

# Good essay about the americanization of benjamin franklin by gordon s. wood

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



## **Book response Essay**

The role of biography in understanding historical events and historical personalities is significant. It helps us to get to know more about the certain period of history and about those who act in these periods. It is impossible to imagine events without any notion about personalities who may also develop their feature in certain historical contexts.

One of the prominent historical personalities of the 18th century is the personality of Benjamin Franklin. Many biographies were written about this political leader, and every of them is intended to reflect the hidden truth in the historical context and events that took place.

The period of 18th century was significant in the American history, and many remarkable events took place in that time. Many issues and problems in policy and American society are discussed by Gordon S. Wood , the winner of Pulitzer Prize, in his book “ The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin” (2004). Many biographies were written before, including by such prominent authors as Brands, Morgan, Isaacson and others. Why Wood decided to write one more biography, as possibly no new information was found out from Benjamin Franklin’s life starting from the period when he lived in 18th century. In my opinion, Gordon S. Woods just desired to take a look on Benjamin Franklin’s life from different perspective. The thing is the image of Franklin is slightly changed from the period of his life, and in 19th century he was treated as an American hero who did much to the founding of the American nation and traditional American values. Benjamin Franklin influenced much on creating a positive image of U. S. cultural, political and social issues that are indivisible from his personality.

<https://assignbuster.com/good-essay-about-the-americanization-of-benjamin-franklin-by-gordon-s-wood/>

18th century was a complicated period in the American history. Many problems were typical for American society, including the problem of religion, slavery, the role of women in American society. Puritan America was not ready to accept the developed traditions of the Enlightenment and apply them to the modern context. Tolerance and equality were started to be regarded the best values to American society. Traditional Catholic religion that was based that days on the Puritan values did not meet the expectations of many people who desired to live in the new America that would be free from slavery and any other oppression against women and the representatives of the other races. That is why in the 18th century Presbyterian movement became very popular not only among common people, but also among political leaders who struggled against traditional values trying to implement the “ new-old” values to real life. Presbyterians preserved the faith in God, but they were not so strict following the rules and rites that were accepted by Catholics as the issue that could not be changed over the years. In their opinion, serving God means at least being a good to man and mankind, so even doing small things matters very much to win God’s mercy. Slavery, oppression of others, criticizing the role of women according to the well-known German saying “ Kinder, Kuche, Kirche” is what was taken for granted in the 18th century. But many people were ready to changes, including Benjamin Franklin.

Being born in the family of a soap and candle maker, from his early childhood Benjamin Franklin developed the best values of a gentleman and leader. In the opinion of many historians and biographers, he was a “ self-made” man. His values were developed in the context of the U. S. society

that was still not free of superstitions against the other nations, slavery, where gender roles were not completed. Franklin's father was "training Franklin to be a candle and soap maker" (Wood 17), but the young man chose the other way. He moved to Philadelphia to start his own printing business. "Franklin arrived in the Quaker city renowned for its religious freedom in 1723, hungry, tired, dirty, and bedraggled in his "Working Dress", his "Pockets" stuffed out with shirts and stockings, with only a Dutch dollar and copper shilling to his name." (Wood 23). This was the start and some "tipping point" of his Americanization. Franklin was in seek of this "self-madness", without help of his parents who he respected. He started to go for his American dream.

Starting his own press business in the other city was very hard, but Benjamin Franklin had luck as he met many good people in his way who helped him to succeed and patronized him. These were Thomas Denhan, a Quaker merchant, who supported Benjamin with money in hard moments and brought him into his business, William Allen, the richest man in Philadelphia, who helped him to gain the position of deputy postmaster; prominent lawyer Andrew Hamilton who continued to patronize Franklin throughout his life with lending money, inviting to his home, introducing to others. In his book, Gordon S. Wood mentions Franklin's comments: "All of these friends were of great use to me". (Wood 27). They really helped the future leader to succeed when he had nothing but his dream.

The central argument suggested by Gordon S. Wood is the difference between "historic Franklin" and "symbolic Franklin". The thing is the image of Franklin has changed dramatically over time. The historic image of

Franklin is clear due to his great role in colony policy, social and cultural life. His success is measured by many inventions and works on science. For example, Franklin invented electricity; he was very fond of learning languages, practicing skills in rhetoric, and more. He gained respect in the 18th century for helping Americans to get free from the colonial rules of Britain, who tried to dictate rules in their western lands. People were inspired by his acts and words, and some researchers even compare Franklin with Nelson Mandela who was a leader of Africans in 20-21 century. The role of Benjamin Franklin was so much significant for American people that they started to idealize him much, and until now we know more of "symbolic" Franklin rather than about historic.

Many people saw in Franklin the representation of American dream that was came true by his endeavors. Even that story about how poor he arrived to Philadelphia proves that people were inspired by Franklin as a "self-made" man who was just trying to get success with a little help of his friends. When Franklin passed away, and later in the 19th century, he was treated in many sources as an idealized symbolic personality who has gained success by himself and helped to rearrange American values when making them new according to the old traditions of Enlightenment. This period when Franklin lived was that we can call one of the major and the crucial in U. S. history. Due to the Benjamin Franklin and other founders, for every U. S. citizen it turned possible to make their dreams come true, either they are poor or not. Starting from the 19th century, he symbolized too much for American nation, and even his religious beliefs made a great change in the minds of many Americans.

Franklin symbolizes the rise of America. In critics to Wood's work, Edmund Morgan writes that he " captured the extraordinary interaction of a rising American people and the man who rose with them, shaping their aspirations as they shaped his" (Morgan 226). Like Franklin rose, the newly founded country started to rise, and new values of it were formed. Many people had faith and hope in the leader who helped to build the new progressive worldview for the newly founded country and nation that could be able to become free from colonialists.

What Franklin believed and hoped was not too difficult to believe, as he was the one who got good education. He was always in seeking of new knowledge and new inspirations. His works in science and his inventions were of great use for people all around the world. The most important in his worldview believed in his dream and his success. The result of his dreaming was that he became not only very rich, but also of great use to the United States of America. His personal and religious values turned to be very good in the context of international relations with Britain, but also in the context of newly developed features of America.

Gordon S. Wood tried to explore the difference between " historic" and " symbolic" Franklin. The author succeeded in this, and he reached his objective. Wood's endeavors were honored at the highest level with Pulitzer Prize. Franklin proved with his life experience that even the most unbelievable dream may someday come true, as in real " any dream will do", if the person tries to succeed. Nowadays, as well as in 19th and 20th century Benjamin Franklin is the symbol of American dream.

## **Works Cited**

Wood, S. Gordon. *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2004. Print.

Book: *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin*. *Washingtonpost Newsweek Interactive Interview*. June 1, 2004. Web 14 Feb. 2014 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A63986-2004May28.html>

Morgan, Edmund. Criticism to "The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin". In book, 2004. Print.