

he is known today as the “Father of American Psychiatry.” He believed that people suffering from mental illness were sick rather than crazy. He treated them with care and kindness. He refused to lock them away from the public eye, which was an accepted treatment in the 1700s. He took a stand against the inhumane treatment of criminals, too.

Like many men of his time, Rush sought ways to make the world a better place. He believed that education and good citizenship went hand in hand. He believed that a strong nation educated its people, and he supported free education for everyone, including women.

Rush was an early *abolitionist*. In the 1770s, he wrote a pamphlet that condemned the institution of slavery. In 1787, he became an active member of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society. He supported the city’s African American community in its efforts to form its own church.

Some of Rush’s ideas and actions were controversial. He anonymously criticized General George Washington’s leadership during the Revolutionary War (1775–1783). He opposed slavery, but he owned a slave. He was an educated doctor determined to eliminate disease, but he used *bloodletting* and *purging* to treat his patients. The processes actually made patients weaker and caused them to faint and sometimes die. Rush continued bloodletting even when other physicians insisted that it was harmful.

So there you have it. Valued friend. Opinionated patriot. Compassionate advocate for the less fortunate. Uncompromising doctor. Progressive thinker. All these descriptions fit the complex man that was Dr. Benjamin Rush. For the most part, though, his intentions were good. He wanted to have a positive impact on the remarkable time in which he lived. +

An abolitionist is a person who supports the end of slavery.

*Bloodletting* is the practice of removing large amounts of blood as treatment for a sick person.

*Purging* is the practice of inducing the evacuation or clearing of the bowels.



**Dr. Benjamin Rush (ABOVE)** lived in Philadelphia (BELOW) in the 1700s, which allowed him to participate meaningfully in the nation’s early history.

