



Benjamin Franklin (Lives & Legacies (Oxford))

Edwin S. Gaustad

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The tenth and youngest son of a poor Boston soapmaker, Benjamin Franklin would rise to become, in Thomas Jefferson's words, "the greatest man and ornament of his age." In this short, engaging biography, historian Edwin S. Gaustad offers a marvelous portrait of this towering colonial figure, illuminating Franklin's character and personality.

Here is truly one of the most extraordinary lives imaginable, a man who, with only two years of formal education, became a printer, publisher, postmaster, philosopher, world-class scientist and inventor, statesman, musician, and abolitionist. Gaustad presents a chronological account of all these accomplishments, delightfully spiced with quotations from Franklin's own extensive writings. The book describes how the hardworking Franklin became at age 24 the most successful printer in Pennsylvania and how by 42, with the help of *Poor Richard's Almanack*, he had amassed enough wealth to retire from business. We then follow Franklin's next brilliant career, as an inventor and scientist, examining his pioneering work on electricity and his inventions of the Franklin Stove, the lightning rod, and bifocals, as well as his mapping of the Gulf Stream, a major contribution to navigation. Lastly, the book covers Franklin's role as America's leading statesman, ranging from his years in England before the Revolutionary War to his time in France thereafter, highlighting his many contributions to the cause of liberty. Along the way, Gaustad sheds light on Franklin's personal life, including his troubled relationship with his illegitimate son William, who remained a Loyalist during the Revolution, and Franklin's thoughts on such topics as religion and morality.

Written by a leading authority on colonial America, this compact biography captures in a remarkably small space one of the most protean lives in our nation's history.

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