to a parliamentary committee in 1738,

That if the *Americans* are suffered to make Bar Iron, it may be impossible and unreasonable to hinder them from manufacturing also; because the Carriage from their Forges to the Sea-ports, the Stowage, Port, and Shipping Charges, the Profit of the Vender there, the Charge of the Freight to *England*, the Risk of the Sea, the several Profits of the Buyers here, the Carriage to the Manufactories in the midland Parts of this Kingdom, the Re-carriage back again to the Sea-ports, the Profits of the Ironmonger and Merchant on Exportation, the Charges of Freight and the Risk of the Sea back again to *America*, with other incidental and contingent Charges, will ever remain unsurmountable Obstacles to their sending Bar Iron into this Kingdom to be manufactured.

That if their Forges and Manufactures are suffered to increase in the manner they now do, they will constantly drain this Kingdom of great Numbers of our People; which, as our Works of all Kinds must decline here, Want of Work at home, and a Prospect of higher Wages under new Masters abroad, they will be continually going from us to them, to the great Depopulation of their Mother Country.⁴⁸

Gee's fears were not unfounded – by the later part of the century, workers in England had discovered that the threat of emigration could be used as a tool in labor negotiations.⁴⁹ The Iron Act of 1750 reflected these fears, permitting the production of pig iron but prohibiting iron manufacturing.⁵⁰

Franklin had skewered moral objections to population growth in one of his most famous hoaxes, *The Speech of Miss Polly Baker* (1747). But Polly's speech was directed at a colonial audience, and the Iron Act required a different strategy. In the *Observations* Franklin turned to "political arithmetic." His argument, presented in 24 crisply written sections, was breathtakingly simple:

⁴⁸ *Journals of the House of Commons* 23:113.

⁴⁹ "So in Paisley, Scotland, in 1773, when weavers struck for higher wages and blocked employers' efforts to use scab labor, the authorities undertook a resolute, all-out prosecution of the ringleaders for creating 'an unlawful combination'—until they discovered that several thousand of the workers 'threatened to go of in a body to America.' At that point the trial became, in the words of one of the judges, 'very delicate.' The court drew back and imposed lenient sentences, and not on all but only on some of the leaders, freeing the rest; the judges contented themselves with lecturing all concerned on 'the criminality of their conduct.' Privately, the chief judge breathed a sigh of relief that 'all thoughts of going over to America are for the present laid aside.'" (Bailyn, *Peopling* 38). See also: Richards, "Scotland and the Uses of the Atlantic Empire," in Bailyn and Morgan, eds., *Strangers within the Realm*, 109-10.

⁵⁰ Arthur C. Bining, *British Regulation of the Colonial Iron Industry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1933).

There is...no Bound to the prolific Nature of Plants or Animals, but what is made by their crowding and interfering with each others Means of Subsistence. Was the Face of the Earth vacant of other Plants, it might be gradually sowed and overspread with one Kind only; as, for Instance, with Fennel; and were it empty of other Inhabitants, it might in a few Ages be replenish'd from one Nation only; as, for Instance, with Englishmen.

No one prior to Franklin had said precisely this. Population levels were determined by the means of subsistence. They could not be manipulated by changing the customs and laws of marriage.⁵¹ They could not be manipulated by restricting (or expanding) opportunities for emigration and immigration.⁵² The efforts of theorists and statesmen to increase the wealth of nations by directly regulating population were misguided. It was this claim that, 50 years later, seized the attention of Thomas Malthus,⁵³ and earned Franklin a founding role in the history of modern population studies.

Population was determined by the means of subsistence, but the latter, Franklin argued, varied with stages of economic development. When first discovered, North America was fully settled—but hunters, not husbandmen. “The Hunter, of all Men, requires the greatest Quantity of Land from whence to draw his Subsistence,” while “the Husbandman” subsisted on “much less,” and “the Manufacturer” required “least of all.” The introduction of agriculture by Europeans created ecological space for a

⁵¹ “As to Privileges granted to the married, (such as the *Jus trium Liberorum* among the Romans), they may hasten the filling of a Country that has been thinned by War or Pestilence, or that has otherwise vacant Territory; but cannot increase a People beyond the Means provided for their Subsistence” (§15).

⁵² “The Importation of Foreigners into a Country that has as many Inhabitants as the present Employments and Provisions for Subsistence will bear, will be in the End no Increase of People...Nor is it necessary to bring in Foreigners to fill up any occasional Vacancy in a Country; for such Vacancy (if the Laws are good, §14, 16) will soon be filled by natural Generation. Who can now find the Vacancy made in Sweden, France or other Warlike Nations, by the Plague of Heroism 40 Years ago; in France, by the Expulsion of the Protestants; in England, by the Settlement of her Colonies; or in Guinea, by 100 Years Exportation of Slaves, that has blacken'd half America?” (§21).

⁵³ Malthus had not read Franklin before writing the 1798 draft of *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, but he did so soon afterward, and gave Franklin pride of place in the “Statement of the Subject” of the second edition of 1803. After quoting from Franklin’s *Observations*, Malthus simply concluded, “This is incontrovertibly true” (Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, in *The Works of Thomas Robert Malthus*, ed. E.A. Wrigley and David Souden [London: William Pickering, 1986], 2:7-8).

population explosion. “Hence Marriages in America are more general, and more generally early, than in America.”⁵⁴

The sheer size of the North American landmass ensured that it would remain agricultural for many generations. Until it was “fully settled, Labour will never be cheap,”⁵⁵ and high wages were inconsistent with manufacturing.⁵⁶ The abundance of uncultivated land made manufacturing unprofitable.⁵⁷ As Adam Smith observed twenty-five years later, in the pivotal third book of *Wealth of Nations*, the wealth of North America “is founded altogether in agriculture.”⁵⁸ England’s wealth, by contrast, was founded in commerce and manufactures, and it was this distinction that enabled a cooperative division of labor between the mother country and her colonies. Franklin sought to be reassuring: “The Danger therefore of these Colonies interfering with their Mother Country in Trades that depend on Labour, Manufactures, &c. is too remote to require the Attention of Great-Britain.”

While land in North America provided refuge for many a poor Irish or Scotch farmer, Franklin argued that it produced no net drain on the population of the British Isles:

A Nation well regulated is like a Polypus; take away a Limb, its place is soon supply’d; cut it in two, and each deficient Part shall speedily grow out of the Part remaining. Thus if you have Room and Subsistence enough, as you may by dividing, make ten Polypes out of one, you may of one make ten Nations, equally populous and powerful; or rather, increase a Nation ten fold in Numbers and Strength.

Ten years later Franklin changed metaphors to emphasize the mutually beneficial effects of colonial growth:

⁵⁴ “For People increase in Proportion to the Number of Marriages, and that is greater in Proportion to the Ease and Convenience of supporting a Family. When Families can be easily supported, more Persons marry, and earlier in Life” (§2).

⁵⁵ Indeed, “Labour is no cheaper now, in Pennsylvania, than it was 30 Years ago, tho’ so many Thousand labouring People have been imported” (§8).

⁵⁶ As Franklin put it ten years later, “Manufactures are founded in poverty. It is the multitude of the poor without land in a country, and who must work for others at low wages or starve, that enables undertakers to carry on a manufacture” (*The Interest of Great Britain Considered, With Regard to Her Colonies* [1760], in *Papers* 9:73).

⁵⁷ “The natural livelihood of the thin inhabitants of a forest country, is hunting; that of a greater number, pasturage; that of a middling population, agriculture; and that of the greatest, manufactures” (Franklin, *Interest of Great Britain Considered*, in *Papers* 9:74).

⁵⁸ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry in the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), Book 3, Ch. 4.

The human body and the political differ in this, that the first is limited by nature to a certain stature, which, when attain'd, it cannot, ordinarily, exceed; the other by better government and more prudent police, as well as by change of manners and other circumstances, often takes fresh starts of growth, after being long at a stand; and may add tenfold to the dimensions it had for ages been confined to. The mother being of full stature, is in a few years equal'd by a growing daughter: but in the case of a mother country and her colonies, it is quite different. The growth of the children tends to increase the growth of the mother, and so the difference and superiority is longer preserv'd.⁵⁹

The doubling-rate for the population of North America was an astonishingly short 25 years. In 100 years “the greatest Number of Englishmen will be on this Side the Water. What an Accession of Power to the British Empire by Sea as well as Land! What Increase of Trade and Navigation! What Numbers of Ships and Seamen!”

Scholars have sometimes argued that the emergence of commercial empires in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe represented a shift from “territory” to “trade” as the basic unit of organization.⁶⁰ While it is true that the first British Empire was based on commercial domination, not territorial conquest, it is misleading to suggest that trade and territory were mutually exclusive. One of the primary objectives of the Seven Years War—arguably the most important war of the eighteenth century—was control of the North American land mass. At its conclusion Britain acquired nearly a half billion acres of land, prompting a prolonged crisis over expansion and regulation. One facet of that crisis, of course, was the American Revolution. But from the beginning relations between center and periphery, manufacturing and agriculture, were fundamentally about the nexus of trade *and* territory. Population was the key. As Franklin succinctly put it, “on the Room depends so much the Increase of her People.”

IV

⁵⁹ Franklin, *Interest of Great Britain Considered*, in *Papers* 9:78-79.

⁶⁰ Anthony Pagden, *Peoples and Empires* (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 86-88; Pagden, *Lords of All the World*, 115; Pincus, “From Holy Cause to Economic Interest.”

Franklin's analysis of the relationship between land, economic development and population growth gave him confidence that North America would be occupied. But by whom? In a satiric essay from this period, "Felons and Rattlesnakes," Franklin lampooned the British practice of transporting criminals to the colonies.⁶¹ Colonists long complained of the practice—according to one Virginian, it threatened to turn the colony into "hell upon earth, another Siberia"⁶²—but Parliament persisted, defending transportation as a means for the "improvement and well peopling the colonies." Franklin sharpened his satirical quill, thanked "our *Mother Country*" for its "tender parental Concern," and offered, as a token of gratitude, to return a rattle-snake for every convict sent to America.

Slaves represented a much larger addition to the population of North America. Franklin's conduct and opinions regarding slavery are complex, and changed dramatically over the course of his lifetime.⁶³ But in the *Observations* he was clear: slavery was economically irrational, morally corrupting, and consumed lives. "The Labour of Slaves can never be so cheap here as the Labour of working Men is in Britain. Any one may compute it." Why then did Americans purchase slaves? Because their movements could be controlled; "hired Men are continually leaving their Master...and setting up for themselves." Slaves "pejorate the Families that use them; the white Children become proud, disgusted with Labour, and being educated in Idleness, are rendered unfit to get a Living by Industry." As a result,

⁶¹ "Felons and Rattlesnakes," 11 May 1751, in *Papers* 4:130-34. See generally: A. Roger Ekirch, *Bound for America: The Transportation of British Convicts to the Colonies, 1718-1775* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); Abbott Emerson Smith, *Colonists in Bondage: White Servitude and Convict Labor in America, 1607-1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1947).

⁶² Quoted in Bailyn, *Peopling of British North America*, 121.

⁶³ As a young printer Franklin had published slave notices in the *Gazette*; as colonial leader, he kept slaves in Philadelphia; as a middle-aged pamphleteer he repeatedly voiced the shibboleths of white racism. But during the 1760s Franklin's attitudes began to change. After visiting "the Negro School" in Philadelphia in 1763 he "conceiv'd a higher Opinion of the natural Capacities of the black Race, than I had ever before entertained." In all respects the black students were "equal to that of white Children." As to his old attitudes, Franklin was characteristically unapologetic: "You will wonder perhaps that I should ever doubt it, and I will not undertake to justify all my Prejudices, nor to account them." Between 1770 and 1772 his descriptions of slavery and the slave trade shifted from defensive to critical, and by 1773 he was cooperating with anti-slavery advocates in England (Granville Sharp) and America (Anthony Benezet). Unlike many of his contemporaries, he had come to acknowledge the colonist's hypocrisy in calling for liberty while buying and selling human chattel. At the end of his life Franklin presided over the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery. In early 1790 he signed a memorandum to Congress, calling for an end to slavery. Senator James Jackson of Georgia responded with expressions of outrage. Franklin responded with a hoax, a bitter parody defending the custom of enslaving Christians by Barbary pirates.

“the Whites who have Slaves, not labouring, are enfeebled, and therefore not so generally prolific; the Slaves being work’d too hard, and ill fed, their Constitutions are broken, and the Deaths among them are more than the Births; so that a continual Supply is needed from Africa.”

Then came the bombshell. Franklin’s sharpest comments, contained in the conclusion of the *Observations*, were directed not at convicts or slaves, but at German immigrants:

Since Detachments of English from Britain sent to America, will have their Places at Home so soon supply’d and increase so largely here; why should the Palatine Boors be suffered to swarm into our Settlements, and by herding together establish their Language and Manners to the Exclusion of ours? Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a Colony of *Aliens*, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them, and will never adopt our Language or Customs, any more than they can acquire our Complexion.⁶⁴

Which leads me to add one Remark: That the Number of purely white People in the World is proportionably very small. All Africa is black or tawny. Asia chiefly tawny. America (exclusive of the new Comers) wholly so. And in Europe, the Spaniards, Italians, French, Russians and Swedes, are generally of what we call a swarthy Complexion; as are the Germans also, the Saxons only excepted, who with the English, make the principal Body of White People on the Face of the Earth. I could wish their Numbers were increased. And while we are, as I may call it, *Scouring* our Planet, by clearing America of Woods, and so making this Side of our Globe reflect a brighter Light to the Eyes of Inhabitants in Mars or Venus, why should we in the Sight of Superior Beings, darken its People? why increase the Sons of Africa, by planting them in America, where we have so fair an Opportunity, by excluding all Blacks and Tawneys, of increasing the lovely White and Red? But perhaps I am partial to the Complexion of my Country, for such Kind of Partiality is natural to Mankind.

The blunt and shocking quality of Franklin’s language, so visible to modern eyes, was evident to his contemporaries as well. When he published the manuscript of the *Observations* in 1760 as an appendix to *The Interest of Great Britain Considered, With Regard to her Colonies*, he left out these two paragraphs. Copies of the original survived, however, and were reprinted by his political enemies during the Assembly election of 1764. Franklin’s reference to “Boors” was interpreted to mean “a *Herd of Hogs*,” and news of Franklin’s perfidy spread through every Dutch coffee house. Franklin claimed not to

⁶⁴ As Franklin complained to James Parker, “Already the English begin to quit particular Neighbourhoods surrounded by Dutch, being made uneasy by the Disagreeableness of dissonant Manners; and in Time, Numbers will probably quit the Province for the same Reason” (20 March 1751, in *Papers* 4:120).

understand the flap, arguing that the English word “boors” meant nothing more than “peasants.” But his own charged language had heightened ethnic consciousness in Pennsylvania. One clever writer suggested that Germans “swarm” into Philadelphia on election day, and “herd together” at the polling place. That is precisely what they did—and Franklin, for the first time, was defeated.⁶⁵

Contemporary scholars have had a difficult time making sense of Franklin’s conduct and language. Sympathetic biographers, from Carl Van Doren to Edmund Morgan and Walter Isaacson, have identified Franklin’s position in the *Observations* as “insular,” “prejudiced” and “ethnocentric,” but suggested that these did not reflect his true or enduring views.⁶⁶ Douglas Anderson, calling attention to the concluding sentence of the *Observations*, has suggested that Franklin was being ironic. An opponent of many ascriptive roles and inherited identities, as well as a brilliant satiric writer, Franklin pursued a “strategy of indirection,” invoking national or ethnic identities in order to parody them.⁶⁷ Critics, from political theorists (Paul Conner) and historians of immigration (Roger Daniels, John Higham, Ronald Takaki) to students of race and ethnicity (Matthew Frye Jacobson, A. Leon Higginbotham) have argued that Franklin meant what he said, and that he was a racist and a nativist for whom economic growth and political development were inseparable from racial and ethnic homogeneity.⁶⁸ At stake in this debate is more than Franklin’s character. As Philip Gleason has recently argued, how we interpret Franklin

⁶⁵ “The Proprietary Party...carried (would you think it!) above 1000 Dutch from me, by printing part of my Paper sent to you 12 Years since on Peopling new Countries where I speak of the Palatine *Boors herding* together, which they explain’d that I call’d them a *Herd of Hogs*. This is quite a laughing matter” (Franklin to Richard Jackson, 11 October 1764, in *Papers* 11:397). Several pamphlets from the electoral campaign of 1764 have been reprinted in the *Papers*; see especially: *What is Sauce for a Goose is also Sauce for a Gander* and the counter-charge *The Scribbler, Being a Letter from a Gentleman in Town To his Friend in the Country* in *Papers* 11:380-88.

⁶⁶ Carl Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Viking, 1938), 218; Edmund Morgan, *Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 152.

⁶⁷ Douglas Anderson, *The Radical Enlightenments of Benjamin Franklin* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 160-62.

⁶⁸ In addition to the sources cited in note 2, see: Paul W. Conner, *Richard’s Politicks. Benjamin Franklin and His New American Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965); Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror. A History of Multicultural America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993); A. Leon Higginbotham, *In the Matter of Color. Race and the American Legal Process. The Colonial Period* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); John Higham, *Send These To Me: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988).

depends on how we explain the politics of population in British North America, and to a very large degree the latter rests on what we mean by terms like “race” and “ethnicity,” and whether we think them sufficient to explain complex social conflicts. According to Gleason, the racial and ethnic dimensions of Franklin’s *Observations* were not determinative; they “*overlay* the differences of substantive interest and *exacerbated* the political conflict.”⁶⁹ Gleason’s invocation of the *politics* of population is appealing. But it, no less than the arguments it seeks to displace, rests on a blunt contrast between attitudes and interests, ideals and institutions.

To understand the politics of population, we need to know more about the work—intellectual, political, and social—being done by the language of color (black, white, tawny, red) as well as categories of ethnicity and national origin (German, English, American). The language of color, especially “black” and “white,” assumed increasingly well-defined and socially significant meanings and during the eighteenth century.⁷⁰ But in Franklin’s own writings their presence is marginal and ambiguous. The word “tawny” occurs twice, in the *Observations*, and once, in a quotation from James Thomson’s *Seasons* reprinted in *Poor Richard* for 1749.⁷¹ The word “red” occurs in this usage only in the *Observations*. Franklin first uses the word “black” to refer to a kind or quality of person in the *Observations*, and thereafter uses it with regularity as a substitute for “slave.”⁷² His first use of “white” to identify a group of persons (“white Men of 16 Years old and upwards” as distinct from “Negroes”) was in *Poor Richard*

⁶⁹ Philip Gleason, “Trouble in the Colonial Melting Pot,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 20 (Fall 2000), 11. See also: Philip Gleason, “A Scurrilous Colonial Election and Franklin’s Reputation,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 18 (January 1961): 68-84.

⁷⁰ Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negroe, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968); Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom. The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: Norton, 1975). See also: Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*.

⁷¹ Albeit then in a telling metaphor, comparing the difficulty of controlling wild passions to the near impossibility of washing “the tawny Indian white” (*Papers* 3:331).

⁷² “At present few or none give their Negro Children any Schooling, partly from a Prejudice that Reading and Knowledge in a Slave are both useless and dangerous; and partly from an Unwillingness in the Masters and Mistresses of common Schools to take black Scholars, lest the Parents of the white Children should be disgusted and take them away, not chusing to have their Children mix’d with Slaves in Education” (Benjamin Franklin to John Waring, 3 January 1758, in *Papers* 7:356). See also: Franklin to Waring, 17 December 1763, in *Papers* 10:395.

for 1750—in a record population statistics he had compiled for the colonies.⁷³ Apart from the text of the *Observations*, his next use of this locution occurred in a letter to Peter Collinson in 1753—in an extended argument for the cultural, not natural, origins of differences between “white persons” and “our American Indians.”⁷⁴ In a letter of 1756 he reiterated his belief that changes in the laws governing indentured servants would lead to large-scale introduction of slavery into Pennsylvania, decreasing the number of “White Inhabitants.” “How much better would it be to recruit in Britain, Ireland or Germany.”⁷⁵

The point of this listing is not to excuse Franklin’s language—it was undeniably offensive to at least some of its targets—but to gauge its significance. The paucity of references suggests that the language of color or ethnicity or national origin was of limited value. More often than not, the work it did was to emphasize the plasticity of identities, rather than their fixity. Thus, in the same breath Franklin spoke of Germans with contempt and low humor, praised them for their “industry and frugality,” and attributed everything to habit, custom, and law.⁷⁶ If we are to understand Franklin’s population politics, categories like “race” and “ethnicity” are starting points, not conclusions, to an analysis.

Franklin’s contemporaries, both friend and foe, cast the problem in terms of a deceptively simple question: was he a “Patriot”? Did his observations and arguments further the common weal? Virtually

⁷³ *Papers* 3:437ff.

⁷⁴ “When an Indian Child has been brought up among us, taught our language and habituated to our Customs, yet if he goes to see his relations and make one Indian Ramble with them, there is no perswading him ever to return, and that this is not natural [to them] merely as Indians, but as men, is plain from this, that when white persons of either sex have been taken prisoners young by the Indians, and lived a while among them, tho’ ransomed by their Friends, and treated with all imaginable tenderness to prevail with them to stay among the English, yet in a Short time they become disgusted with our manner of life, and the care and pains that are necessary to support it, and take the first good Opportunity of escaping again into the Woods, from whence there is no reclaiming them” (Benjamin Franklin to Peter Collinson, 9 May 1753, in *Papers* 4:477ff.) “In Europe, if the French, who are White-People, should injure the Dutch, are they to revenge it on the English, because they too are White People? The only Crime of these poor Wretches seems to have been, that they had a reddish brown Skin, and black Hair; and some People of that Sort, it seems, had murdered some of our Relations. If it be right to kill Men for such a Reason, then, should any Man, with a freckled Face and red Hair, kill a Wife or Child of mine, it would be right for me to revenge it, by killing all the freckled red-haired Men, Women and Children, I could afterwards any where meet with” (Benjamin Franklin, *A Narrative of the Late Massacres* [1764], in *Papers* 11:42ff).

⁷⁵ Benjamin Franklin to Sir Everard Fwakener, 27 July 1756, in *Papers* 6:472. In other places, “White” included Dutch and French, as well as English, Scottish, Irish, and German.

⁷⁶ Contrasting the work ethic of English and German laborers, Franklin concluded that “when I can see nothing in Nature that should create this Difference, I am apt to suspect it must arise from Institution” (Franklin to Peter Collinson, 9 May 1753, in *Papers* 4:479-80).

everyone agreed that the regulation of population was critical to economic growth and political independence. But what did that mean? How could population be governed? With what consequences? What were the characteristics—the virtues and vices—of a flourishing population? How could they inculcated? And to what extent was economic development tied to specific social and political institutions?

Each of these questions had an imperial, as well as domestic, dimension. By the second quarter of the eighteenth century, the term “British Empire” had come to be identified with a distinct ideology: it was Protestant, maritime, commercial, and free.⁷⁷ But the terms of integration between center and periphery were unclear. Were mother country and the colonies of North America political partners and co-equals, or were the colonies a politically and economically dependent resource for the metropolis? Franklin saw this issue, first and foremost, in demographic and economic terms. He repeatedly sought to reassure the English that the open expanse of land in North America guaranteed that it would remain agricultural for at least a century.⁷⁸ He warmly embraced David Hume’s 1760 essay “Of the Jealousy of Trade” in the optimistic faith that it might “abate” English anxieties about American development.⁷⁹ But Franklin’s enthusiasm, and his demographic projections, masked a threatening possibility: that the wealth of North America was not subject to gross political manipulation. This insistence on the economic limits to imperial policy laid the foundation for thoughts of independence as early as 1767. As he explained to the Scottish jurist and philosopher Lord Kames, the advantages of Union are “not so apparent” in America:

Scotland and Ireland are differently circumstanced. Confined by the sea, they can scarcely increase in numbers, wealth, and strength so as to overbalance England. But America, an immense territory, favoured by nature with all

⁷⁷ David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁷⁸ “I have long been of Opinion, that the Foundations of the future Grandeur and Stability of the British Empire, lie in America; and tho’, like other Foundations, they are low and little seen, they are nevertheless, broad and Strong enough to support the greatest Political Structure Human Wisdom ever yet erected” (Franklin to Lord Kames, 3 January 1760, in *Papers* 9:6-7).

⁷⁹ Franklin to David Hume, 27 September 1760, in *Papers* 9:227.

advantages of climate, soil, great navigable rivers, and lakes, etc., must become a great country, populous and mighty; and will, in a less time than is generally conceived, be able to shake off shackles that may be imposed on her and perhaps place them on her imposers.

The British Empire rested on its domination of international markets. But markets have their own laws, imposing limits on those who lived by them. As Hume commented in another of his essays, trade had become “an affair of state,” and no one—not even the British Empire—could either ignore it or completely control it. By 1767 this line of analysis, rooted in the politics of population, led Franklin to embrace the political distinctness of the colonies of North America.

On the ground floor, in Franklin’s Pennsylvania, things were altogether more complicated. Thoughts about the public good inevitably led to reflection on the massive influx of immigrants from southwestern Germany. Between 1683 and 1783 approximately 500,000 German-speakers left the Reich for Hungary, Russia, Spain and England. Approximately 125,000 of that total came to British North America. Most landed at Philadelphia, and about three-fourths settled in Pennsylvania. By 1775, one of every three Pennsylvanians was German-speaking.⁸⁰ This massive migration, which one historian has called a “prototype of later, nineteenth-century, transatlantic mass migrations,” was “not the result of a *concerted* governmental effort.” Instead, it built on a recruiting network that was private and market-driven, in which migrants were sought out and offered transportation to the colonies in exchange for five years indentured servitude. Successful Germans in Pennsylvania proved particularly willing to redeem poor immigrants, creating a labor market for German help stretching from Pennsylvania south.⁸¹

Pennsylvania Germans possessed a strong work ethic, but prior to the Seven Years War they refused to be culturally assimilated. They supported German printing houses, patronized German stores,

⁸⁰ In the late 1720s, an average of 600 German immigrants landed at Philadelphia each autumn. In the late 1640s this grew to 1,800, and in 1749—at the end of the War of Austrian Succession—a peak of 9,500 newcomers arrived. For each of the next five years, an average of 5,600 per year arrived (Wokeck, “Harnessing the Lure,” in *To Make America*, ed. Altman and Horn, 224). See also: A.G. Roeber, “‘The Origin of Whatever is Not English Among Us’: The Dutch-speaking and the German-speaking Peoples of Colonial British America,” in Bailyn and Morgan, ed., *Strangers within the Realm*, 244.

⁸¹ Wokeck, “Harnessing the Lure,” in *To Make America*, ed. Altman and Horn, 216-28.

and taught their children in German. Christopher Sauer—the man who drove Franklin’s German-language paper, the *Philadelphische Zeitung*, out of business—“assaulted all proposals that hinted at closer English-German union in religious or political affairs in Pennsylvania.” Sauer had “one simple lesson” he “hammered home”: “Support the Quakers and avoid courts, lawyers, politics, and unnecessary involvement with English-speakers that might endanger our language, our families and customs, and our faith.”⁸²

Franklin was not the only English-speaker to be worried by these developments. Patterns of immigration were matters of state, and were closely watched by Parliament. An early manuscript copy of the *Observations* was eagerly read by leading MPs. Proposals to mitigate the perceived effects of German immigration were floated. At stake were the contours of one of the first compulsory programs of assimilation in North America. In private correspondence Franklin embraced proposals to establish free English schools in German communities, and to require that all legal documents be written in English. All officeholders were competent to speak English. But Franklin rejected more draconian proposals emanating from the Committee on German Affairs, including forced intermarriage and the suppression of German-language printing houses. “Methods of great tenderness should be used, and nothing that looks like a hardship be imposed. Their fondness for their own Language and Manners is natural: it is not a Crime.”⁸³ These conversations culminated in the creation of “The Society for Promoting Religious Knowledge and English Language among the German Immigrants in Pennsylvania” in 1753. At its height the Society sponsored eleven schools and 750 students. But opposition within the German-speaking community was strong, and sponsorship waned.⁸⁴

⁸² Roeber, “Whatever is Not English Among Us,” in Bailyn and Morgan, ed., *Strangers within the Realm*, 252. Roeber suggest that Franklin’s paper was fated to fail because it was the obvious work of an “outsider” (259).

⁸³ Franklin to Peter Collinson, [1753?], in *Papers* 5:158-60. These concerns and arguments are amplified in Franklin to Peter Collinson, 9 May 1753, in *Papers* 5:479-86.

⁸⁴ The scheme is described in William Smith to Richard Peters and Benjamin Franklin, February 1754, in *Papers* 5:203-18.

The relative isolation of the German-speaking community meant that it did not make a substantial contribution to the cultural practices of English-speakers in colonial Pennsylvania. But intriguingly, the Anglicization of German-speakers in Pennsylvania was not always due to external pressure; in at least some instances, it was sought by Germans themselves. By mid-century, German-speakers began to write wills and avail themselves of English courts as they discovered that customary practices governing inheritance were at odds with common law procedures. At the same time German churches began to press for formal incorporation by the government of Pennsylvania as a means of resolving increasingly brutal fights between poor congregants and clerics and more prosperous church elders. For many Germans, the public culture of British North America came to seem a resource for, and not an obstacle to, the preservation of German private life.⁸⁵

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Franklin's reflections on German immigrants were part and parcel of the population politics of commercial societies. Franklin thought of population in imperial terms. And empires are *always* about identities, about the destruction of "old" peoples and the construction of a "new" people.⁸⁶ This is no less true of the commercial empire of eighteenth-century Britain than of the territorial empire of ancient Rome. Indeed, it was precisely the capacity of commerce to change identities—to pit "interests" against "passions" and in so doing civilize human beings—that made it so attractive to so many.

Empires divide the world into "inside" and "outside," and are distinguished, first and foremost, by the ways in which they define and police the boundary between those two zones. In the abstract, the domain of commerce is universal, and its transformative power is spontaneous. All are free to participate in its workings, and in participating their customs, habits and beliefs are refashioned. In practice—in

⁸⁵ Roeber, "Origin of Whatever Is Not English among Us," in Bailyn and Morgan, eds., *Strangers within the Realm*, 263-68, 274-78.

⁸⁶ Pagden, *Peoples and Empires*.

eighteenth-century Pennsylvania--things were much more complicated.⁸⁷ Creating a commercial society in British North America was inevitably, and inexorably, a political process. At its core were questions concerning the location, identity, and movement of peoples.

⁸⁷ Anthony Pagden's comments about the modern United States are apposite: "democracy relies for its civilizing machinery upon an exalted vision of commerce...The price of joining the new world order—now represented by the international monetary institutions—is still the willingness to live by a law whose force is assumed to be not, as is all other legislation, local, but universal" (Pagden, *Lords of All the World*, 199-200).