

Doctor Benjamin Franklin's Dream America

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EQUUS

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Cover image: John Turnball's "Declaration of Independence" Target List.

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**DOCTOR BENJAMIN FRANKLIN'S
DREAM AMERICA**

for Kate

th@ all r cre8d =; th@
they r endowd by their
cre8or with certn inalien-
able rights; th@ among
these r life, librtty and the
purst of happines

– **Thomas Jefferson**

John Morton :: April 1 st 1777	Francis Lightfoot Lee :: January 11 th 1797
Button Gwinnett :: May 19 th 1777	Carter Braxton :: October 10 th 1779
Philip Livingston :: June 12 th 1778	Oliver Walcott :: December 1 st 1797
John Hart :: May 11 th 1779	Lewis Morris :: January 22 nd 1798
George Ross :: July 14 th 1779	James Wilson :: August 28 th 1798
Joseph Hewes :: November 10 th 1779	George Read :: September 21 st 1798
George Taylor :: February 23 rd 1781	William Paca :: October 23 rd 1799
Richard Stockton :: February 28 th 1781	Edward Rutledge :: January 23 rd 1800
Caesar Rodney :: June 29 th 1784	Matthew Thornton :: June 24 th 1803
Stephen Hopkins :: July 13 th 1785	Samuel Adams :: October 2 nd 1803
William Whipple :: November 28 th 1785	Francis Lewis :: December 21 st 1803
Arthur Middleton :: January 1 st 1787	George Walton :: February 2 nd 1804
Thomas Stone :: October 1 st 1787	Robert Morris :: May 9 th 1806
John Penn :: September 14 th 1788	George Wythe :: June 8 th 1806
Thomas Nelson Jr. :: January 4 th 1789	James Smith :: July 11 th 1806
Benjamin Franklin :: April 17 th 1790	Thomas Heyward Jr. :: March 6 th 1809
William Hooper :: October 14 th 1790	Samuel Chase :: June 11 th 1811
Lyman Hall :: October 19 th 1790	William Williams :: August 2 nd 1811
Benjamin Harrison :: April 24 th 1791	George Clymer :: January 23 rd 1813
Francis Hopkinson :: April 9 th 1791	Benjamin Rush :: May 19 th 1813
Roger Sherman :: July 23 rd 1793	Robert Treat Paine :: May 11 th 1814
John Hancock :: October 8 th 1793	Elbridge Gerry :: November 23 rd 1814
Richard Henry Lee :: June 19 th 1794	Thomas McKean :: June 24 th 1817
Abraham Clark :: September 15 th 1794	William Ellery :: February 15 th 1820
John Witherspoon :: November 15 th 1794	William Floyd :: August 4 th 1821
Thomas Lynch :: February 13 th 1795	Thomas Jefferson :: July 4 th 1826
Josiah Bartlett :: May 19 th 1795	John Adams :: July 4 th 1826
Samuel Huntington :: January 5 th 1796	Charles Carroll :: November 14 th 1832

Fifty-six men signed *The Declaration of Independence*.
This is the story of their deaths.

Part 1 :: The Death

JOHN MORTON :: APRIL 1ST 1777

Doc Josiah Bartlett, Roger Sherman, Thomas M’Kean and Doctor Benjamin Rush all got the same email. Orders from Congress to form another *unofficial* little committee. The assignment: Do whatever you have to do to keep John Morton alive and functioning until the Articles of Confederation have been uploaded.

Right now, their patient is struggling through another fit of blood-speckled coughing. Fresh droplets make new stellar patterns across the white pillowcases. A whole night sky’s worth of faded constellations. One hand on his laptop, the other up to ward the men from the bed, “To come too close is to invite death, to tempt it with fresh consumables.” He coughs a few light coughs until the coughs become chuckles. Then back into his laptop, the glowing crater bashed into the fabric of the bed quilts. His fingers trigger key patterns. Screen light drones the jagged caverns of his face. The room, hung thick with the candle stink of overcooked beef, hints a gray and forgettable day in lace curtains all pulled closed.

No one knows exactly what it is that’s killing John Morton. Both Rush and Doc Bartlett are confident it can’t be contagious, but they stick to the walls all the same. Sherm and M’Kean follow their lead. These are men who know which chances are worth taking. Been taking some big ones lately. Not coming up very good either. New York rests in the King’s hands, General Washington and the Continental Army lapping wounds in winter quarters. It’s been almost a full year since the Declaration was uploaded, three or four or five or twenty-three years of war, depending on which representative of which state you follow. This Revolution, after all that has transpired, threatens to become no more than collected, distilled and then suppressed ideals, as temporary as a single human generation.

John Morton’s typing grinds to a halt. He just sits there. There’s a moment of distinct possibility that he has passed, dead and off for the next land beyond. But then Morton’s eyes shift. He finds the men in the room with him. “I am finished.” He forces a swallow, a long inhale. Eyes wearily scan browser windows unpacked and gaping all across his screen. “Have to update

my status,” and he reads aloud the words he’s just then typing: “The Articles of Confederation are done.”

Morton stares into the letters, the meaning their crooked shapes make in the string. Already this latest status update pulses down the scrolls of countless patriots, just like every thought that’s entered his mind these last five years. As soon as he’d committed to the revolt, John Morton sliced his brain open and laid it bare for the entire social network to peruse. Every thought, every inclination, reaction or bloviation, public in the time it takes to type 140 characters or less.

Thomas M’Kean takes a step away from the wall in order to show everyone how one makes a fist from a regular old hand. Though still the good reluctant soldier, M’Kean’s lately been flashing glimpses of that general they all know is lurking in there. “The Articles,” he says. “Finally, we can pull the states together and start putting up a fight!”

A gesture from Rush to indicate he’s not so sure, but that’s as far as he’ll take it. Sometimes in these settings he has a hard time speaking up. Despite the status afforded him by his deep involvement in the politics and administration of the Revolution, Ben Rush knows he’s not really a politician or an administrator – not truly an intellectual at all – but just a country sawbones glorified by the natural workings of republicanism. Still, though, he makes a good enough gesture toward enlightenment science.

But Doc Bartlett? Doc is the true product. No gestures involved. Cured himself of a mysterious fever when he was a teen and there was no looking back. Always working on learning some dead language, always a few science experiments running in that lab under his New Hampshire homestead. His latest gig is cutting up dead bodies and looking inside. Right now he’s shaking his head, singing a little ditty about The Articles that goes, “*Have to get them ratified first.*”

“Been coughing three days straight.” John Morton types, reads aloud, “I’ve been coughing three days straight.” He types, scans his status, types, scans his status.

Through this all, Roger Sherman has looked – as always – softly puritanical, like a throwback to some forgotten age without