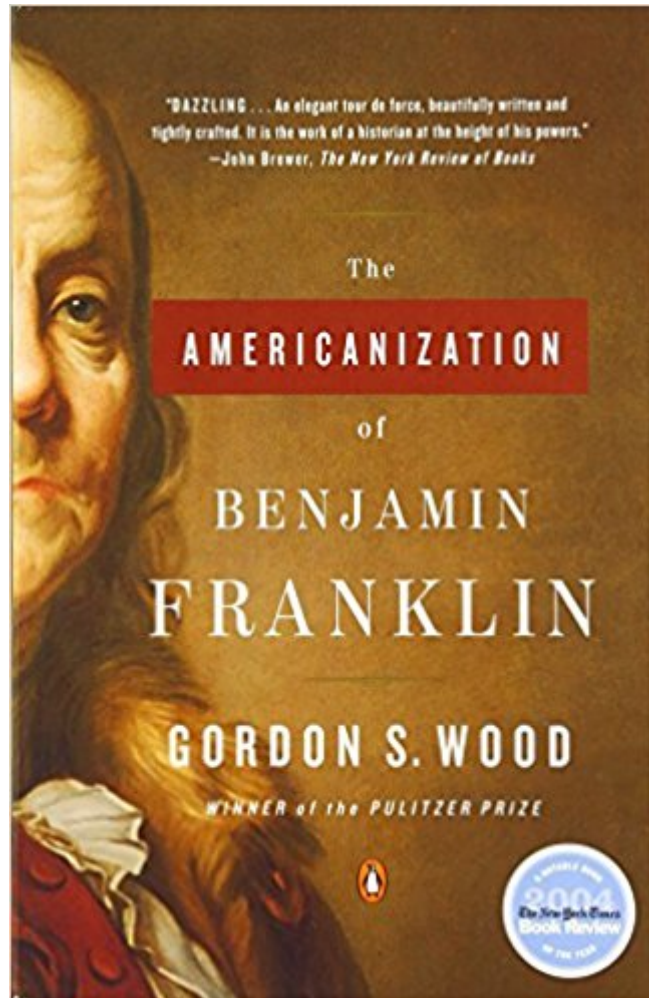




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# The Americanization Of Benjamin Franklin



## Synopsis

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.

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## Customer Reviews

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. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Adult/High School - This fascinating account provides a vivid picture of an extraordinary man adapting to changing times. Franklin was an intensely loyal British subject who looked forward to the time when he would take an active role in Britain's imperial schemes. His unshaken faith that the monarchy would inevitably behave fairly to the colonists blinded him to the growth of an increasingly powerful anti-British sentiment. Wood shows how Franklin was often completely out of touch with public opinion. At his death, America's brief, perfunctory eulogies sharply contrasted with the national mourning for him in France. In the 19th century, Franklin was rediscovered as the homespun philosopher, a simple man most noteworthy for his emphasis on self-improvement and industry. He was far more, as readers will discover. Black-and-white illustrations are included. - Kathy Tewell, Chantilly Regional Library, VA Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Benjamin Franklin (1706-90) is the founding father more Americans admire than any other. However, it is also true that Franklin the man is little understood. This situation is remedied in this excellent short work by Dr. Gordon S. Wood who is America's foremost historian of the colonial, revolutionary and early republican period of our nation's history. Wood begins by stating that Franklin has come to symbolize the Horatio Alger, pull yourself up by the bootstraps lad who through hard work, clean living, frugality and dedication makes a success of himself. Franklin was a hard worker who was born the 15th of 17 children to a Boston soapmaker in 1706. He left Boston for Philadelphia at the age of 17. In the City of Brotherly Love he became a famous printer and newspaper editor. He was also a tireless social reformer organizing the local militia, volunteer fire department, free public library, creating the idea of matching funds and founding the American Phil.

Society. Franklin also served as Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Pa. winning the attention of wealthy patrons who aided him in his career climb to the top. Franklin retired in his late 40s. He spent much of his life in London and Paris. Until the 1770's when he opposed the Stamp Act he was pro-British calling for colonial obedience to the crown. He served as the Royal assistant postmaster for the entire American colonies but was fired in 1774 following his support of the American rebellion. Franklin was an expert on electricity who developed the lightening rod and also invented bifocal glasses and the famous Franklin stove. He was an avid swimmer enjoying long walks and sitting with friends in the "Juno society" discussing intellectual and community concerns. BF was the printer for several colonial legislative bodies and served with success in the Penn. government. Following the American Revolution he served three terms as President of Pennsylvania. Though only attending school for two years he was awarded honorary doctorates by Yale and Oxford among other institutions of higher learning. He was our first ambassador to France and the greatest diplomat in American history. Due to BF's efforts the French government gave support to the fledgling United States in commercial treaties and as an ally against England in the American Revolution. Franklin was a genius, a wit and and the most famous, learned and traveled American citizen of the eighteenth century. Wood ranks him second only to George Washington in the pantheon of Revolutionary War heroes. Franklin was not cute and cuddly but a pragmatist with an astute mind who understood human nature. He spoke several languages and read widely in many fields. He was a Deist who doubted the deity of Christ though he thought religion good for the moral uplift of the public. His family life was complicated. He lived with Deborah Read his common law wife who gave him a son Franky who died young and a daughter Sally. He was not close to her and lived abroad for several years while she kept house in Philadelphia. His illegitimate son William by an unknown paramour was a Loyalist who was imprisoned by the Americans. He had been the Royal Governor of New Jersey. BF and William had their love aborted over their political disagreements. BF was close to Temple Franklin the son of William. Franklin was ambitious and could be vain. He was not happy with the way he was treated by Congress following the Revolution claiming he needed reimbursement for his time on diplomatic work abroad in France. He did not like puritanical John Adams. Some in America thought he was too pro-British but he was an arch patriot of the new American republic. Franklin was a Renaissance man and a great American statesman, inventor, publisher and printer. Gordon Wood's short book was named a Notable Book in 2004 by the New York Review of Books. It is the best book I have read on Franklin and deserves to be on your bookshelf. A great book about a great American! Bravo Ben!

The story most of us learned in school was that Franklin was a kind, jovial fellow, a polymath, an inventor, a scientist, a politician, all of which is true. He was also presented as the quintessential new American man, who was born in this country and felt a loyalty to the new country, and a spirit of rebelliousness where Mother England was concerned. It's a great story, but it's far from the truth. It's also far too simple a description of this complex man. Franklin was indeed a self-made man, who started out (as did many of that era) in an apprenticeship to a master of his trade (in this case, an elder brother) but his drive, independence and intelligence led him to leave that form of indentured servitude early, and seek out his own fortune. To that end he cultivated patrons, charmed a good many people, and even traveled to England on the promise- false, as it turned out- of financial support to set up a business there. The idea that Franklin would consider moving to England may seem odd to the reader brought up on the popular myth of Franklin as rebel, but for most of his life Franklin considered himself an Englishman first and foremost, and much of his political activity early on was dedicated to convincing the government back in England that the American colonists were deserving of the same rights as Englishmen back home, and convincing the more rebellious elements here that it was in their best interests to reconcile with England. It wasn't until 1774, when Franklin was already 68 years old, that he effectively renounced his English identity in favor of an American identity. Once declaring himself to be an American, Franklin relished his new identity as a pioneer and, in the eyes of many European, a rustic. He arrived in France, where he was to serve as Ambassador, wearing a frontiersman's fur hat, and happily played the role expected of him. He stayed in France for another nine years, entertaining the French, negotiating several important treaties, and enjoying the various pleasures that Paris could provide. Gordon Wood's biography presents a full picture of Franklin, a man whose life was filled with both triumph and tragedy. He was celebrated through Europe as a great scientist, inventor, and wit, while at the same time the War of Independence resulted in an acrimonious split with his beloved son William. His common law wife Deborah Reed, whom he had first proposed to when she was only 15, and who ran his many businesses during his frequent absences, died while he was away in England. He was a hard working businessman, campaigner for various causes, and government official, who nonetheless found time for his avocational scientific interests. He discovered the Gulf Stream, was credited by Malthus with discovering the law of population growth, and made discoveries in electricity and meteorology. Wood presents a more detailed picture of Franklin than have most biographers, giving a glimpse into Franklin's family life, his working relationship with allies (like Jefferson) and enemies (most notably Adams), as well as his own beliefs and emotions. An excellent and entertaining look into the life of one of America's greatest, and first, citizens.

Dozens, probably hundreds, of books have been written about Franklin over the years. One might wonder how much of a new contribution another book about Franklin could make. Apparently, quite a lot. Nowadays, Franklin is viewed as the most "American" of the Founding Fathers, chiefly because he is perceived as a self-made man who was able to make something out of himself against all odds. In other words, Franklin represents the American Dream. However, as Mr. Woods so clearly illustrates in his brilliant biography, this view of Franklin as the "ideal American" is not so conclusive, and was developed primarily after his death. Franklin was a rather strong supporter of the Crown for most of his adult life. As a point, he thought that the grant of Pennsylvania given to William Penn should have been revoked and returned to the Crown. He also tried, up to the last moment, to reconcile between the Americans and the English in the years prior to the Revolution. Even during the Revolution, at the time when he was in France securing loans and lobbying the French to support the American cause, he was still (unjustifiably) suspected of being a royalist in disguise. The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin is a tremendous contribution to our understanding of this great man.

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