

# Celebrating Magnificence

by JOHN HIBBS

On January 17, 2006 Benjamin Franklin turns 300. This is our opportunity to plant some images deserving of this giant of a man.

For an American to steal every heart in Paris, it takes an extraordinary achievement.

Lance Armstrong did it on a bicycle. Jackie Kennedy did it on the arm of her husband. G.I. Joe did it from the top of a tank. And Ben Franklin did it in a bear skin hat. What they wore and what they rode didn't matter nearly as much as what they represented--youth,



vitality, power, imagination and unquenchable resolve.

These qualities were on high display last Sunday. On the loveliest street in the Old World, under the

glittering *Arc de Triomphe*, came the best from the New World. Just when America needed it the most, Lance was there to give the most.

'*Magnifique*' as the French would say. That's as good a word as any.

But what of Ben Franklin? Ben's images just don't compare to the ones we have of Jackie's grace or G.I. Joe's dented helmet. Or of Lance in bright yellow, both arms extended, the world's premier bike riders all in tow.

## Where is Benjamin Franklin in our collective memory banks?

In our Google-ized world the masters of search engine delivery can point us to several million web pages directly connected to a man who was loved as much in Paris as in Philadelphia. It is not for nothing that Ben's portrait is printed on America's one hundred dollar bill. How does a sixth Tour de France victory compare to Ben's *Way to Wealth*--with world-wide circulation exceeded only by the Bible?



Sure, Jackie brought us deep pride and Joe got us to Berlin. But how does that compare to Franklin's gift to General Washington--the French navy at the tipping point of the War. Inside the Pantheon of History, what seat deserves a more honored place than Ben Franklin's?

On January 17, 2006 Ben turns 300. This milestone provides an opportunity to plant some images deserving of this giant of a man. Our plan--with curtain up on July 4, 2005 and down on December 31, 2006--is to cement Ben's image in several hundred million minds, from Prague to Perth, from Capetown to Cairo, from Anchorage to Santiago.

It is no small task, and our work must begin immediately.

The Pew Foundation generously has granted four million dollars to ensure a grand celebration. The Smithsonian, Philadelphia's Benjamin Franklin Institute and the 'City of Brotherly Love' are preparing for the world party. Be assured that on January 17, 2006, there will be loud trumpets from the White House, the Senate and Congress. It's a celebration that will make front page news from the *New York Times* to the *Honolulu Gazette*. And, if we have our way, from the *London Times* to the *Sydney Herald* as well.

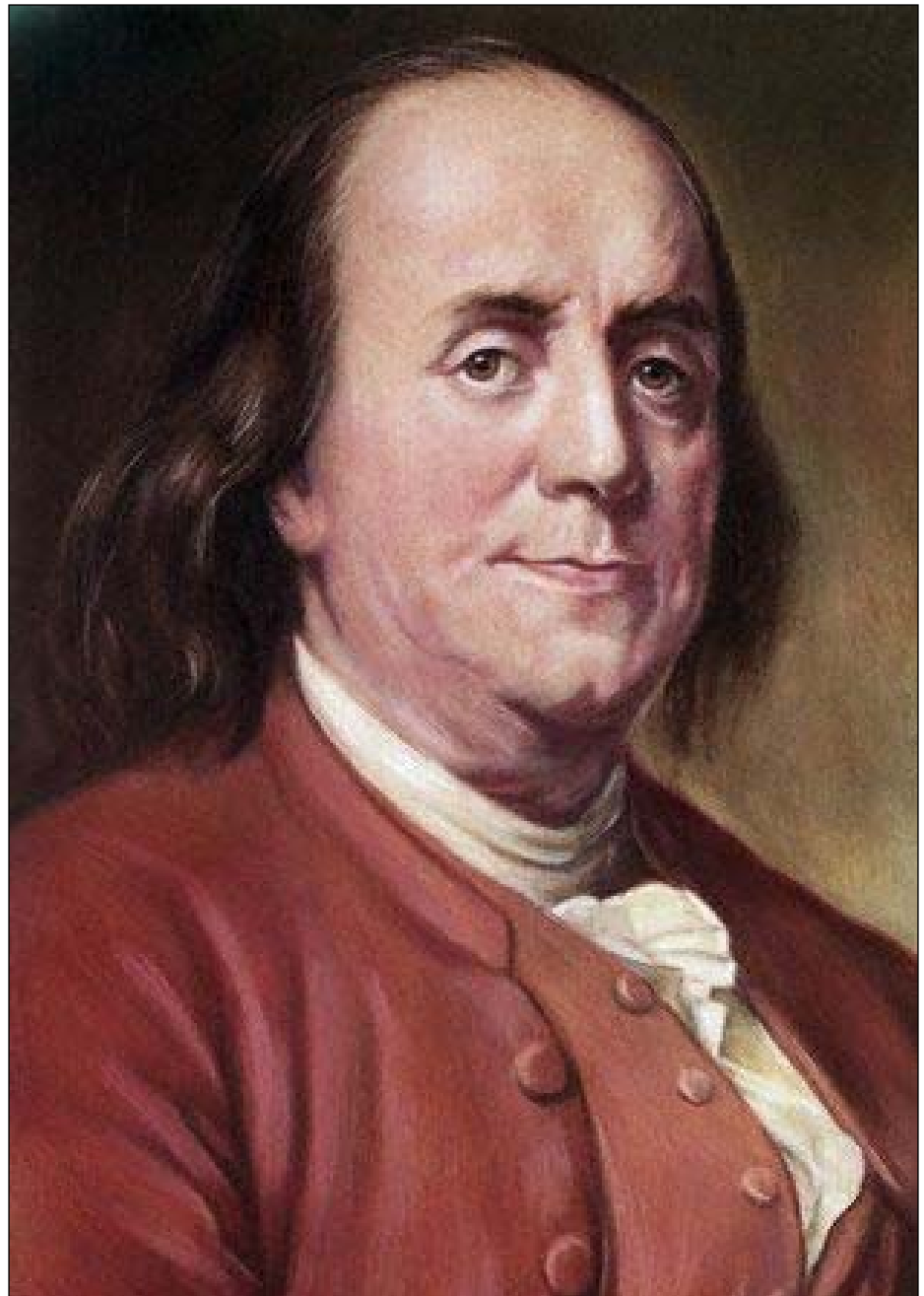
To this end, we have a brand new initiative: THE FRANKLIN AMBASSADOR PROGRAM.

Starting next month, we will be seeking 130 very ambitious Americans who are willing take to heart Ben's wisest advice:

IF YOU WOULD NOT BE FORGOTTEN AS SOON AS YOU ARE DEAD AND ROTTEN, DO SOMETHING WORTH READING. OR WRITE SOMETHING WORTH READING.

By March 2005, we will have selected 130 enterprising Americans to become **Franklin Ambassadors**. They will be sent to 73 world capitals in September. Their four-month assignment, inside a capital city overseas, is to assist the American Embassy, the American Chamber of Commerce, the international business community, the foreign diplomatic corps and the host government to hold a celebration that will be history's biggest birthday party.

We don't think it is unreasonable to expect the celebratory efforts to



cause applause as loud as that given Lance, or Jackie, or even G.I. Joe.

Each **Franklin Ambassador** will carry strict instructions to involve the 'movers and shakers' in the community as well as precisely targeted educators, technologists and publicists. It's more than just a birthday bash for a great man. Our mission is to promote the idea that extraordinary gains in learning outcomes can come from the collaborative use of extraordinary new tools.

**Franklin Ambassadors** will find big league reporters eager to impart the importance of Benjamin Franklin's Celebration--to tell them it is more than a 300th birthday party for a great man; that what they bring is long term stuff of a kind Ben would salute... innovative ways to create new wealth. Just in time. When America needs them most.

Please join us. Write to John Hibbs  
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For more information, please see <http://www.bfranklin.edu/ambassadors>. John Hibbs is the Executive Director of the Benjamin Franklin Institute of Global Education. <http://www.bfranklin.edu/johnhibbs> He resides in Eugene, Oregon, USA