

Landmarks of American History and Culture: Workshops for School Teachers

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN AND THE INVENTION OF AMERICA¹

The Villanova Center for Liberal Education (VCLE) in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Villanova University was awarded a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to repeat a workshop series for primary and secondary school teachers entitled, "Benjamin Franklin and the Invention of America." The workshops, originally conceived and directed by Dr. Colleen Sheehan (Political Science) and Dr. Catherine Wilson (VCLE) in the summer of 2006, will once again be part of the *Landmarks of American History and Culture: Workshops for Primary and Secondary School Teachers* seminar series sponsored annually by the NEH.

"Due to the high quality of the 2006 'Ben Franklin' workshops, the NEH recommended strongly that we re-submit the proposal this year to run the workshops again," said Dr. Marylu Hill, assistant director of the VCLE and current project director for the Franklin workshops. "We are very pleased that the NEH recognized for the second time the excellence of the programming initiated by Drs. Sheehan and Wilson."

The workshop will take place from June 30 to July 4, and again from July 7 to July 11, 2008. "The specific focus of this seminar series will be the influence Franklin has on the invention of America," said Dr. Hill. "As a student of the Enlightenment, Franklin understood that invention was a product of human reason and reason's application to such areas as science, government, printing, diplomacy, and citizenship. His objective in all these enterprises was the forging of a new civic culture. This culture was characterized by a commitment to industry, discipline, self-sufficiency, and public spiritedness. Franklin's view of civic life was subject to considerable criticism at the time and continues to engender a lively debate today. Adding to this criticism were doubts about Franklin's own private life." The workshop will examine the personal character of Franklin, his role as public innovator, and the ways in which these inform the invention of a new American culture.

VCLE, along with the Visions of Freedom Learning Community (VOF) at the University and the Matthew J. Ryan Project for the Study of Free Institutions and the Common Good (The Ryan Project) also at Villanova, will serve as the seminar partners for these workshops. The Villanova faculty who will serve as lead scholars for the seminar series represent a wide diversity of views on Franklin's contribution to the study of civic education and civic virtue. These faculty members will address Franklin from fields as diverse as the humanities, the sciences, mathematics, and business.

¹ This phrase, "the invention of America," is taken from Chapter 1 of Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 1-4.

In addition, internationally recognized Franklin scholars, including H.W. Brands (University of Texas at Austin), Joyce Chaplin (Harvard University), and Jerry Weinberger (Michigan State University), will lead seminars addressing the significance of Franklin's life and legacy. Several of Villanova's own distinguished faculty, including Jonathan Doh (VSB), Catherine Kerrison (History), Paul Rosier (History), and Paul Pasles (Mathematics), will also lead seminar sessions.

"Benjamin Franklin and the Invention of America" will address topics relevant to educators teaching at a range of grade levels and in a variety of disciplines. Educators will benefit not only from studying Franklin from diverse perspectives but also in the context of his life in early American Philadelphia. The participants will visit important Philadelphia landmarks associated with Franklin's life, including Independence Hall, the National Constitution Center, Bartram's Garden, and the American Philosophical Society. At these selected sites, participants will be able to view the manner in which Franklin lived as well as engage in extensive discussions about his life and thought with leading Franklin scholars. An essential aspect of these seminars will be explorations of the value of Franklin's contribution to American public life.