

PL 1700  
A BRIEF  
EXAMINATION

OF THE  
*Practice of the Times,*

By the Foregoing and the Present  
DISPENSATION: Whereby  
is manifested, how the Devil works  
in the Mystery, which none can un-  
derstand and get the Victory over but  
those that are armed with the Light,  
that discovers the Temptation and the  
Author thereof, and gives Victory o-  
ver him and his Instruments, who are  
now gone forth, as in the Beginning,  
from the true Friends of *Jesus*, having  
the Form of Godliness in Words, but  
in Deeds deny the Power thereof;  
from such we are commanded to turn  
away.

*By R. Sandiford*  
Remember them that are in Bonds, as bound with them;  
and them that suffer Adversity, as being your selves  
also in the Body, Heb. xiii. 3.

If any Man love the World, the Love of the Father is  
not in him.

He that leadeth into Captivity, shall go into Captivity,  
Rev. xiii. 10.

Printed for the Author, Anno 1729.

Figure 4.1.

Ralph Sandiford, *A Brief Examination of the Practice of the Times, by the Foregoing and the Present Dispensation . . .* ([Philadelphia]: Printed [by Benjamin Franklin and Hugh Meredith] for the author, 1729).

The Library Company of Philadelphia.

## The Education of African Americans in Benjamin Franklin’s Philadelphia

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**B**enjamin Franklin’s *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania* (1749), publication of which gave rise to the Academy of Philadelphia and, ultimately, the University of Pennsylvania, did not mention the colony’s African Americans. Pennsylvania’s black inhabitants, whether slave or free, make no appearance in one of Franklin’s best known and most influential writings; they are simply not comprehended within Franklin’s definition of the “youth of Pensilvania.” One might be forgiven, then, for assuming that the education of African Americans in Franklin’s adopted city of Philadelphia was of no moment to the University’s founder, that the issue simply did not intersect with the busy life of a multifaceted man whose mind was constantly engaged by seemingly more pressing matters. In fact, however, Franklin was personally involved for the last three decades of his life in efforts to educate Philadelphia’s blacks undertaken by the Associates of Dr. Bray, a philanthropic organization affiliated with the Church of England, and he was never far from the epicenter of other similar ventures from his earliest days in Philadelphia.

Franklin played his role in the education of African Americans in the context of colonial Philadelphia, which was the capital—both political and intellectual—of a province in which slavery was well entrenched and yet in which a history of antislavery activism dated back to the late seventeenth century. There are no censuses for colonial Philadelphia, so estimating the population, and especially the black population, is no easy matter. Yet by using a variety of sources, historians have been able to approximate the population at various times. In 1723, the year of Franklin’s arrival in the city, the total population of Philadelphia was probably about 6,500, of which about 650 were blacks, mostly slaves. What later, after the American Revolution, became a large and thriving free black community had not yet begun to form. By mid-century the population had reached almost 13,000, of which about 1,000 were blacks, again mostly slaves. From about 1760 through the Revolution, the black population actually declined from 1,300 to fewer than 1,000, owing in part to a large influx of European indentured servants and the disruption of the slave trade. Following the Revolution, however, the black population doubled from 1,000 to a little more than 2,000 between 1780 and Franklin’s death in 1790. The proportion of slaves to free blacks quickly reversed itself, so that by the end of the century less than one percent of Philadelphia’s blacks were slaves. The city had the first large free black community in the colonies.<sup>2</sup>

When Franklin settled in Philadelphia in October 1723, though, slavery was legal in Pennsylvania, having existed since the days of William Penn, himself a slave owner, and would continue to be legal well into the nineteenth century. The 1780 Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery freed no slaves immediately; in fact, it stipulated that the children of slave women then in bondage would only become free when reaching the age of twenty-eight. Thus a child born into bondage immediately before the passage of the act could have had a child twenty or thirty years later who would also be born into bondage and would become free at twenty-eight. There were still sixty-four slaves in Pennsylvania as late as 1840, the last year the census enumerated slaves. Abolition was indeed gradual in Pennsylvania.<sup>3</sup>

The antislavery activism that finally brought about abolition had its origins in the 1688 petition of four German Quakers and Mennonites of Germantown, just north of Philadelphia, the first antislavery petition in the New World. From that time until abolition became a reality, Quakers were in the forefront of the movement, although paradoxically Quakers were also among the largest slave owners until the 1770s, when the sect officially took a stand and threatened to disown Quakers who continued to hold slaves.

Benjamin Franklin himself lived out the ambivalence felt by many as the eighteenth century advanced. Franklin printed antislavery tracts by the outspoken Quakers Ralph Sandiford and Benjamin Lay, although he did so without affixing his name to the pamphlets (see Figure 4.1).<sup>4</sup> Franklin owned slaves from as early as 1735 until 1781, and he never deliberately freed any of them. And his wealth, derived principally from the profits of his printing business, owed much to the numerous advertisements for slave sales and runaways that he published and to the actual sales that he facilitated. However, by the end of his life Franklin had taken a very public stand against slavery. As president of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage (usually known as the Pennsylvania Abolition Society), Franklin is credited with writing the 1789 petition to Congress urging the abolition of slavery. The circuitous route by which Franklin arrived at that point—indeed, the long and complex story of his relationship to the black race, to the institution of slavery, and to issues of freedom and bondage—has been addressed by many scholars and is not properly the subject of this essay.<sup>5</sup> For our purposes we will be concerned with Franklin’s statements and actions concerning the education, and educability, of African Americans.



Before 1750, when the first sustained efforts to educate Philadelphia’s blacks began under the auspices of the Quakers, there are only tantalizing hints of such activity. By a rather remarkable coincidence, one such attempt was by Samuel Keimer, a man who would cross paths—and swords—with Franklin on numerous occasions. Keimer, a native Londoner, had arrived in Philadelphia late in 1722 or early in 1723, having already had a career that involved religious enthusiasm (as a “French Prophet,” or Camisard), the writing and printing of disputatious literature, many periods of imprisonment (one for as long as six years), and printing work for Daniel Defoe. In Philadelphia Keimer established himself as a printer and hired Franklin as a journeyman the day after the young runaway apprentice arrived from Boston. Both men, it seems, had been intended by their fathers for a religious vocation, but both ended up being apprenticed to printers.<sup>6</sup>

In February 1723, just eight months before Franklin arrived in Philadelphia, Keimer placed advertisements in two successive issues of Andrew Bradford’s *American Weekly Mercury* (see Figures 4.2a and 4.2b). The *Mercury* was Philadelphia’s only newspaper until Keimer himself began publishing a paper with the rather cumbersome title of *Universal Instructor in All Arts and Sciences; and the Pennsylvania Gazette* at the end of 1728—the very paper Franklin would take over in 1729 and continue as the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. Keimer’s first advertisement (February 5–12) reads:

Take Notice,  
There is lately arriv’d in this City a Person who freely offers his Service to  
teach his poor Brethren the *Male Negroes* to read the Holy Scriptures, &c.

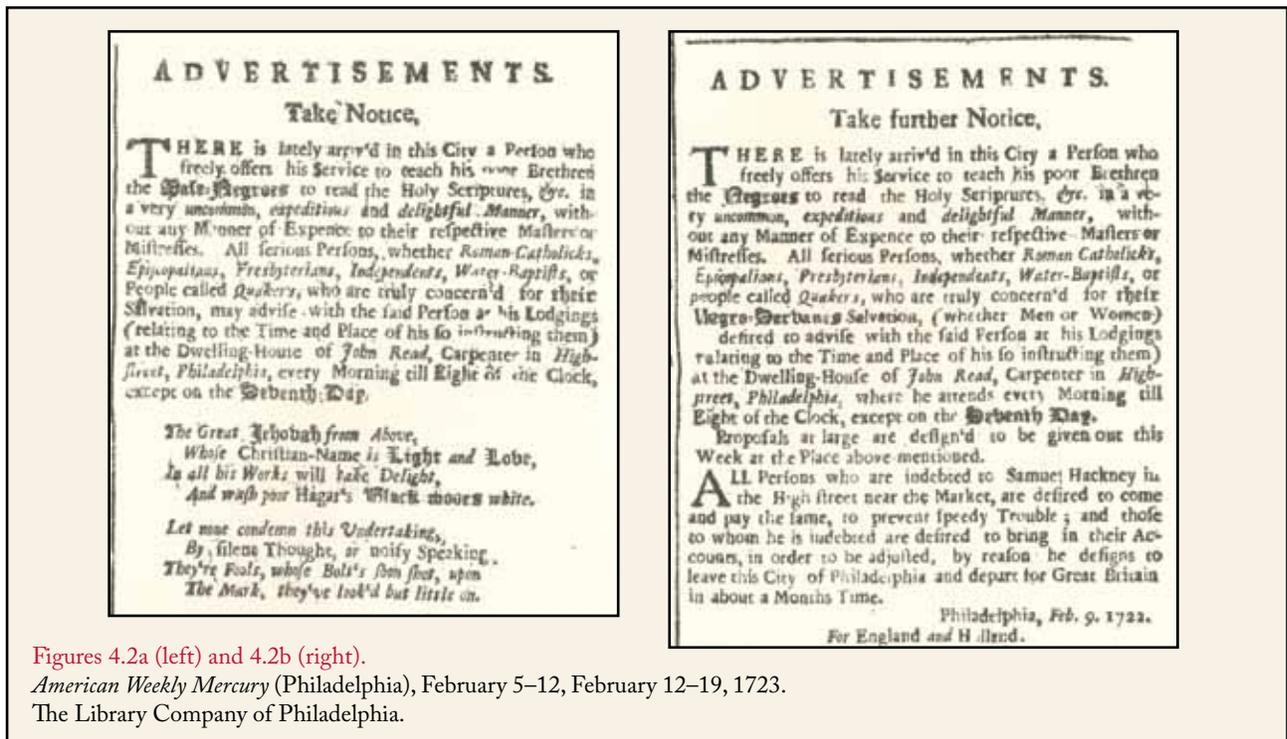
in a very *uncommon, expeditious and delightful Manner*, without any Manner of Expence to their respective Masters or Mistresses. All serious Persons, whether *Roman Catholicks, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Independents, Water-Baptists*, or people called *Quakers*, who are truly concern'd for *their* Salvation, may advise with the said Person at his Lodgings (relating to the Time and Place of his so instructing them) at the Dwelling-House of *John Read*, Carpenter in *High-street, Philadelphia*, every Morning till Eight of the Clock, except on the *Seventh Day*.

The notice was followed by these two quatrains:

The Great *Jehovah* from Above,  
Whose Christian-Name is *Light* and *Love*,  
In all his Works will take Delight,  
And wash poor Hagar's *Black moors* white.

Let none condemn this Undertaking,  
By silent Thought, or noisy Speaking  
They're Fools, whose Bolt's soon shot, upon  
The Mark, they've look'd but little on.

Keimer notes that he has lodgings at the home of John Read (at present-day 318 Market St.). Just a month after Franklin's arrival in the city, about November 10, 1723, Franklin himself took up lodgings at the Read house, next door to Keimer's printing shop. This was of course the home of his future common-law wife Deborah Read and her father.



Figures 4.2a (left) and 4.2b (right).

*American Weekly Mercury* (Philadelphia), February 5–12, February 12–19, 1723.

The Library Company of Philadelphia.

Keimer’s advertisement must have left more than a few heads shaking in wonderment and confusion. Did his school already exist, or was it only in the planning stages? When he referred to “*their* Salvation,” was he speaking of the slaves or their owners? And why “*Male Negroes*” only? Keimer ran another advertisement the following week (February 12–19), which was headed “Take further Notice” and answered these questions. The phrase “*Male Negroes*” became instead “*Negroes*.” Keimer then rephrased “All serious Persons . . . who are truly concern’d for *their* Salvation” as “All serious Persons . . . who are truly concern’d for their *Negro-Servants* Salvation, (whether Men or Women).”

Keimer’s plan was to open a free school for teaching Philadelphia’s black slaves to read so that they could study the Bible. Although his revised advertisement did much to remove the ambiguities of the first version, we do not know whether Keimer ever opened his school. A hint that he might indeed have gotten his scheme off the ground comes several years later, and from the pen of another of Keimer’s adversaries. Late in 1725 Keimer seems to have been searching for a new venue for his school. He was involved in a dispute with rival almanac-publisher Jacob Taylor, who accused Keimer of publishing a spurious edition of Taylor’s almanac for 1726. Taylor lashed out at Keimer in a long piece in the *Mercury*, which included this bit of doggerel:

A school for thee; a most commodious place  
To Nod, and Wink, and point with such a Grace —  
Thy black disciples, now immerg’d in folly,  
Shall start out clerks, and Read, and Speak like Tully:  
The pref’rence to the sable Sort belongs,  
The Whitemen next must learn the sacred Tongues.  
Thus, in just Order are thy Legions led  
To realms of Science, *Keimer* at the Head.<sup>7</sup>

Taylor’s attack on Keimer suggests that the school did indeed exist—else why suggest that his “black disciples” are *now* “immerg’d in folly,” and why excoriate Keimer for an unfulfilled fantasy then several years old?

With virtually no surviving evidence of Keimer’s educational venture, it is hard to discern his motive in proposing—and perhaps creating—a school for Philadelphia’s black slaves. A hint may be found, however, in an apology for a delay in publication that Keimer published in his newspaper: he believed himself to be so beleaguered by enemies that he had thought of writing up his experiences for general entertainment under the title of the “White Negro.”<sup>8</sup> It seems that Keimer’s travails and disputes had given him a persecution complex and increased his empathy for blacks, and that he therefore sought to identify himself with them. Within three months of venting his spleen and likening himself to a “White Negro,” Keimer had quit the printing business and sold his paper to Franklin and Hugh Meredith.<sup>9</sup>

Regardless of Keimer’s motive or whether his school ever actually opened, his proposal must be credited as a very early attempt to address the lack of educational opportunities for Philadelphia’s black inhabitants, and it can safely be asserted that the ever-observant young Franklin would have been well aware of this curious episode in the life of his employer and later rival. Franklin did not leave any evidence of his thoughts on the subject of black education at this stage of his life. But years later, in his *Autobiography*, he heaped scorn on Keimer and ridiculed him mercilessly, suggesting perhaps that the young Franklin was something less than enthusiastic about the idea and was also unwilling to credit Keimer for his unorthodox yet forward-thinking plans.



Almost two decades later another controversy erupted in Philadelphia over plans to educate the city's blacks, and again Franklin was not far from the epicenter. This time the catalyst was the English revivalist preacher George Whitefield, who played such a signal role in the Great Awakening in the American colonies and who made eight visits to Philadelphia between 1739 and 1770. Franklin and Whitefield had a close and interesting relationship. Franklin welcomed the preacher to Philadelphia; published his sermons and other writings; measured the distance his voice carried to corroborate reports that Whitefield had preached to 25,000 auditors; and, when Whitefield was denied the pulpits of Philadelphia's more orthodox congregations, took part in buying land and building a house "expressly for the Use of any Preacher of any religious Persuasion who might desire to say something to the people of Philadelphia."<sup>10</sup> (Later, after the enthusiasm for Whitefield had died down, the building was taken over by the newly founded Academy of Philadelphia.)<sup>11</sup> Franklin's *Autobiography* records two amusing stories about Whitefield. In one, Whitefield is said to have prayed for Franklin's conversion, "but never had the Satisfaction of believing that his Prayers were heard."<sup>12</sup> In the second, Franklin reported that he went to hear Whitefield preach and solicit funds for his orphanage in Georgia, and

silently resolved he should get nothing from me. I had in my Pocket a Handful of Copper, Money, three or four silver Dollars, and five Pistoles in Gold. As he proceeded I began to soften, and concluded to give the Coppers. Another stroke of his Oratory made me ashamed of that, and determin'd me to give the Silver; & he finish'd so admirably, that I empty'd my Pocket wholly into the Collector's Dish, Gold and all.<sup>13</sup>

In April 1740 Whitefield purchased 5,000 acres of land at the forks of the Delaware River, near present-day Easton, Pennsylvania, about 75 miles from Philadelphia. He called it Nazareth. On this vast tract he intended to settle Moravians from Georgia, build a school for black children, and create a haven for English debtors.<sup>14</sup> Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette* published solicitations for contributions for the school, and Franklin himself was authorized to receive such contributions (see Figure 4.3).<sup>15</sup> Whitefield's project was short-lived, however. Within a year, he recognized that his project was impracticable, and he and the Moravians were parting ways over theology; they bought the entire 5,000 acres and went on to establish the settlements of Nazareth and nearby Bethlehem.

THE Rev. Mr. Whitefield having taken up  
5000 Acres of Land on the Forks of Delaware, in the Province of  
Pennsylvania, in order to erect a Negroe School there, and to settle a Town  
thereon with his Friends; all Persons who please to contribute to the said  
School, may pay their Contributions to Mr. Benezet, Merchant, in Phila-  
delphia, Mr. Noble at New-York, Mr. Gilbert Tennent, in New-Brun-  
swick, New-Jersey, or to the Printer of this Paper.

Figure 4.3.  
*Pennsylvania Gazette*, November 27, 1740.  
The Library Company of Philadelphia.

Yet Whitefield’s evangelism and his plans for a school for blacks had struck a chord in Philadelphia. Though a slave owner himself and in no sense an opponent of the institution (indeed, he played a leading role in introducing slavery into Georgia), Whitefield nonetheless preached the importance of bringing slaves to Christ through education and Bible. (In this regard, he and Keimer shared a concern for the slaves’ souls rather than for their temporal condition.) Whitefield also inveighed against such “devilish diversions” as dancing. One of the thousands who heard him preach in Philadelphia must have been dancing-master Robert Bolton. Bolton was a Philadelphia shopkeeper who left the colony for Maryland in 1737 and returned about a year later to open a dancing school, “considerable Encouragement being given him for that Purpose.”<sup>16</sup> Bolton apparently took Whitefield’s words about sinful activities to heart, for he acquiesced when in April 1740 Whitefield’s traveling companion William Seward locked up the dancing room and took away the key. The “great Stir” between Seward and the gentlemen (the self-styled “better sort”) who had rented the room boiled over into the press, and Franklin ended up in the middle, not only printing pieces from both sides in his *Pennsylvania Gazette*, but even joining the controversy by writing as “Obadiah Plainman.”<sup>17</sup>

No longer having a dancing school for adults, Bolton announced the opening of a school in which children would be taught “all kinds of Needle-work, Dancing, &c. Where also Children may board, as usual with Mr. Brownell.”<sup>18</sup> (As it happened, Brownell was Franklin’s first teacher in Boston before both of them relocated to Philadelphia.)<sup>19</sup> And no doubt inspired by the other part of Whitefield’s message, Bolton took a step both courageous and foolhardy by proposing to admit to his school black students along with his white students. The evidence for this plan comes from newspapers in Charleston and Boston, which reported on the furor Bolton’s plan caused (see Figure 4.4):

We hear by a private Letter from Philadelphia, that one Mr. *Boulton*, who formerly kept a Dancing School, Ball, Assembly, Concert Room &c. there, being convinced that such a Practice was contrary to the Gospel of Christ, has lately set up a School for teaching Children to read, &c., and that upon his giving Notice that he would teach Negroes also, had in 23 Days no less than 53 Black Scholars. For this he was sent for, and arraign’d in Court, as a Breaker of the Negro Law, but on making his Defence was dismiss’d. And the next Day order’d by the Foreman of the Grand Jury to continue his School without Interruption.<sup>20</sup>

Curiously, this incident does not seem to have been recorded in the city where it took place. If Bolton did indeed “give notice” of his intention to teach blacks, he did not do it in either of the two newspapers then being published in Philadelphia—the *American Weekly Mercury* and Franklin’s *Pennsylvania Gazette*. Nor is it certain just what law Bolton was arraigned for breaking. The 1725 Act for the Better Regulating of Negroes in This Province includes no prohibition against teaching blacks to read. Perhaps he was accused of violating the 1705 Act for the Trial of Negroes, still in force, which included a clause prohibiting the assembly of more than four blacks “upon no lawful Business of their Masters or Owners,” on pain of a public whipping not exceeding thirty-nine lashes.<sup>21</sup>

Could Franklin have been the source of the private letter cited by the *South-Carolina Gazette*? The *Gazette* was established when Franklin sent Thomas Whitmarsh from Philadelphia to Charleston in 1732 to begin the publication. When Whitmarsh died of yellow fever shortly thereafter, Franklin sent Louis Timothée to succeed him. Timothée, a Huguenot immigrant who later anglicized his name to Lewis Timothy, had

*Charlstown, South Carolina, July 15.*

We hear by a private Letter from Philadelphia, that one Mr. Bolton, who formerly kept a Dancing School, Ball, Assembly Concert Room &c there, being convinced that such a Practice was contrary to the Gospel of Christ, has lately set up a School for teaching Children to read. &c. and that upon his giving Notice that he would teach Negroes also, had in 23 Days no less than 53 Black Scholars. For this he was sent for, and arraign'd in Court, as a Breaker of the Negro Law, but on making his Defence was dismiss'd. And the next Day order'd by the Foreman of the Grand Jury to continue his School without Interruption.

*Great Indignation being shew'd Week from Parismouth*

Figure 4.4.

*Boston Weekly News-Letter*, August 21, 1740.

Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

been one of Franklin's journeymen and the first librarian of Franklin's Library Company of Philadelphia. Timothy died in 1738, with one year remaining of his six-year contract with Franklin. The paper was then taken over by Timothy's widow Elizabeth and their thirteen-year-old son Peter. Given the close business relationship between Franklin and the Timothys, and given Franklin's intimate knowledge of the closing of Bolton's dancing school and concert room, would not Franklin have been a likely source of the report of Bolton's arraignment for teaching Philadelphia's blacks?



The first sustained efforts to teach Philadelphia's blacks began in 1750, ten years after the Bolton imbroglio and less than a decade before Franklin's own deep involvement with the Associates of Dr. Bray. The Quaker initiative was led by the teacher and ardent and prolific antislavery activist Anthony Benezet, a French Huguenot who had emigrated from London in 1731.<sup>22</sup> Benezet must have been well aware of Whitefield's abortive effort to establish a Negro school in Nazareth; the two men had known each other in England, and Benezet's father, John Stephen Benezet, was Whitefield's collector of subscriptions in Pennsylvania to support the school. Despite the fact that surviving correspondence between Franklin and Benezet does not exist before 1772,<sup>23</sup> there can be no doubt that the paths of these two prominent civic figures crossed frequently, at least during the years Franklin was resident in Philadelphia. Benezet was a subscriber to Franklin's Pennsylvania Hospital (and a manager in 1757), a shareholder of the Library Company, and a customer of Franklin's shop.<sup>24</sup> They were practically neighbors, too, Benezet living on the north side of Chestnut Street between Third and Fourth, and Franklin living for many years along or near the first three blocks of Market Street, and then beginning in the mid-1760s at Franklin Court, almost directly behind Benezet's house. They were distantly related by marriage, as well, for in 1745 Benezet's brother Daniel had married a cousin of Deborah Franklin.<sup>25</sup>

Anthony Benezet had been teaching white pupils since 1739, first at the Germantown school established by Francis Daniel Pastorius, and from 1742 at the Friends' English School (now known as the William Penn Charter School). Beginning in 1750, Benezet taught black pupils in the evening at his home (see Figure 4.5). After carrying on this independent enterprise at his own expense for two decades, he convinced other Quakers to erect a school for the instruction of black children (see Figure 4.6). (This was just at the time when the Quakers were adopting an antislavery stance and encouraging their members to free their slaves.) The new school opened in June 1770 with twenty-two pupils, a number that grew to thirty-six within two months. By 1774 a new building had been erected to house the school. It is said that 250 pupils passed through the school in the years from 1770 to 1775. Benezet provided supervision for the school for a number of years, and then took up his teaching role again in 1782, devoting himself to the school for the last two years of his life. After making provision for his wife, Benezet stipulated in his will that his entire estate should be used to endow the school.<sup>26</sup>



In 1757, just as Franklin was embarking for England as the agent of the Pennsylvania Assembly in its dispute with the Proprietors over the taxation of Proprietary lands and other issues, the Reverend John Waring, secretary of the Associates of Dr. Bray, wrote a letter to Franklin. The Bray Associates was an Anglican organization based in London that promoted the conversion to Christianity and the education of blacks in the American colonies. The Associates had been founded in 1724 and for its first thirty years had tried to achieve its goals by sending small libraries to colonial clergymen, with which they could teach and catechize among their black parishioners, and by sending catechists to the colonies. By the mid-1750s, neither of these methods had accomplished much, and the Associates began to think about other avenues for reaching their goal—hence Waring's letter to Franklin concerning the work of the organization. At that time the Associates had apparently not yet thought of establishing organized, formal Negro schools in America, for Waring cited the example of the Welsh "circulating schools" and asked Franklin if a similar scheme could "be set on foot in Your province for the Service of the blacks?"<sup>27</sup> The Associates were thus still thinking in terms of itinerant schoolmasters.

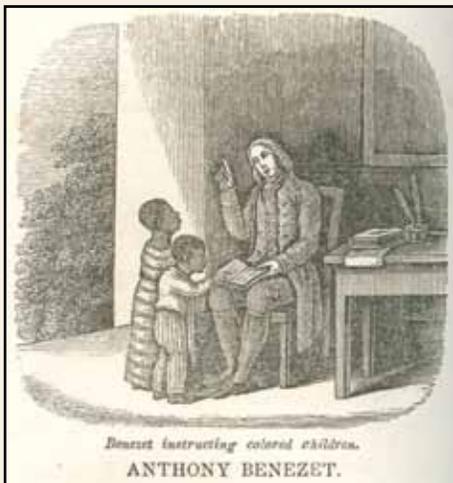


Figure 4.5.  
"Benezet Instructing Colored Children," from J. W. Barber,  
*Historical, Poetical, and Pictorial American Scenes* (New Haven:  
Published by J. W. & J. Barber; for J. H. Bradley, [1853]).  
The Library Company of Philadelphia.

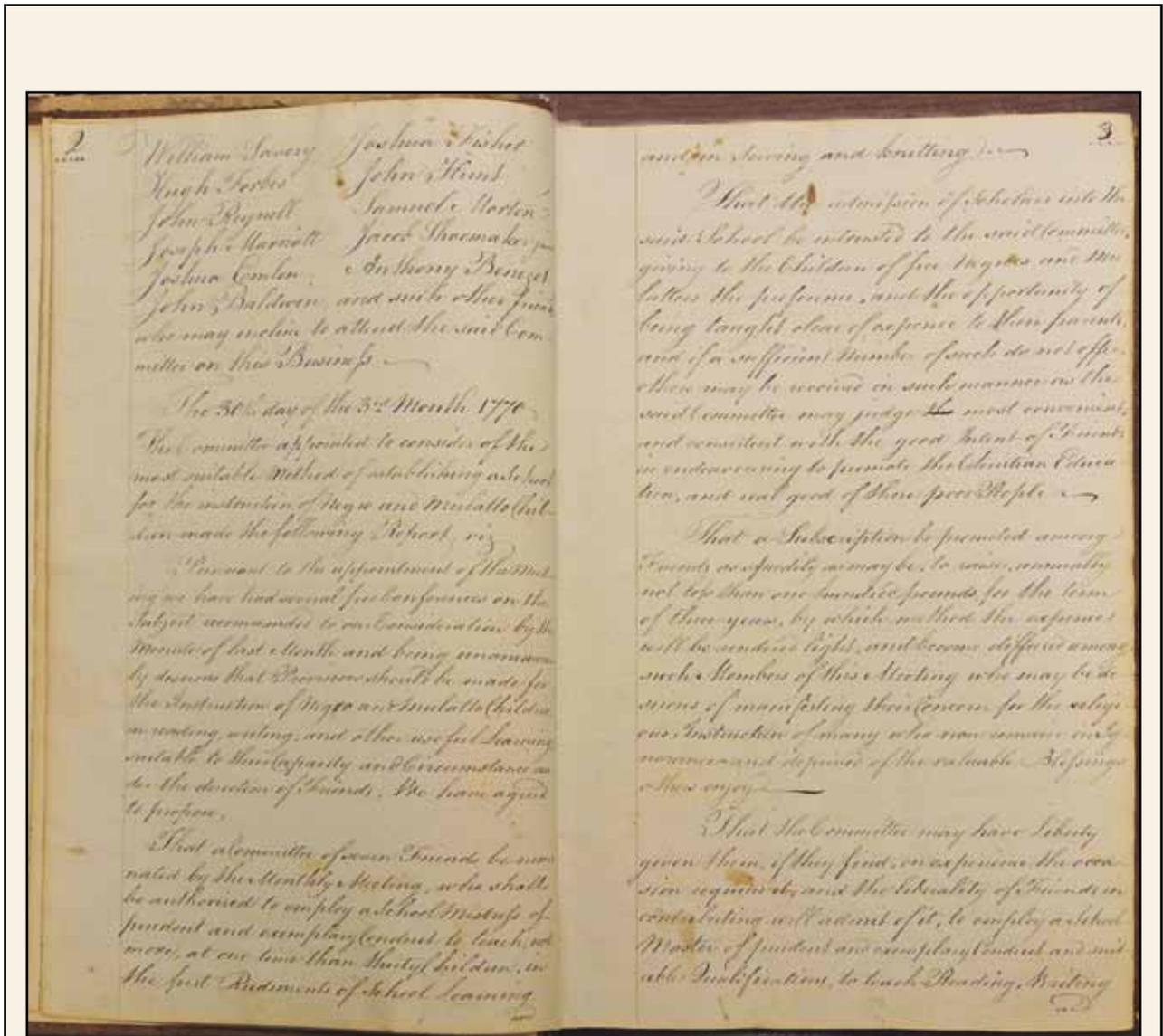


Figure 4.6.

School for Black People (Africans' School), Overseers Minutes, vol. 1, 1770–1811, pp. 2–3.

Archives of the Monthly Meeting of Friends, Philadelphia; Haverford College Library, Quaker Collection.

These early pages from the Minute Book of the Africans' School present a March 30, 1770 report made by a committee of Friends recommending the creation of a "school for the instruction of Negro and Mulatto children." Names of some of the committee (including Anthony Benezet) appear at the top of p. 2.

Philadelphia Jan. 3. 1758.

Rev<sup>d</sup> Sir,

I send you herewith the Extract of  
M<sup>r</sup> Stungen's Letter which I mentioned to you  
He is among us esteem'd a good Man, one that  
makes a Conscience of the Duties of his Office, in w<sup>ch</sup>.  
he is very diligent, and has behaved with so much  
Discretion, as to gain the general Respect & Good-  
will of the People. — If the Associates of D<sup>r</sup> Brey  
should think fit to make Toyal of a School for  
Negro Children in Philadelphia, I know no Per-  
son under whose Care it would be more likely  
to succeed. At present few or none give their  
Negro Children any Schooling; partly from a  
Prejudice that Reading & Knowledge in a Slave  
are both useless and dangerous; and partly from  
an Unwillingness in the Masters & Mistresses of  
common Schools to take black Scholars, lest  
the Parents of the white Children should be dis-  
gusted & take them away, not chusing to have  
their Children mix'd with Slaves in Education, Play,  
&c. — But a separate School for Blacks, under  
the Care of One of whom People should have an  
Opinion that he would be careful to imbue the  
Minds of their young Slaves with good Principles,  
might probably have a Number of Blacks sent  
to it; and if on Experience it should be found  
useful,

M<sup>r</sup> Waring

Figure 4.7.

Benjamin Franklin to John Waring, January 3, 1758.

Miscellaneous Benjamin Franklin Collections, courtesy, American Philosophical Society.

Waring's letter arrived in Philadelphia after Franklin had sailed to London, so his wife Deborah showed the letter to the Rev. William Sturgeon, a graduate of Yale College who since 1747 had been the assistant minister of Christ Church and catechist to the Negroes in Philadelphia, supported by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. Sturgeon in turn wrote to Franklin in August 1757, recommending that a school be opened in Philadelphia "under the Care and Inspection of the Minister, or some other prudent Person or Persons."<sup>28</sup> Franklin then communicated Sturgeon's proposal to Waring in January 1758 (see Figure 4.7). Obviously enthusiastic about the plan, Franklin even saw its importance extending beyond Philadelphia:

At present few or none give their Negro Children any Schooling, partly from a Prejudice that Reading & Knowledge in a Slave are both useless and dangerous; and partly from an Unwillingness in the Masters & Mistresses of common Schools to take black Scholars, lest the Parents of the white Children should be disgusted & take them away, not chusing to have their Children mix'd with Slaves in Education, Play, &c. But a separate School for Blacks, under the Care of One, of whom People should have an Opinion that he would be careful to imbue the Minds of their young Slaves with good Principles, might probably have a Number of Blacks sent to it; and if on Experience it should be found useful, and not attended with the ill Consequences commonly apprehended, the Example might be followed in the other Colonies, and encouraged by the Inhabitants in general.<sup>29</sup>

In recommending the establishment of a school to the Bray Associates, Sturgeon and Franklin may well have had in mind Anthony Benezet's successful experience over the preceding six years, while at the same time perhaps doubting that the ardent abolitionist Benezet was imbuing the minds of his pupils with the "good Principles" that they recommended.

Upon learning of the plan the Associates hesitantly proceeded toward an implementation of Sturgeon's and Franklin's vision. On February 1, 1758, they agreed to consider at the next meeting whether it would be proper to open a school for black children in Philadelphia, and in the meantime they commissioned Waring to "get the best Information he can of such Particulars as may enable the Associates to Judge of the Propriety & Usefulness of such a School there."<sup>30</sup> Such information could, of course, be had most readily from Franklin himself. Waring consulted Franklin about the expediency of opening a Negro school in Philadelphia, and at their meeting of April 5, 1758, the Associates agreed to a three-year trial of such a school at a maximum expense of £20 sterling per annum.<sup>31</sup>

The Philadelphia school opened on November 20, 1758, with a mistress and thirty pupils under Sturgeon's direction.<sup>32</sup> Boys were to be taught to read and girls to read, sew, knit, and embroider. The mistress was to attend church with the children every Wednesday and Friday, and "all her Endeavours [were] to be directed towards making them Christians." The books the Bray Associates sent to the school were primarily religious in nature.<sup>33</sup> The school was immediately successful, and in June 1759 Sturgeon reported that thirty-six scholars attended regularly.<sup>34</sup> Of the thirty-six pupils, twenty-five were slaves and eleven free.<sup>35</sup> Deborah Franklin wrote to her husband on August 9, 1759, that she "went to hear the Negro Children catechised at Church. . . . It gave me a great deal of Pleasure, and I shall send Othello to the School."<sup>36</sup> Yet the Franklins' own slave is not included in the only surviving list of students that postdates Deborah's letter.<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps because of Sturgeon's report, the Associates agreed in January 1760 to open three other American schools "with all Convenient Speed." They also asked Waring to inform Franklin of the decision and to solicit Franklin's assistance in the establishment of the other schools. Although the idea of establishing Negro schools was implanted in the minds of the Associates by Sturgeon and Franklin and nourished by Sturgeon's early report of success, the Associates apparently reached the decision to increase the number of schools before seeking Franklin's advice. The Associates elected Franklin a member on January 2, 1760, however, and when he attended his first meeting fifteen days later, they readily accepted his recommendations concerning the locations of the three prospective schools. Franklin suggested that New York, Williamsburg, and Newport were the most proper places in the British plantations for the additional Negro schools, and he recommended particular men to superintend them.<sup>38</sup> Waring then wrote to the three men to inform them of the Associates' intentions and to request their assistance in establishing schools in order to advance the Associates' "pious Undertaking." The response was quite favorable, and the schools in New York and Williamsburg opened on September 22 and 29, 1760, respectively.<sup>39</sup> The Newport school did not begin its operations until 1762. The Associates opened one other Negro school, in 1765, at Fredericksburg, Virginia. Of these five schools, only that at Philadelphia survived the Revolution.<sup>40</sup> Each school typically had between twenty and thirty students and was supported by an annual grant from the Associates of £20 or £25, usually £20. Most, and perhaps all, of the schools were open to both slave and free black children, although the preponderance of students were slaves.<sup>41</sup> And the Philadelphia school (and perhaps others) welcomed as students slaves whose masters were not members of the Church of England.<sup>42</sup>

Before the Revolution, four mistresses and four superintendents served the Philadelphia school.<sup>43</sup> Important changes began to occur in 1766. First, on July 31, Sturgeon resigned his position as assistant minister of the United Congregations of Christ Church and St. Peter's because of ill health, and it seems likely that he ceased to superintend the Associates' Negro school at that time. Franklin wrote from England to Francis Hopkinson late in 1767 that the Associates had not heard from Sturgeon "these two years past" and conveyed the Associates' request that Hopkinson and Edward Duffield "enquire into the State of" the school.<sup>44</sup> After receiving Franklin's letter early in 1768, Hopkinson and Duffield succeeded Sturgeon as the school's administrators. Under the diligent mistress Mrs. Ayres, the school had apparently not declined during the lapse between the administrations of Sturgeon and of Hopkinson and Duffield. When the latter two first examined the school there were twenty-seven students in attendance.<sup>45</sup>

About the same time that Sturgeon left the school, the Bray Associates were acting to strengthen the institution. At their meeting of July 24, 1766, Waring reported the receipt of a letter from the secretary of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge revealing that the Reverend Abbot Upcher, a wealthy clergyman from Suffolk, intended to donate £1,000 to the Associates for the purchase of an estate in America. The following October 2 the Associates asked Franklin to write to Upcher "to acquaint him with the Circumstances of purchasing Lands in America."<sup>46</sup> Franklin of course recommended Philadelphia, advising Upcher "to empower three Persons in Philadelphia to purchase Ground Rents within that City."<sup>47</sup> On May 7, 1767, the Associates appointed Franklin and four Philadelphians undoubtedly recommended by Franklin—the Reverend Jacob Duché (minister of the United Congregations of Christ Church and St. Peter's), Hopkinson, Duffield, and David Hall (Franklin's former partner in the printing business)—to serve as trustees for the land to be purchased.<sup>48</sup>

After the Associates had received Upcher's third and final benefaction, bringing his total gift to £500, they consulted Richard Jackson, an influential London lawyer and great friend of Franklin, "on the most

proper Method of securing to the Associates the full Right & Title to such Lands as shall be purchased in Pennsylvania with Mr. Upchers Benefactions.”<sup>49</sup> Jackson recommended that the five trustees in whom the lands would be vested should “be chosen out of such Associates as are resident in England,” and that those trustees could “grant a Letter of Attorney to empower five persons resident in America to act as Attorneys for Them.” The five Americans originally named as trustees—Franklin, Duché, Hopkinson, Duffield, and Hall—were then named attorneys under the trusteeship of five of the British Associates.<sup>50</sup> Not all of the five Americans involved themselves in the affairs of the Associates in Philadelphia, however. In 1769 Duché, who was “much engaged in the Duties of a large Parish,” declined “to take the Negro School under my particular Inspection,” and David Hall “insist[ed] on another Person’s being appointed in his Room as it does not suit him to undertake the Charge . . . put upon him.”<sup>51</sup> With Franklin in London (see Figure 4.8) and Duché and Hall resigned, Hopkinson and Duffield were the only two of the five appointees remaining as trustees in Philadelphia for the purchase of land.

By July 1773, Hopkinson and Duffield were able to inform the Associates that after careful inquiry they had found a suitable lot at the corner of Market and Ninth streets.<sup>52</sup> After the Associates had agreed to the purchase, Hopkinson and Duffield concluded the transaction and reported the results in May 1774. At the same time, they announced that Hopkinson had left Philadelphia and that Duffield “intended very soon to retire into the Country, & therefore requested that some other person might be appointed Inspector of the Negro School in their Stead.”<sup>53</sup>

In May 1774, as these land negotiations were being completed, the school had thirty pupils, three free and twenty-seven slave. The mistress taught “2 at their Needles & Spelling, 1 at Knitting, Needle, & Testament, 7 at Spelling, 3 in the Testament, 1 at Needle & Testament, 1 in the Psalter, 10 in the Alphabet, 1 in Fables, 1 at Sampler & Testament, 3 in the Primer.”<sup>54</sup> Knowing that only the girls were taught skills with the needle, we may surmise that of the thirty pupils, five were certainly girls. In the fall of 1774, the Reverend Thomas Coombe, assistant minister of the United Congregations of Christ Church and St. Peter’s, undertook the supervision of the school. In July 1775, Coombe sent his last communication before the Revolution, reporting that “the School continues full [with thirty pupils] & the Mistress discharges her Duty with diligence & a reasonable Degree of Success.”<sup>55</sup> Despite the Associates’ difficulties in ensuring a



Figure 4.8.

Invitation from the Associates of Dr. Bray to Benjamin Franklin, London, May 21, 1772 (recto and verso). Benjamin Franklin Papers, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, University of Pennsylvania.

strong financial footing for the school, it would seem that the school itself had performed its educational mission with “Success” for nearly fifteen years.

The school fell into abeyance during the war, as communications with and funds from Britain were cut and the ties between Christ Church and the Anglican metropolis were severed. After the war, Hopkinson and Franklin (once again back in Philadelphia) resumed their correspondence with the Associates. Their first letters concerned the disposition of the lot owned by the Associates, and by October 1786 Hopkinson was able to report that he had leased out a portion of it: “This, I expect, will answer three good Purposes—it will fix a Value on the rest of the Estate; will forward the letting out more of the Ground on as good Terms & will enable me to renew the Negroe Charity School according to the Designs of the Associates.”<sup>56</sup> The school did reopen in December 1786, and within a year’s time it was again full.<sup>57</sup>



Franklin expressed different views at different times concerning the temperament and intellectual faculties of blacks, and it is possible to discern a change in his thinking over time. In his 1751 *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, &c.*, in which he compared the economics of slavery with Britain’s domestic manufacturing, Franklin listed pilfering as one of the costs of slavery, “almost every Slave being *by Nature* a Thief.”<sup>58</sup> When he reprinted the *Observations* in 1760, that appraisal had changed; slaves pilfered “from the nature of slavery.”<sup>59</sup> Franklin also began to attribute blacks’ apparent lack of intellect to the stultifying effects of slavery. His letter to the Bray Associates after visiting the Philadelphia Negro school in 1763 is instructive in this regard (see Catalogue no. 67). Franklin reported that the black students were making good progress:

I was on the whole much pleas’d, and from what I then saw, have conceiv’d a higher Opinion of the natural Capacities of the black Race, than I had ever before entertained. Their Apprehension seems as quick, their Memory as strong, and their Docility in every Respect equal to that of white Children. You will wonder perhaps that I should ever doubt it, and I will not undertake to justify all my Prejudices, nor to account for them.<sup>60</sup>

Franklin seems almost surprised to discover that his experience had belied his expectations. This visit to the Bray school to witness for himself the progress the black pupils were making was revelatory for Franklin. In the years following that visit, Franklin became more outspoken in his views on slavery. In 1774 he expressed the belief that blacks “are not deficient in natural Understanding, but they have not the Advantage of Education.”<sup>61</sup>

In holding this view, Franklin was expressing a sentiment shared by many of his contemporaries. In his own *Pennsylvania Gazette* (April 17, 1740) he had published George Whitefield’s “Letter . . . to the Inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia, North and South-Carolina” in which Whitefield argued that blacks and whites, “if born and bred up here, I am perswaded, are naturally capable of the same Improvement.” And perhaps Franklin was influenced by Anthony Benezet, whose long years of instructing black pupils had led him to believe in the intellectual equality of whites and blacks. Benezet’s first statement on this subject appeared in his 1762 *A Short Account of . . . Africa*, in which he wrote that “Negroes are generally sensible humane and sociable, and . . . their capacity is as good, and as capable of improvement as that of white people.”<sup>62</sup>

Late in life Franklin became an active leader of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS). He served as its president, in which capacity he is credited with the authorship of two documents that are the most significant writings of his final year. One was *An Address to the Public*, published by the PAS in October 1789 (Figure 4.9), which also took an environmental view of blacks, asserting that because of slavery the bondsman “too frequently sinks beneath the common standard of the human species. The galling chains, that bind his body, do also fetter his intellectual faculties, and impair the social affections of his heart.”<sup>63</sup>

The *Address* was accompanied by *A Plan for Improving the Condition of the Free Blacks*, which charged a committee of twenty-four PAS members with the responsibility for transacting “the business relative to free blacks.” The committee was to do its work through four subcommittees, one of which was the Committee of Education,

who shall superintend the school-instruction of the children, and youth of the Free Blacks; they may either influence them to attend regularly the schools already established in this city, or form others with this view; they shall in either case provide that, the pupils may receive such learning, as is necessary for their future situation in life; and especially a deep impression of the most important, and generally acknowledged moral and religious principles.

The *Plan* and *Address* were followed early in 1790 by a petition to Congress, signed by Franklin as president, seeking to put slavery in America on the road to extinction.<sup>64</sup> Franklin died in April 1790, two months later, without having won this battle.

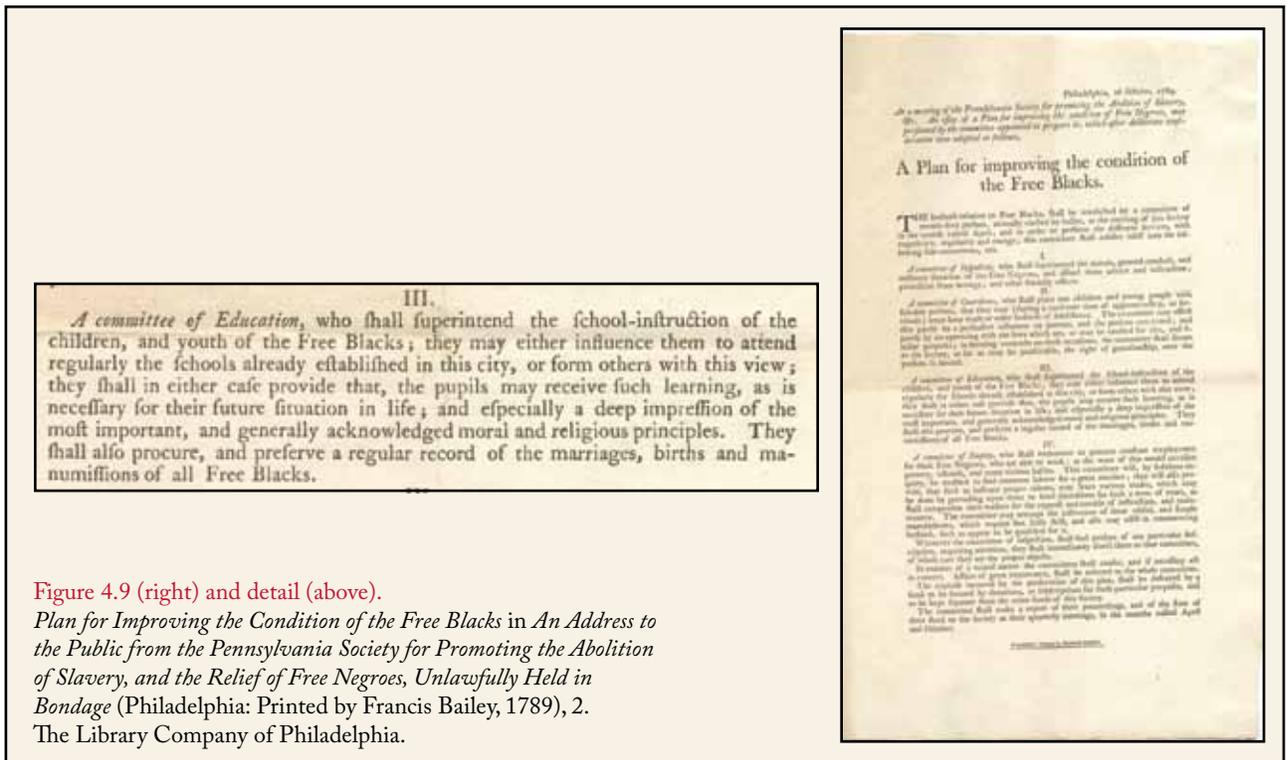


Figure 4.9 (right) and detail (above). *Plan for Improving the Condition of the Free Blacks in An Address to the Public from the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and the Relief of Free Negroes, Unlawfully Held in Bondage* (Philadelphia: Printed by Francis Bailey, 1789), 2. The Library Company of Philadelphia.

What happened in the years following Franklin's death? After the death of Hopkinson (in 1791), the Bray Associates' Philadelphia Negro school came under the superintendence of Bishop William White, and by 1795 the institution had begun to flourish. In a letter to the Associates of June 4, 1795, White noted that Philadelphia blacks had erected "a very convenient Church," partly at their own expense and partly through subscriptions from whites (Figure 4.10). The church, called the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, declared its conformity to the Episcopal Church in "Doctrine Discipline & Worship." White also recommended the construction of a schoolhouse out of the future profits from the rents of the lot, which the Associates agreed to.<sup>65</sup> A year later the Associates approved the establishment of another school in conjunction with the African Church, and on March 5, 1804, they resolved to establish yet a third school in Philadelphia.<sup>66</sup> From its modest beginning in 1758, the Philadelphia Negro school had grown and thrived, surviving numerous changes in personnel and the upheavals of revolution, and it had given impetus to the development of other educational facilities for Philadelphia's blacks.

The Quakers in 1789—five years after Benezet's death—had formed the Association of Friends for the Free Instruction of Adult Colored Persons, which sought to do for adults what the Quakers had been doing for forty years for children (see Figures 4.11a and 4.11b). Sessions were held at night, and by 1792 there were fifty pupils (see Figures 4.12a and 4.12b). This was just about at the time when the Education Committee of the PAS purchased a lot on Cherry Street onto which they moved a building and in 1793 opened "a free school for the instruction of children of color of both sexes." They hired a black woman, Eleanor Harris, "being judged well qualified," to teach the children spelling, reading, and needlework. They paid her \$100 a year and provided her with a room in the school and firewood.<sup>67</sup> In 1795 Quaker women formed a society for educating black women and opened a school for them that met on five evenings each week (see Figures 4.13a and 4.13b).<sup>68</sup> Thus in the waning years of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, the Bray Associates, the Quakers, and the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (many of whose members were also Quakers) provided at least a modicum of education for Philadelphia's burgeoning population of free blacks.



Figure 4.10.  
Frederick De Bourg Richards, photographer, "St. Thomas'  
(African) Church, Southwest corner of Fifth and Adelphi Street"  
(photographic print: salted paper mounted on paper, 21 x 16 cm.,  
May 1859).  
The Library Company of Philadelphia.

1798

DECEMBER 8. 1798. REGULARS

*Of a Society instituted in Philadelphia the 24. of the 1<sup>st</sup> Month 1775, for the free Instruction of color'd Blacks and People of Colour.*

---

Withdrew not paid from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of them Read to be at: *Brooks III. 27.*

For consideration of the Dead savings which many well-disposed Blacks and People of colour labour under from not being able to read write or cast accounts, which would qualify them to act for themselves, or provide for their Families, the whose names are subscribed agree to undertake their tuition; and bind themselves by the following Regulations for said Purpose.

- I. The affairs of the Society shall be transacted on the evening of the second Sabbath-day in every month, which the Schools are held, at the time and place occasionally fixed on.
- II. One of our Members shall act as Clerk, take regular minutes of our Proceedings, and procure our Reports.
- III. In case of absence without sufficient cause, a fine of 20cts. or a Dollar shall be paid to our Collectors; and if voluntary contribution shall be made when necessary, to defray the expenses of the Society. The Money so collected to be paid into the hands of a Treasurer, who shall produce his Account, properly adjusted, once in six months.
- IV. Any Person requesting to join the Society, with the concurrence of two or more Members, may be proposed at any

1798 DECEMBER, 10.

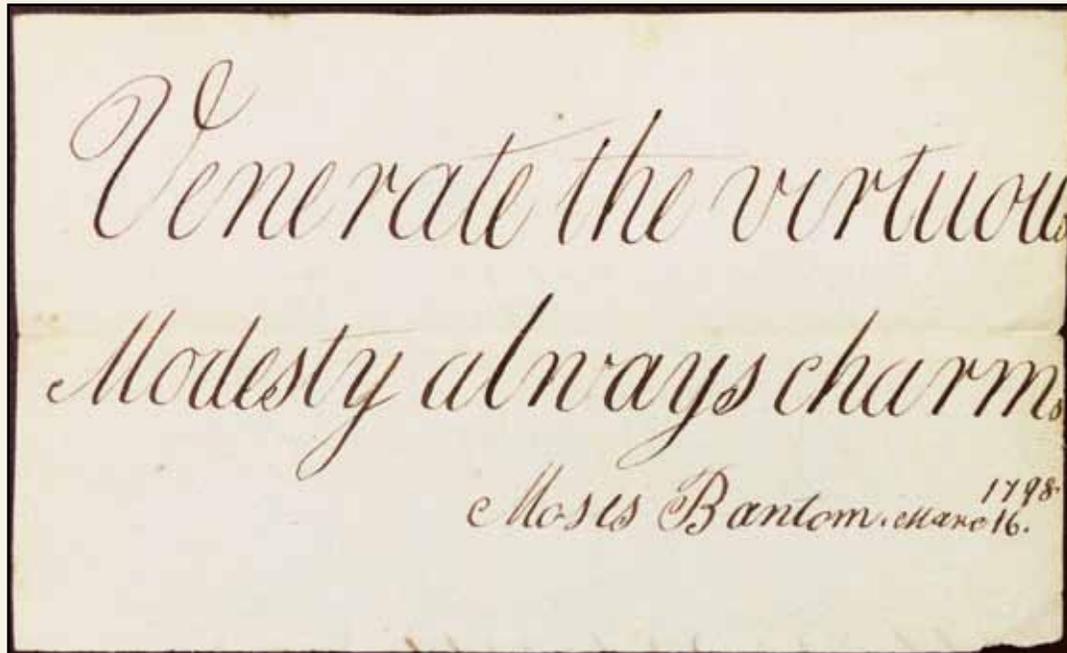
any Extra Meeting for consideration; but such request will be decided upon before the next evening.

Finally, In regard to the order, order, and usefulness of this Institution, we will endeavor to avoid any unbecoming disputes, individually engage to submit to the judgment of the Society, if the exclusion of any of us should become necessary for the good of the Institution.

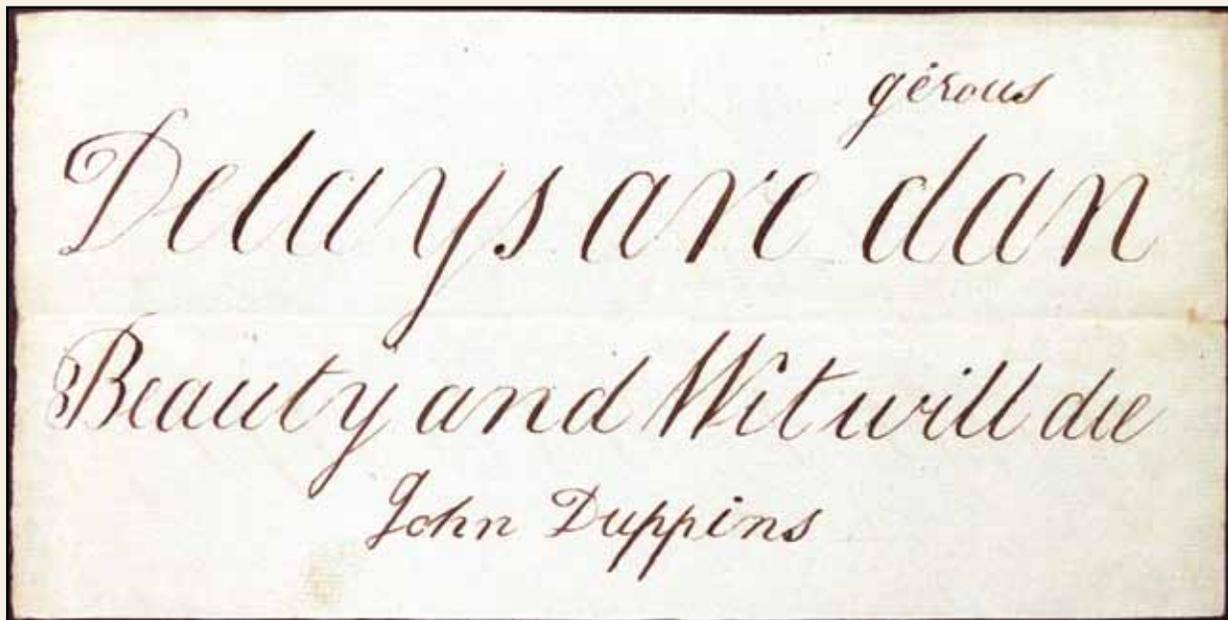
Signed in Philadelphia, according to each Member as ought to discontinue his services, on giving public notice at some Future Meeting of the Society:

Thomas B. Barton	Benjamin Hornor Jun <sup>r</sup>
Joseph Garrison	Aaron Clarke
James T. Towell	Sam <sup>l</sup> Richards Jun <sup>r</sup>
John Biddle	James Reed
Edu <sup>g</sup> Thayer Russell	John Garrison
Arthur T. Southwick	Benjamin Chamberlain
George Williams	Nathan <sup>l</sup> Shurtz
Cal <sup>l</sup> Hopkins	John Lambert
Samuel Bolton	William Thompson
Samuel Paul	Eliza Hughes
Joseph Scallenger	Mrs <sup>l</sup> Wilcox
Oliver Knicker	Henry Lawrence Jun <sup>r</sup>
Charles Donaldson	Benjamin C. Lister
Thomas Rogers	Paul P. Hopper
Robert Johnson	
Samuel Lawrence	
Wesley Webb	
Edward Ross	
Samuel Barnes	

Figures 4.11a and 4.11b. Association of Friends for the Free Instruction of Adult Colored Persons, Records, Minute Book 1, 1790–98, pp. [1–2]. Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College.



Venerate the virtuous  
Modesty always charms  
Moses Bantom, March 16. 1798.



Delays are dan<sup>gerous</sup>  
Beauty and Wit will die  
John Duppins

Figures 4.12a (top) and 4.12b (bottom).

Writing samples of Moses Bantom, 16 March 1798, and John Duppins, n.d. (between 1790 and 1802).

Association of Friends for the Free Instruction of Adult Colored Persons, Records (RG 4/009), Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College.

Figures 4.13a (upper right) and 4.13b (lower right).

Letters of Mary Brown, March 11, 1790, and Frances Richardson, n.d. (between 1790 and 1802) to the Women's Association.

Association of Friends for the Free Instruction of Adult Colored Persons, Records, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College.

Esteemed friends I am lead by a humble  
 Sense of gratitude and duty to return you most  
 affectionate acknowledgments for the kind atten-  
 tion you have condescended to wards the improve-  
 ment of our useful Learning as well as the inculcat-  
 ing us in the more excellent precepts that of our  
 Religious Duties earnestly trust will be  
 Blessed in the ardent endeavours to persevere  
 for that promotion which will afford a com-  
 fortable satisfaction to you, and a lasting  
 happiness to our lives with most grateful  
 regards I am your obliged  
 Mary Brown March 11 1777.

dear masters; I am very thankful to you for  
 the favour that I received from you to think not  
 most affected people a. using our talents but  
 o. my dear masters if you ~~did~~ <sup>had</sup> not tedious to  
 know you is Good to our home should I presume to  
 set it down; I wonder you think thousand think for  
 the pains that you has taken with me o. my dear  
 masters; now not how to wonder you thinks a nuff but I  
 hope god all mighty will bless all if you for your  
 trouble James B. Richardson

Yet the education of Philadelphia’s blacks was not dependent solely on the actions of certain benevolent whites. Philadelphia’s African Americans sometimes took the initiative and assumed responsibility for their own education and that of others in the black community, or acted in concert with the whites who were connected to the Bray Associates, the Quakers, and the PAS. There is a tantalizing record in 1775 of what was likely a school run by a black man, presumably for black pupils. In July of that year someone known as Black Abraham bought three dozen spelling books from the Philadelphia printer-bookseller Robert Aitken for fifteen shillings a dozen (see Figure 4.14).<sup>69</sup> This was just one year before Benezet published his famous *Pennsylvania Spelling-Book*, which taught reading by inculcating moral and religious lessons and was likely used in the education of both white and black pupils (Figure 4.15).<sup>70</sup> No further trace of Black Abraham or his school has been found. But it was after the Revolution, as Philadelphia’s free black population grew so dramatically, that leaders of the African American community became involved with educational ventures.

The two most prominent African Americans of that time were to a large extent self-taught. “The personal experience of men such as Richard Allen . . . and Absalom Jones taught them that literacy had been a cardinal element in getting freedom and in getting ahead.”<sup>71</sup> Absalom Jones (Figure 4.16) was born a slave in 1746 on a Delaware plantation. He related in an autobiographical sketch that

being very fond of learning, I was careful to save the pennies that were given me by the ladies and gentlemen from time to time. I soon bought myself a primer, and begged to be taught by any body that I found able and willing to give me the least instruction. Soon after this, I was able to purchase a spelling book; for as my money increased, I supplied myself with books, among others, a Testament.<sup>72</sup>

Jones moved to Philadelphia with his master in 1762 and purchased his freedom in 1784. Soon thereafter he was one of the leaders, with Richard Allen, in the creation of the Free African Society, and in 1794 became the first pastor of the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas. In 1766 his master allowed him to attend night school, where he learned “Addition, Troy weight, Subtraction, Apothecaries’ weight, Practical Multiplication, Practical Division, and Reduction.”<sup>73</sup> And in 1799 Jones received funds from the Abolition Society to open a preschool for young children in his home.<sup>74</sup>

Richard Allen was also born a slave, in 1760, to Philadelphian Benjamin Chew. During his youth, Allen and his family were sold to a man with property near Dover, Delaware. Allen, like Jones, acquired literacy in Delaware, and he landed in Philadelphia after traveling as an itinerant Methodist preacher. After founding the Free African Society with Jones in 1787, Allen later became the founder (and first bishop) of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (see Catalogue no. 131). Allen intuitively understood the importance of education to African Americans. His biographer notes that Allen “was in the front rank of those who were leading in the education of both children and adults. It was said that no man of his group was more interested in the education of his people.”<sup>75</sup> He challenged white society to “try the experiment [a very Franklinian notion!] of taking a few black children, and cultivate their minds with the same care, and let them have the same prospect in view, as to living in the world, as you would wish for your own children, [and] you would find upon the trial, they were not inferior in mental endowments.”<sup>76</sup> In 1795, in collaboration with the administrators of the Bray Associates’ school, Allen opened a day school for sixty children, and in 1804 he founded the Society of Free People of Colour for Promoting the Instruction and School Education of Children of African Descent. Both Jones and Allen knew from their own experience that blacks who received education could become accomplished members of the community.





Figure 4.14 (above). Robert Aitken, Waste Book, Robert Aitken Papers, 1771–1802, p. 267. The Library Company of Philadelphia.

The entry for July 25, 1775, records the sale of spelling books to Black Abraham.

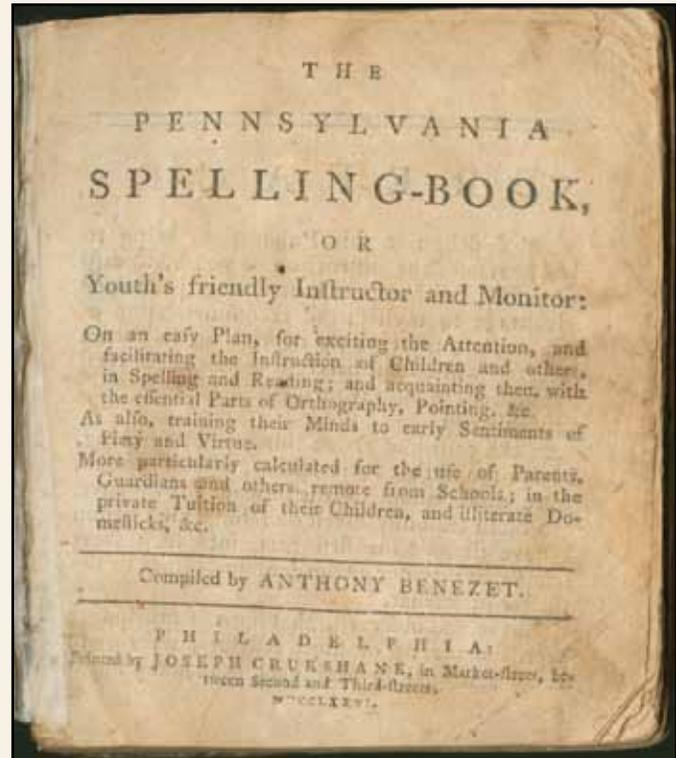


Figure 4.15 (upper right). Anthony Benezet, *The Pennsylvania Spelling-Book, or Youth's Friendly Instructor and Monitor* (Philadelphia: Printed by Joseph Cruikshank, 1776). The Library Company of Philadelphia.

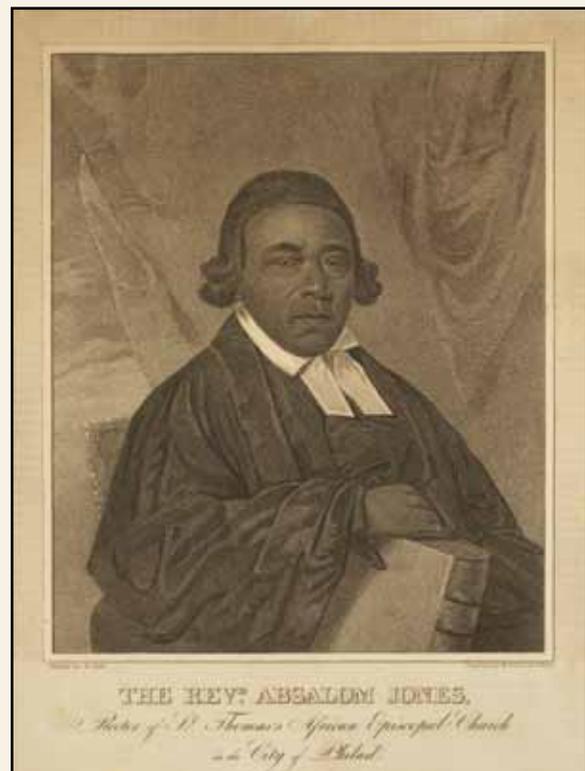


Figure 4.16 (lower right). W. R. Jones and J. Boyd, *The Revd. Absalom Jones, Rector of St. Thomas's African Episcopal Church in the City of Philad.*, engraving, n.d., after painting by Rembrandt Peale. Courtesy of Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Philadelphia, Pa.

The schools run by the Bray Associates, the Quakers, the PAS, and by blacks themselves (and by 1811 there were no fewer than eleven such schools for blacks in the city) represented the best hope for Philadelphia's African Americans of becoming literate prior to the availability of public education. "Public" education in the modern sense—that is, free, tax-supported education—began in Philadelphia in 1818. Prior to that time, indigent children could attend private schools and receive reimbursement from tax funds, but the list of such children for the years 1811–1816 includes no black children. When that arrangement was superseded by the new public school system beginning in 1818, once again black children were denied access. Although entitled to receive this education by the state laws authorizing public education for Pennsylvania's children, in reality they were excluded. The first segregated public school for black children finally opened in 1822, and the subsequent period of inadequate, segregated schools continued until the mid-twentieth-century era of mandatory integration.<sup>77</sup>



At the outset we noted that Franklin's plan for the Academy of Philadelphia did not allow for the education of blacks, and indeed the Academy (and later the College and University) did not provide such education for 150 years. How and when did the University of Pennsylvania come to terms with a century and a half of exclusion and begin to provide for the higher education of African Americans?<sup>78</sup> There is no indication in the historical papers of the University—in the Minutes of the Trustees, the office correspondence of the Provost, or the administrative records of the individual Schools—that there was a conscious policy of excluding black students.

The first African American students to enroll in classes at the University of Pennsylvania did so in 1879. James Brister, who earned the degree of doctor of dental surgery in 1881, was the first to graduate. Nathan Francis Mossell, who enrolled the same year as Brister, earned an M.D. in 1882. William Adger, the first African American to enroll in the College, earned a bachelor's degree in 1883. Aaron A. Mossell, younger brother of Nathan, enrolled in the Law School in 1886 and in 1888 became the first African American to graduate with a bachelor of laws degree. Aaron was the father of Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander who, in 1921, as a student at Penn, was the first African American woman in the nation to earn a Ph.D. in economics and in 1927 the first woman in Pennsylvania to earn the LL.B. (The Penn Alexander Partnership School in West Philadelphia is named for her.) Penn granted its first modern Ph.D. in 1889. Louis Baxter Moore was the first African American to earn that degree, receiving a doctorate in 1896 in classics.

William Pepper, Jr., M.D., who was provost from 1880 until 1894, has been credited as the person responsible for conferring degrees upon these pioneer African Americans. It is said that Pepper, who was a faculty member in the School of Medicine, mentored Nathan Mossell. The precise factors behind the opening of the University to these African Americans are simply not documented or have yet to be discovered. What we can know, however, is that Benjamin Franklin's early efforts to secure educational opportunities for Philadelphia's African Americans are now reflected in the University's commitment to providing the best possible education to black scholars from many states and nations.<sup>79</sup>



1. The author wishes to acknowledge the late J. A. Leo Lemay and thank Richard Newman and John Pollack for their incisive comments about this essay.
2. For estimates of Philadelphia's black population, see Susan E. Klepp, "Seasoning and Society: Racial Differences in Mortality in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 51, no. 3 (July 1994): 473–506, esp. 474–77, 495–96; Gary B. Nash and Billy G. Smith, "The Population of Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 99, no. 3 (1975): 362–68; Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720–1840* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 33–34, 36, 38; Sharon Salinger, "To Serve Well and Faithfully": *Labor and Indentured Servants in Pennsylvania, 1682–1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), table A3.
3. Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and Its Aftermath* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).
4. Ralph Sandiford, *A Brief Examination of the Practice of the Times* (Philadelphia, 1729); Benjamin Lay, *All Slave-Keepers That Keep the Innocent in Bondage, Apostates* (Philadelphia, 1737). Of the fifteen pamphlets that Franklin printed, according to their title pages, "for the author," his name appeared on ten. Of the five that did not carry his name, three were the Sandiford (two editions) and Lay tracts, one was an almanac for a rival almanac-maker, and one was an anonymous allegorical poem. Thus it could be reasonably inferred that Franklin did not wish to be publicly identified as the printer of the antislavery tracts (although his *Pennsylvania Gazette* did carry brief notices by the two authors that so identified him [December 22, 1730, August 17, 1738]). After Franklin had retired from his active printing career, the successor firm of Franklin and David Hall printed another Quaker antislavery tract, the second part of John Woolman's *Considerations on Keeping Negroes; Recommended to the Professors of Christianity, of Every Denomination* (Philadelphia, 1762).
5. See David Waldstreicher, *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin and Slavery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004); Emma Jones Lapsansky-Werner, "At the End, an Abolitionist?" in *Benjamin Franklin: In Search of a Better World*, ed. Page Talbott (New Haven, Conn. and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 273–96; and John C. Van Horne, "Collective Benevolence and the Common Good in Franklin's Philanthropy," in *Reappraising Benjamin Franklin: A Bicentennial Perspective*, ed. J. A. Leo Lemay (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1993), 425–40.
6. Robert T. Sidwell, "'An Odd Fish': Samuel Keimer and a Footnote to American Educational History," *History of Education Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1966): 16–30; Joshua Francis Fisher, "Some Account of the Early Poets and Poetry of Pennsylvania," *Memoirs of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania*, 2, part 2 (Philadelphia, 1830): 61–65; Stephen Bloore, "Samuel Keimer: A Footnote to the Life of Franklin," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 54, no. 3 (1930): 255–87; C. Lennart Carlson, "Samuel Keimer: A Study in the Transit of English Culture to Colonial Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 61, no. 4 (1937): 357–87.
7. [Jacob Taylor], *A Compleat Ephemeris for the Year of Christ 1726* ([Philadelphia]: Samuel Keimer, [1725]); *American Weekly Mercury*, January 18–25, 1726. Two years later Franklin printed Taylor's next (and authentic) almanac while working for Keimer. Jacob Taylor, *An Almanac for 1728* (Philadelphia: Samuel Keimer, [1727]).
8. In the July 3, 1729, issue of his newspaper, Keimer sought to explain why he had failed to print his paper the previous week. Beset by creditors and other spiteful people who wished him ill, he had committed one of the gravest sins a newspaper publisher could commit: he had missed a deadline. One part of his long-winded apologia reads: "Twould swell a Volume to a very considerable Bulk only to relate the various Scenes of Life and Circumstances the Publisher hereof has gone thro'; no History he has ever read, (keeping exactly to Truth) could ever come up to it; and as his whole Life has been truly an Original; so it has been long design'd to present the World with a true Copy thereof, for their Entertainment, under the Title of the *White Negro*." *Universal Instructor in All Arts and Sciences; and the Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 3, 1729.
9. Keimer moved to Barbados, where he published the *Barbadoes Gazette*. The issue of May 4, 1734, included his "Sorrowful Lamentation," a lengthy poem attacking his newfound set of enemies, in which he noted that he worked like a slave. Isaiah Thomas, *The History of Printing in America*, ed. Marcus McCorison from the 2nd edition (New York: Weathervane Books, 1970; orig. publ. 1874), 605–6.
10. Franklin, *Autobiography*, in *Writings*, ed. J. A. Leo Lemay (New York: Library of America, 1987), 1406.
11. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1419.
12. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1408.
13. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1407.
14. *Whitefield's Journals, To Which Is Prefixed His "Short Account" and "Further Account,"* ed. William Wale (London, 1905), 408; *Pennsylvania Gazette*, April 24, 1740; *American Weekly*

- Mercury*, April 17–24, 1740; David Cranz, *The Ancient and Modern History of the Brethren: Or, A Succinct Narrative of the Protestant Church of the United Brethren* (London, 1780), 258–59; John Gottlieb Heckewelder, *A Narrative of the Mission of the United Brethren Among the Delaware and Moberg Indians* (Philadelphia, 1820), 18.
15. *Pennsylvania Gazette*, November 27, December 4, 1740. The *American Weekly Mercury* also carried such solicitations, and its printer, Andrew Bradford, was likewise authorized to accept contributions. *American Weekly Mercury*, November 20–27, 1740, et seq.
  16. *Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 13, 1738.
  17. Seward’s account of the dispute is given in his *Journal of a Voyage from Savannah to Philadelphia, and from Philadelphia to England, M.DCC.XL* (London, 1740), 6–7, 21–22, 61. The dispute degenerated into a newspaper exchange between Franklin (writing as Obadiah Plainman) and Tom Trueman (who may have been Richard Peters), with Franklin mocking the members of the dancing assembly, who had styled themselves as the “better sort.” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 1, May 8, May 15, May 22, May 29, 1740; “Note on Closing the Concert Room,” in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Leonard W. Labaree et al. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1959–) (hereafter *Franklin Papers*), 2:257–59; J. A. Leo Lemay, *The Life of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 2: *Printer and Publisher, 1730–1747* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 427–35; William Pencak, “Beginning of a Beautiful Friendship: Benjamin Franklin, George Whitefield, the ‘Dancing School Blockheads,’ and a Defense of the ‘Meaner Sort,’” *Proteus* 19 (2002): 45–50 (photocopy at the Library Company of Philadelphia).
  18. *Pennsylvania Gazette*, August 3–10, 1738.
  19. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1313; *Franklin Papers*, 2:213, 214.
  20. (Charleston) *South-Carolina Gazette*, July 12–18, 1740. The story was picked up in Boston and reported in the *Boston Weekly News-Letter* on August 21, 1740. Whitefield recorded in his journal on May 11 that many Philadelphia blacks had begun to read. *Whitefield’s Journals*, 422.
  21. *A Collection of All the Laws of the Province of Pennsylvania: Now in Force* (Philadelphia, 1742), 335–40; 83–86. Both laws were repealed by the Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery of 1780.
  22. For biographies of Benezet, see George S. Brookes, *Friend Anthony Benezet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1937) and Maurice Jackson, *Let This Voice Be Heard: Anthony Benezet, Father of Atlantic Abolitionism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).
  23. In the earliest surviving letter between the two (from Benezet to Franklin on April 27, 1772, in response to a letter from Franklin), Benezet calls Franklin “a real friend and fellow traveler on a dangerous and heavy road” (*Franklin Papers*, 19:113).
  24. *Franklin Papers*, 2:128; 5:283; Minute Books of the Directors of the Library Company of Philadelphia, 1:144–45 (May 6, 1745).
  25. *Franklin Papers*, 5:283. Interestingly, at the same time Anthony Benezet began his teaching of blacks, his brother Daniel was advertising a slave for sale in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* (June 21, 1750).
  26. Nancy Slocum Hornick, “Anthony Benezet and the Africans’ School: Toward a Theory of Full Equality,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 99, no. 4 (1975): 399–421; *A Brief Sketch of the Schools for Black People, and Their Descendants, Established by the Religious Society of Friends* (Philadelphia, 1867).
  27. Rev. John Waring to Benjamin Franklin, January 24, 1757, in *Religious Philanthropy and Colonial Slavery: The American Correspondence of the Associates of Dr. Bray, 1717–1777*, ed. John C. Van Horne (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 121–23. The Welsh circulating schools were the work of Gruffydd (Griffith) Jones (1683–1761), a Carmarthenshire clergyman who in 1731 began establishing schools held from September to May, when pupils (both children and adults) were better able to attend classes than during the heavy farming season. The itinerant schoolmasters taught pupils to read the Welsh Bible and to learn the Anglican catechism. After three or four months the teachers would move on (“circulate”) to another location. Geraint H. Jenkins, *The Foundations of Modern Wales 1642–1780* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 370–81.
  28. Rev. William Sturgeon to Benjamin Franklin, August 22, 1757, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 125.
  29. Benjamin Franklin to Rev. John Waring, January 3, 1758, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 124.
  30. Minute Books of the Associates of Dr. Bray, 1:112, United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Archives, Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies at Rhodes House, University of Oxford.
  31. Minute Books of the Associates of Dr. Bray, 1:114.
  32. Rev. William Sturgeon to Rev. John Waring, November 9, 1758, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 135–36.

33. A first shipment of books, of which no details are known, arrived in October 1758. Books sent to Sturgeon in 1759 “for the Use of the Negro School opened there 1758” were “40 Childs first Book, 15 Church Catechism, 40 English Instructor, 30 Easy Method of Instructing Youth, 30 Church catechism with Texts of Scripture & Catechism paraphrased, 20 Friendly Admonition to the Drinkers of Brandy &c., 2 Preliminary Essays on the Exposition of the Church Catechism, 24 Christians Guide, 70 Sermons preached before the Associates & Trustees for Georgia &c. [total] 271.” Further shipments were sent later in 1759 (192 books), 1764 (130 books), and 1771 (40 copies of John Waring’s pamphlet *A Letter to an American Planter from His Friend in London*). “Catalog of Books for Home and Foreign Libraries, 1753–1817,” Manuscripts of the Associates of Dr. Bray, United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Archives, Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies at Rhodes House, University of Oxford.
34. Rev. William Sturgeon to Rev. John Waring, June 12, 1759, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 136–37.
35. “List of Negro Children” enrolled in the Philadelphia school from the time it opened in November 1758 until June 1759, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 162–63.
36. Deborah Franklin to Benjamin Franklin, August 9, 1759, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 137.
37. The list, dated November 20, 1762, was enclosed in a letter from Benjamin Franklin to Rev. John Waring, June 27, 1763. Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 198–200.
38. The men Franklin recommended were the Rev. Messrs. Samuel Johnson, Henry Barclay, and Samuel Auchmuty of New York; William Hunter and the Rev. Thomas Dawson of Williamsburg; and the Rev. Thomas Pollen of Newport. Minute Books of the Associates of Dr. Bray, 1:126, 129, 130–31. Franklin may have suggested these towns because they all had good communications with the metropolis, active Anglican churches, and black populations large enough to provide an adequate number of pupils.
39. Rev. John Waring to Rev. Thomas Dawson, February 29, 1760; Rev. Samuel Johnson to [Rev. John Waring], July 28, 1760; Rev. Thomas Pollen to [Rev. John Waring], August 12, 1760; William Hunter to Rev. John Waring, February 16, 1761; and Rev. Samuel Auchmuty to Rev. John Waring, April 4, 1761, all in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 144–48, 151–56.
40. Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 22–23. The Fredericksburg school closed in 1770 because few black children in the neighborhood could attend; the New York and Williamsburg schools closed late in 1774 following the deaths of their school mistresses; the Newport school was still open as late as April 1775.
41. See various letters to the Associates in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 162–63, 166–69, 188, 199–200, 266, 277–78, 304–5, 307, 318.
42. Francis Hopkinson and Edward Duffield to Rev. John Waring, November 20, 1769, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 288.
43. The first mistress was dismissed in May 1761 following complaints of her bad management. The next mistress was Elizabeth Harrison, wife of Richard Harrison, master of the charity school of the Academy of Philadelphia. From November 1764 to about May 1768 the mistress was Mrs. Ayres (or Ayers). She moved to the country and was replaced by Sarah Wilson. Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 161–62, 222, 270.
44. Benjamin Franklin to Francis Hopkinson, December 16, 1767, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 263–65.
45. Francis Hopkinson and Edward Duffield to Rev. John Waring, ca. March 1768, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 266.
46. Minute Books of the Associates of Dr. Bray, 1:245–46, 1:248.
47. Benjamin Franklin to Rev. Abbot Upcher, October 4, 1766, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 248–49.
48. Minute Books of the Associates of Dr. Bray, 1:260.
49. Minute Books of the Associates of Dr. Bray, 2:10 (June 2, 1768).
50. The British Associates were Rev. John Waring, Peter LeKeux, John Spiller, Samuel Waring, and Rev. Juckes Egerton. Minute Books of the Associates of Dr. Bray, 2:11–12 (June 16, 1768).
51. Francis Hopkinson and Edward Duffield to Rev. John Waring, June 30, 1769, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 286.
52. Francis Hopkinson and Edward Duffield to Rev. John Waring, July 3, 1773, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 313–14.
53. Francis Hopkinson and Edward Duffield to Rev. John Waring, May 3, 1774, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 317.

54. Edward Duffield to Rev. John Waring, May 20, 1774, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 318.
55. Rev. Thomas Coombe to Rev. John Waring, July 18, 1775, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 326.
56. Francis Hopkinson to Rev. Thomas Lyttleton, October 24, 1786, Manuscripts of the Associates of Dr. Bray.
57. The school reopened under the direction of Ruth Lewis, and by May 1788 there were eleven boys and twenty-one girls in attendance. Minute Books of the Associates of Dr. Bray, 2:152–53.
58. Originally printed as an appendix to William Clarke, *Observations on the Late and Present Conduct of the French* (Boston, 1755), in *Writings*, 367–74, quotation on 370 (emphasis in original).
59. Reprinted in Franklin’s pamphlet *The Interest of Great Britain Considered with Regard to Her Colonies and the Acquisitions of Canada and Guadaloupe* (Boston, 1760), quotation on 54, and later in his *Experiments and Observations on Electricity*, 4th ed. (London, 1769), quotation on 200.
60. Benjamin Franklin to Rev. John Waring, December 17, 1763, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 204.
61. Benjamin Franklin to the Marquis de Condorcet, March 20, 1774, in *Franklin Papers*, 21:151.
62. Anthony Benezet, *A Short Account of That Part of Africa Inhabited by the Negroes* (Philadelphia, 1762), 8. Benezet made the same point in *A Caution and Warning to Great Britain and Her Colonies, in a Short Representation of the Calamitous State of the Enslaved Negroes in the British Dominions* (Philadelphia, 1766), 12. And in 1781 Benezet wrote: “[Benezet] can with Truth and Sincerity declare, that he has found amongst [blacks] as great variety of Talents, equally capable of improvement, as amongst a like number of Whites; and he is bold to assert, that the notion entertained by some, that the Blacks are inferior to the Whites in their capacities, is a vulgar prejudice, founded on the Pride or Ignorance of their lordly Masters, who have kept their Slaves at such a distance, as to be unable to form a right judgment of them” (*Short Observations on Slavery Introductory to Some Extracts from the Writing of the Abbe Raynal, on That Important Subject* [Philadelphia, 1781], 11–12). A similar sentiment was expressed by “A Friend to the Oppressed” in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* of January 30, 1772: “[Slaves] Education is generally very low and illiterate . . . most of those, who have been tried with Freedom, are such as have begun to feel the Decline of Nature: I would therefore advise those in Possession of young Negroes, to give them an Education suitable for a rational Being; learn them to read and write, which will qualify them for Business; give them the Privilege of reading the Scriptures, and other History, and then, I doubt not, but they would devote their Leisure Hours in Search of useful Knowledge, which, for Want of such Education, are employed in Actions destructive to their Morals.”
63. *Plan for Improving the Condition of the Free Blacks; An Address to the Public* (Philadelphia, 1789), in *Writings*, 1154–57. For a general treatment of the issue of educability of blacks, see Charles H. Lyons, *To Wash an Aethiop White: British Ideas about Black African Educability, 1530–1960* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1975), chap. 2 (“Endued with Equal Faculties” or “Lusus Naturae?”: Eighteenth-Century Attitudes).
64. Petition of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society to the Senate and the House of Representatives, February 3, 1790, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, Digital Edition (<http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/>).
65. Minute Books of the Associates of Dr. Bray, 2:235–37 (January 7, 1796).
66. Minute Books of the Associates of Dr. Bray, 2:248–49 (February 6, 1797); 2:351.
67. *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Fourth Convention of Delegates from the Abolition Societies Established in Different Parts of the United States, Assembled at Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1797), 31–34. Harris taught at the school until her death in 1797. Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 204.
68. *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Fourth Convention*, 31–34; Edward Raymond Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania: Slavery, Servitude, Freedom, 1639–1861* (Washington, D.C., 1911), 128–29.
69. Robert Aitken Waste Book, entry for July 25, 1775, 267, Library Company of Philadelphia, cited in Edwin Wolf 2nd, *The Book Culture of a Colonial American City: Philadelphia Books, Bookmen, and Booksellers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 62.
70. Anthony Benezet, *The Pennsylvania Spelling-Book, or Youth’s Friendly Instructor and Monitor* (Philadelphia, 1776).
71. Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 203.
72. “Sketch of the Rev. Absalom Jones,” in *Annals of the First African Church, in the United States of America, Now Stiled The African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1862), 118–22 (quote on 119–20).

73. "Sketch of the Rev. Absalom Jones," 120.
74. Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 204.
75. Charles H. Wesley, *Richard Allen: Apostle of Freedom* (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1935), 92.
76. Richard Allen, "Address to Those Who Keep Slaves, and Approve the Practice," appended to Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People, During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia, in the year 1793: And a Refutation of Some Censures, Thrown upon Them in Some Late Publications* (Philadelphia, 1794), 24.
77. Harry C. Silcox, "Delay and Neglect: Negro Public Education in Antebellum Philadelphia, 1800–1860," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 97, no. 4 (1973): 444–64.
78. The information in this section was kindly provided by Mark Frazier Lloyd, Archivist of the University, to whom I am greatly indebted.
79. Today, African Americans comprise just over 6 percent of the undergraduate student body and just under 6 percent of the overall university enrollment.