



The Radicalism of the American Revolution

By Gordon S. Wood

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In a grand and immensely readable synthesis of historical, political, cultural, and economic analysis, a prize-winning historian describes the events that made the American Revolution. Gordon S. Wood depicts a revolution that was about much more than a break from England, rather it transformed an almost feudal society into a democratic one, whose emerging realities sometimes baffled and disappointed its founding fathers.

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The Radicalism of the American Revolution By Gordon S. Wood **Bibliography**

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The gifted Wood offers a fresh take on the formative years of the United States, explaining the astonishing transformation of disparate, quarreling colonies into a bustling, unruly republic of egalitarian-minded citizens.

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From Library Journal

Historians have always had problems explaining the revolutionary character of the American Revolution: its lack of class conflict, a reign of terror, and indiscriminate violence make it seem positively sedate. In this beautifully written and persuasively argued book, one of the most noted of U.S. historians restores the radicalism to what he terms "one of the greatest revolutions the world has ever known." It was the American Revolution, Wood argues, that unleashed the social forces that transformed American society in the years between 1760 and 1820. The change from a deferential, monarchical, ordered, and static society to a liberal, democratic, and commercial one was astonishing, all the more so because it took place without industrialization, urbanization, or the revolution in transportation. It was a revolution of the mind, in which the concept of equality, democracy, and private interest grasped by hundreds of thousands of Americans transformed a country nearly overnight. Exciting, compelling, and sure to provoke controversy, the book will be discussed for years to come. History Book Club main selection.

- *David B. Mattern, Univ. of Virginia, Charlottesville*

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From Kirkus Reviews

Perhaps, as is often noted, the American Revolution was not as convulsive or transforming as its French and Russian counterparts. Yet this sparkling analysis from Wood (History/Brown Univ.; ed., *The Rising Glory of America*, 1971) impressively argues that it was anything but conservative. Wood's contention that the Revolution was ``the most radical and far-reaching event in American history" may stretch the point (did it really have more of an impact than the Civil War?). But from now on it will be hard to argue that the rebellion was a genteel event that left fundamental institutions unscathed. Wood pictures colonial society as overwhelmingly deferential--to king, to family patriarch, and to aristocrats--with ``personal obligations and reciprocity that ran through the whole society." But patriots such as Adams, Jefferson, and Franklin, aspiring to become gentlemen, resented this entrenched order of patronage and kinship. Their classical republicanism stressed benevolence and government by an enlightened elite. To their dismay, however, they discovered that their rhetoric unleashed all the latent entrepreneurial and egalitarian energies of American life, which even the elaborate mechanism of the Constitution could not completely contain. Among the results, Wood says, were a new concept of the dignity of labor, improvements in the lot of women, the first significant antislavery movement, and the frank acceptance of private interest underlying the political party system. Above all, Wood suggests, the Revolution produced the messy, fractious politics of liberal democracy, dominated by ordinary people pursuing commercial interests. A provocative, highly accomplished examination of how American society was reshaped in the cauldron of revolution. -- *Copyright ©1991, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Users Review

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