

Shine Bright LLCE Cycle Terminal

File 15 United Selves of America

Selfie culture p. 172

Journalist: And joining us now from Salford in the United Kingdom is author and journalist Will Storr. You can find an excerpt of his new book, *Selfie: How We Became So Self-Obsessed and What It Is Doing to Us*, at our website at onpointradio.org.

So how does the digital age feed and amplify this drive for perfectionism, which is ultimately sort of self-destructive, as you argue?

Will Storr: Well, yeah, so there's a number of different, kind of, routes into it, really, and I think that one of the, kind of, fundamental things that you need to know about how the brain kind of works, how we're doing in our social world — Like, you know, we're a hypersocial species, so we are obsessed with, kind of, our social standing. Our brains are very concerned about how we measure up compared to other people. And that's what we do: we compare ourselves to the people around us. And of course, on social media, one of the things that we do, psychologists call it perfectionist presentation: we present our, the most perfect moments from our perfect lives on social media. And kind of the toxic thing about this is that even if we know consciously that, oh, that's just someone putting their perfect holiday day or their perfect breakfast on Instagram... We know that consciously, but unconsciously it still matters. And we're also, you know, back in the day, there was an understanding that Hollywood celebrities were Hollywood celebrities, they were like a different breed of human to the rest of us... But, kind of, post-reality TV, post-kind of Kardashians on Instagram... We're flicking through Instagram, and there's Jennifer Lawrence and there's Kim Kardashian, oh, and look, and there's me in my swimming costume... So, we constantly, we constantly, there's this pressure, like... People feel like they have to look and behave like celebrities these days.

Meet Benjamin Franklin p. 174

Meet Dr. Benjamin Franklin, our most accomplished, most accessible, and most paradoxical Founding Father. He was the entire package: scientist, inventor, journalist, businessman, and statesman.

Interviewee 1: I became convinced that Benjamin Franklin was *the* great American genius.

His achievements were unparalleled. He was the driving force behind America's first public lending library, first non-religious college, and first national newspaper. As a diplomat, he helped make American independence a reality.

Interviewee 2: Next to George Washington, Benjamin Franklin is probably the most indispensable person when it comes to winning the Revolution.

And in matters of science, he was nothing less than the greatest thinker of his time.

Interviewee 3: "We can certainly compare Franklin's work with electricity with the Wright Brothers' work with aviation.

For someone who has been a national icon for well over two hundred years, Benjamin Franklin remains surprisingly enigmatic. His long public life and prolific writings present us with a maze of different personas. At times, Franklin is diplomatic; at others, skeptical; he can be flirtatious, wary, conciliatory, witty, or maddeningly patient. He is rarely stubborn, usually wise, often candid, and, whenever necessary, artfully evasive. The doorway into this hall of mirrors is Franklin's autobiography, which he began writing at the age of sixty-five.

Interviewee 4: The autobiography tells us not who Franklin was, which is how many people have read it, but how Franklin saw himself, and more importantly, how he wished others to see him.

Interviewee 2: Benjamin Franklin was the first great publicist and image-maker in America, and the greatest image he created was of himself.

Interviewee 5: And I think that Franklin is a master of masks. Franklin understood that American life is one great masquerade ball.

The self-made man p. 175

Nobody in American history has a better claim to the title of self-made man than Frederick Douglass, who escaped from slavery to become one of the nation's greatest anti-slavery activists, and then a world-renowned author and orator, diplomat and public intellectual.

As a professional lecturer, Douglass made his living travelling and giving speeches, of which his most popular and most famous was entitled "Self-made Men". And I'm sure you all read it in the previous issue of *The Objective Standard*. The lecture celebrated heroic figures like Abraham Lincoln, who rose from obscurity through their own hard toil, as opposed to being fortunate enough to be born into wealth and fame. Douglass referred to, in his lecture, to engineers, and poets and political revolutionaries and industrialists who, "If they have climbed high, have built their own ladders". But Douglass's lecture was not just a series of biographies and famous rags-to-riches stories. Instead, it focuses on what he called "the philosophy of the self-made man". What are the qualities and virtues that make for the self-made man, and what does this idea have to teach us about society in general?

The thesis of the Self-made Men lecture was that the people that we view as self-made success stories have accomplished that status not through luck or accident or fate, but through, in his words, "Work! Work!! Work!!! Work!!!!". He writes this - the first "work" appears with one exclamation point; the second with two exclamation points; the third with three exclamation points and the fourth with four exclamation points - all in all caps - so he really meant it! Determined perseverance and uncomplaining will to shoulder hard responsibility and a commitment to do one's best were the keys.

A unique genre p. 176

[Opening text] For three days, beginning October 30, 2015, the descendants of the authors of slave narratives gather at the University at Buffalo for an unprecedented workshop exploring participants' ancestral roots through discussion, reflections and writing.

Kari Winter: The genre of American slave narratives is unique in world history. Slavery has been practiced throughout history, but it is only in 18th and 19th century [sic] with American slaves writing their own stories that the world got a wealth of literature produced by former slaves describing their experience from their points of view. It is unprecedented, as far as I know, to ever have a gathering of such illustrious descendants of authors of slave narratives in one place. One of my goals for the workshop is for it to help reconnect the sense of the present to the past. One of the processes of enslaving people was to make them genealogical isolates, which meant to sever them from their descendants, to deny them the possibility of marriage, and to sever them from their children so they had no rights or claims over their own children. Breaking those bonds of kinship is a profound form of violence to human beings. It's my belief that part of the work of history is to restore that severed connection between generations, that the violence that happens when you sever one generation from the other is profound and it reverberates through many generations. To be able to go back and restore the connections is a very empowering thing, and a very healing thing.