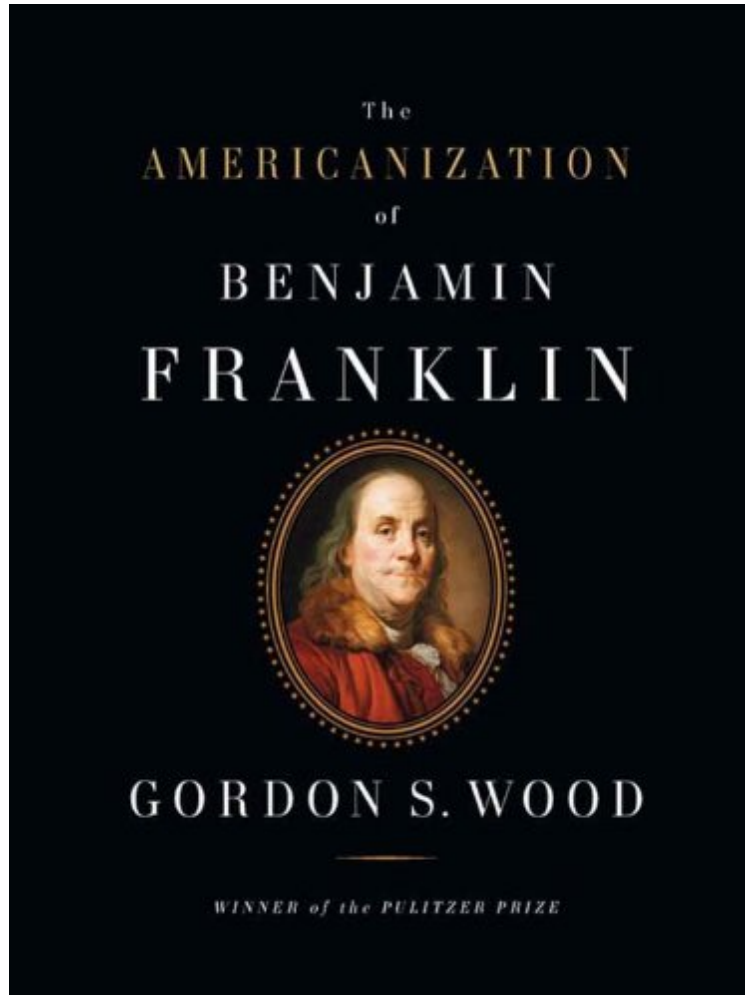


[Free download] The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin

## The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin

Von Gordon S. Wood

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**Von Gordon S. Wood : The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin:

KundenrezensionenHilfreichste Kundenrezensionen0 von 0 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. Gordon Wood recovers the historic Benjamin Franklin,Von Lawrance Bernabo"The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin" is not a traditional biography of the Founding Father's remarkable life but a more selective study of specific aspects of his life as they relate to his enduring popular image. Wood's purpose is to recover the historic Franklin who has been replaced my a series of images and representations over the past two hundred years as he came to be known as "the first American."The grand irony is that before he personified being "American" to all of Western civilization, Franklin was the most British of the colonists. Wood argues that Franklin's emotional commitment to the vision of a pan-British world was rivaled only by that of William Pitt the Elder. That is important for understanding how a man who would

sign his name to the Declaration of Independence was, two decades earlier, beseeching the King of England to make Pennsylvania a Crown colony. It was not just because of antipathy for the Penn family, but because Franklin believed whole-heartedly in the beneficence of the British monarchy. However, when it became clear that he was not going to be considered truly British--and if Dr. Franklin could not be accorded that right then clearly no Colonial ever would--that Franklin embraced the idea of being something else. In that regard he was similar to George Washington, whose chief ambition was to be a serving British officer and who was treated with even greater disdain by those he aspired to be like. Wood makes his case by tracing Franklin's evolution through five key stages. We begin with his early ambition of "Becoming a Gentleman," which shows that Franklin raised above his humble beginnings and trade as a printer not only through his own enterprise but through the patronage of wealthy and influential men, challenging the purity of his rags to riches story. "Becoming a British Imperialist" covers how Franklin the gentleman had time to become the scientist who would be known throughout the Empire and the continent as Dr. Franklin. These first two chapters are the most interesting because they represent the early Franklin who has been obscured by the Franklin the Founding Father. That is the Franklin developed in the last three chapters. "Becoming a Patriot" begins with the Stamp Act and Franklin's reaction to it, tracing the series of events that forced him to the cause of revolution after a last attempt to save the Empire in which he believed. By the time Franklin returns to the United States and begins the stage of "Becoming a Diplomat," he has become too American in England and too English in America, so it is not surprising that it is the French for whom he becomes "the symbolic American." "Becoming an American," Wood's final chapter, covers Franklin's return to America, and his death. What followed was not only his apotheosis, as the greatest American president never to be president to use one common phrase, but also the deification of Franklin as the self-made businessman. In the end Wood wants to comment on the Myth of American Nationhood, and my one disappointment in the book is that he does not spend more time on the changes in Franklin's popular image following his death; I was expecting there to be an entire chapter devoted to that as well, although Wood does point out the bits and pieces of key elements as he goes along. Gordon Wood is a Professor of History at Brown University and one of the foremost national scholars on the American Revolution. In 1991 his book, "The Radicalism of the American Revolution," won the Pulitzer Prize and is considered one of the definitive works on the social, political, and economic consequences of the Revolutionary War. The book essentially argues how the American Revolution transformed a society that was essentially feudal (think about it) into a democratic society that actually confounded and disappointed the Founding Fathers. Of course what most Americans know about Gordon Wood is that he has written about the pre-Revolutionary utopia and the capital forming effects of military mobilization and that Vickers believes that Wood drastically underestimates the impact of social distinctions predicated upon wealth, especially inherited wealth ("Work in Essex County", page 98, right?). "The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin" is the sort of history case study of which I am most interested at this point. I already know the basic biography of Franklin and in recent years the only new bit that I have really picked up was that both he and Jefferson spoke atrocious French and that Franklin was apparently unaware of it (or used it to his advantage in his "American" persona while in Paris). Wood's starting point is actually today, the image of Franklin in the popular mind, and then going back and showing not only how this image came to be but also how it diverges from the historical record. This image of Franklin is not "true," but it is "real," and Wood's volume does not expose its falsity as much as it explains why in looking backwards different generations of Americans have seen Franklin through the eyes of their own times. Most of the illustrations in the volume consist of portraits of Franklin, done after he became a gentleman, and which provide visual evidence of his transformations; certainly there are few figures in American history whose lives are so aptly captured in such a fashion. In reminding us that Franklin was not simply a British colonist but also a most loyal subject to the crown who saw in the American colonies the potential for expanding the greatness and glory of the British empire, Wood emphasizes the radical transformation that turned Franklin into a zealous patriot. It is hard for us to think of Franklin as anything other than an American, but there is great value in remembering the times in which they both lived and him within that context as well as appreciating his legacy today.

**Kurzbeschreibung** From the most respected chronicler of the early days of the Republic and winner of both the Pulitzer and Bancroft prizes comes a landmark work that rescues Benjamin Franklin from a mythology that has blinded generations of Americans to the man he really was and makes sense of aspects of his life and career that would have otherwise remained mysterious. In place of the genial polymath, self-improver, and quintessential American, Gordon S. Wood reveals a figure much more ambiguous and complex and much more interesting. Charting the passage of Franklin's life and reputation from relative popular indifference (his death, while the occasion for mass mourning in France, was widely ignored in America) to posthumous glory, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* sheds invaluable light on the emergence of our country's idea of itself. From Publishers Weekly Eminent revolutionary historian Wood illuminates the life and times of perhaps our nation's most symbolic yet enigmatic forefather. Born of modest roots, Benjamin Franklin displayed from an early age a sharp mind and a literary gift, which served him as he

went on to amass a small fortune, mostly as a printer, and to emerge as a civic leader. Wood, who won a Pulitzer Prize in 1993 for *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, shows how Franklin's skills and charm enabled him to complete the remarkable transition from humble beginnings to gentlemanly status, occupying his later years with scientific experiments, philosophy and statesmanship. Wood also introduces us to Franklin the loyal British subject, who could scarcely conceive of a colonial government independent of the British, yet, in 1776, at the age of 70, came to play a key role in the Revolution. He secured the help of the French, who in turn helped ultimately to define Franklin as the "symbolic American." This is not a comprehensive biography. Instead, Wood's purpose is to supplant our common knowledge of Franklin as the iconic, folksy author of *Poor Richard's Almanac* with a different, richer portrait, a look at how a man "not even destined to be an American" became, paradoxically, the "symbol of America." What emerges is a fascinating portrait of Franklin, not only as a forefather but as a man. Illus. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From *Booklist* Of all of our Founding Fathers, Franklin seems the most accessible. His portraits suggest an elderly, benign man; his writings are pithy, folksy, and they dispense common sense that supposedly reflects the emerging American character. Of course, the real Franklin was a more complicated and interesting figure. Professor Wood won the Pulitzer prize for *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (1992). As revealed here, Franklin was an intensely ambitious young man, determined to rise above his humble origins. He was attracted to the trappings of British aristocracy. In a sense, he was the least American of the founders, since he spent most of the last three decades of his life in Britain and France. As Wood convincingly asserts, Franklin's conversion to American patriot was an evolutionary process; for most of his public life, he was a staunch supporter of the British empire. Once he committed to the patriot cause, though, he did so with considerable personal pain and loss. This superbly written work provides a fresh perspective on a justly admired but enigmatic figure. Jay Freeman Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved