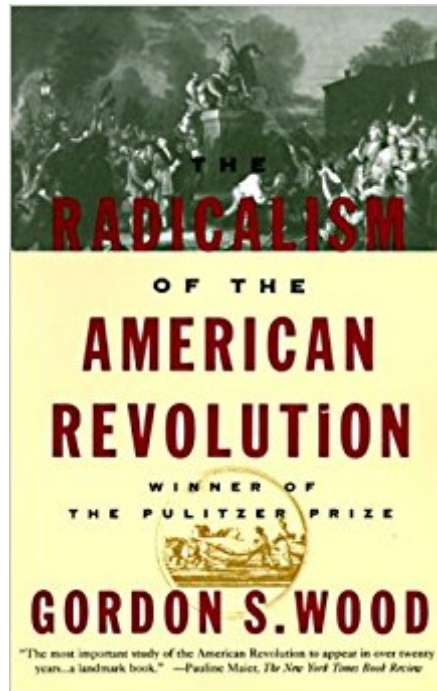




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The Radicalism Of The American Revolution



Synopsis

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.

Book Information

Paperback: 464 pages

Publisher: Vintage; Reprint edition (March 2, 1993)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0679736883

ISBN-13: 978-0679736882

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 1 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 124 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #17,979 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #32 in Books > Textbooks > Social Sciences > Political Science > Political History #48 in Books > History > Americas > United States > Revolution & Founding #135 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Political Science > History & Theory

Customer Reviews

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. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc.

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, CharlottesvilleCopyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This work was at times had some very gripping historical narrative. Most notably, what comes to mind for me, is the detailed and vivid description that Mr. Wood provides when describing the ordering life of Revolutionary War era Americans in the Carolina backwoods region. Mr. Wood also delves deeply into the psyche of post-colonial Americans, and has a true historian's grasp on the 18th century mind-set. In fact, never once does Mr. Wood err in applying 20th or 21st century values to 18th century persons, and that alone, makes *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* a remarkable book. Gordon Wood's premise in this work is simple and concise and it can be summed up by saying that given the monarchical/hierarchical mind-set of 18th century Europeans, the Republicanism that the American Revolution instilled and promulgated for all white males (not just property owners) was truly radical and revolutionary for its time. It was only by way of revisionist history which represented our American founders as stable pillars of traditionalism that we have been conditioned to think that the American Revolution was not as radical as the nearly contemporary French Revolution which began in 1789. This work, I believe won the Pulitzer Prize for history in 1991, and even some 25+ years later its general assertions still ring true. However, at times, probably because of the general simplicity of the work's main premise, the narrative does drag and become a little bit redundant. That is the only reason that I did not give Mr. Wood's study 5 stars.

Wood is one of the leaders in the field. His narrative dives deeply into the lives and context of the 18th century. He provides an illustrative picture of daily life without getting lost in the detail. By showing his readers how daily events reflect the context of the period and the overall political will of the day, Wood gives us both a grounded and informed view of the Revolution. I particularly enjoyed how he provides evidence to support his suppositions about culture or changes in culture. While I might be less comfortable with some of his detail at times, he never loses the reader in the presentation of contextual information. You read his work feeling confident about the time period and its customs. This allows the reader to move beyond any superficial descriptions of smell, noise,

and weather to more thoughtfully reflect on the much more timely and relevant social nuances the "radical" thinking of the revolution. Through a well-constructed context, Wood guides the reader through origins and consequences of English hierarchy and social stratification. While never taking sides, Wood demonstrates just how critical 19th century America was for reshaping human potential. Wood applies his narrative expertise to expose just how novel American thinking was, at the time, to fostering modern visions of individualism and capitalism.

Very interesting new insights about the changes in politics and society during the period before, during and after the Revolutionary War -- say from around 1750 to 1820. The book's title is a bit misleading in that way -- it's not about the war but rather what was going on in that age. While I strongly recommend the book to anyone interested, the reader should be prepared for what I think is a frequent setting up straw men and then, of course, knocking them down. This happens most in discussions of what Wood calls the "Republican" POV, which is imho a very idealized version of the philosopher-king, disinterested wise man view of Aristotle and some of the philosophes of the Enlightenment -- and, to some extent maybe of Thomas Jefferson. I seriously doubt that any of these folks thought such a mode of government could actually work, and indeed our own founding fathers designed the Constitution to deal with what they saw as the inevitable conflicts of interest among the people and, therefore in a democracy or a republic, inevitably within the government itself. Wood cites many quotes of this or that clergyman or whatever, which again imho are scant evidence that any serious person, or many people in general, ever thought such a thing was more than an ideal against which to test other schemes. To me, analyses of history, political science, and philosophy all need to be informed by each of the three fields. And by economics. Wood is great on the history, good on the philosophy, maybe a bit weak on the economics, and I think quite weak on the political science. But these are quibbles about a book that I find, as a whole, very interesting and enlightening to read.

Prof. Wood's work ushered into the meaning of American revolution the more fundamental fact that an American society and political culture that were entirely new and original was created by the process, and that resistance needs to be treated separately from this transformative "revolution".

This book has little in the way of the historical facts and timeline of the American Revolution. Instead, the book concentrates on the great shift from a monarchical society to a republic based on Enlightenment values. The characters in this story are not just the big-name founding fathers. There

are lesser-known founding fathers, tradesmen, foreign observers, and more. The author quotes all of these at length. This allows us to understand the Zeitgeist of the time. I found myself underlining a great deal of the book. It's definitely one of those books that will require a second read to fully comprehend.

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