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Albuquerque Journal, N.M.

Ken Burns' documentary examines the life of Benjamin Franklin




Adrian Gomez, Albuquerque Journal, N.M.

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Burns' latest project set to air is "Benjamin Franklin."

"Franklin is without a doubt, the greatest American personality of the 18th century," Burns says. "His life spanned most of the 18th century and he is the example of upward mobility. He started with nothing and became someone who touched every facet of the world."

The two-part series will air at 7 p.m. Monday, April 4, and Tuesday, April 5, on New Mexico PBS, channel 5.1.

Burns and his crew worked on the project for more than five years.

Franklin was a prolific writer and publisher, a groundbreaking scientist and inventor, a world-renowned diplomat and a signer of both the Declaration of Independence and the U.S.

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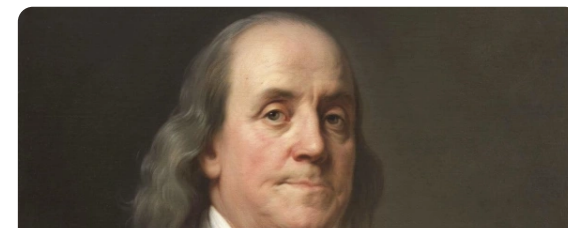


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his 84 years spanned nearly the entirety of the 18th century, an epoch of revolutionary change in science, technology, literature, politics and government — change that Franklin himself helped to advance.

He launched the first public library in America, organized a volunteer fire company, and founded an academy that eventually became the University of Pennsylvania.

His annual publication, "Poor Richard's Almanack," set a model for future humorists such as Mark Twain and contained maxims that are still part of our shared lexicon. And his famous experiments with electricity led to one of his most important inventions — the lightning rod.

While Franklin was also full of contradictions.

Critically, especially for a man so associated with independence and individual liberty, Franklin



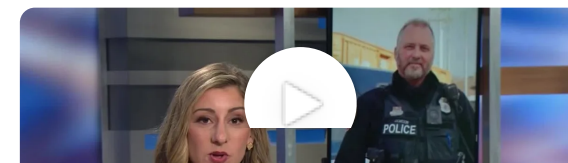
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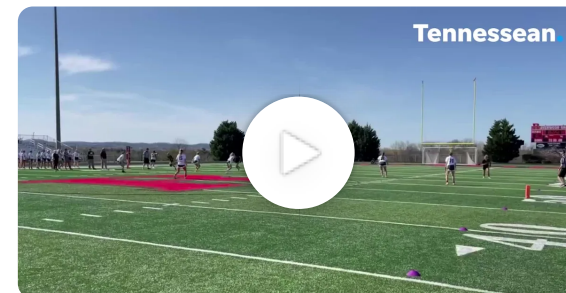
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Franklin's newspaper, The Pennsylvania Gazette, also advertised the sale of enslaved people and published notices of runaways. And while he publicly denounced white settlers who indiscriminately killed Indigenous people, he also championed the expansion of white settlements on to Indigenous lands.

"Benjamin Franklin was a fascinating and complicated individual who helped shape our contemporary world," Burns says. "If we see him for more than his long list of accomplishments, we recognize an imperfect man challenging himself and his contemporaries as he tries to understand and improve the world around him. One of the best and most prolific writers of the 18th century, Franklin both embodies and documents the dynamic social, scientific and political changes of



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ounding and the racial divisions that continue to impact our country today."

Burns says the projects always have challenges.

"Taking on Franklin, there are no photographs," he says. "We traveled around the Eastern seaport and filmed. We went to London and we found a working printing press of the time. It's been a journey and the four hours is a compelling one."

The actor Mandy Patinkin provides the voice of Franklin. Burns called Patinkin's reading "distinctive and transcendent," noting that Patinkin's voice and timing seem to capture Franklin perfectly, finding just the right sense of humor and curiosity for life that Franklin presented in his many writings. Peter Coyote narrates the film.

"Every American learns about Benjamin Franklin in grade school, but often it ends there," says David

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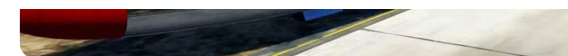
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myths that have followed him through time.

"His biography is uniquely primed to inform us of our history. His 70 years before signing the Declaration of Independence tell us about America before the United States, and in his last 15 years, he was central to bringing the United States into being."

On TV

"Benjamin Franklin," a two-part series from Ken Burns, will air at 7 p.m. Monday, April 4, and Tuesday, April 5, on New Mexico PBS, channel 5.1.



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