

BOOK REVIEWS

The Varieties of Political Experience in Eighteenth-Century America. By RICHARD R. BEEMAN. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004. 366p. Illustrations, notes, appendices, index. \$39.95.)

The theme that most concerns this ambitious book (its title notwithstanding) is the colonial roots of American democracy. Beeman presents his work as a social history companion to Edmund S. Morgan's *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (1988); whereas Morgan explored the growth of democracy from the vantage point of ideas, Beeman concentrates on behaviors. Although he sees the gradual movement from "traditional" to more "modern" democratic modes of political behavior as taking place in all of Britain's mainland North American colonies, Beeman is especially eager to highlight regional variations, distinguishing among the political cultures of not only different colonies but also the "settled, urban, and frontier areas" of particular colonies (p. 7). As a result of this focus, the argument proceeds less as a chronological analysis of developments relating to democratic growth and more as a taxonomy of different colonial political cultures.

In assembling this taxonomy, Beeman integrates findings from a wide array of scholarly studies that have rarely received synthetic treatment. This integrative work is, by far, the book's greatest accomplishment. By deftly analyzing evidence ranging from legislative and electoral statistics to biographical data on individual leaders, Beeman not only brings under one dust jacket a wealth of useful information (the six appendices of statistical data are enough on their own to make the book an essential reference for historians of colonial politics) but also invites comparisons that previously we did not think to consider: who knew, for instance, that, whereas Virginia legislators received numerous petitions from constituents and were highly active lawmakers, South Carolina's leaders heard scarcely a peep from settlers and passed only a handful of laws each year?

The framework into which Beeman organizes all of this data is more problematic. Relying upon the republican synthesis devised by intellectual historians like J. G. A. Pocock and Gordon S. Wood, Beeman arranges the political cultures he examines along a spectrum that echoes a little too neatly the categories established by those scholars. Virginia and Massachusetts represent the "classical republican" deferential end of the spectrum. Then come upstate New York and South Carolina, which more closely resembled Walpolean protoliberal oligarchies. Next are the southern and northern backcountries, which manifested both "traditional" and "democratic" elements. Finally come the most "popular" and "pluralistic" political cultures of the group: Pennsylvania, a "paradoxical"

blend of "popular and oligarchic tendencies" (p. 207), and the highly "pluralistic" northeastern cities of Boston, New York City, and Philadelphia, where, in Beeman's words, "modern America was born" (p. 247). The apparatus is so neat that sometimes it seems to dictate how behaviors are interpreted rather than vice versa; for instance, similarly low levels of legislative activity in South Carolina and Pennsylvania are read entirely differently, in the first instance as a sign of oligarchic irresponsibility and in the second instance as signs of a contented populace and of a legislature committed to not abusing its power.

The framework is also static. Although Beeman's taxonomy, moving from "traditional" oligarchic political cultures to "modern" pluralistic liberal ones, gives the illusion of chronological change, it in fact conveys primarily still images of each of these societies. Beeman's first chapter, on the traditional order of politics in England and America, and his interesting last chapter, on postrevolutionary developments in these societies, are too cursory in their analyses to correct for this problem. As a result, although Beeman's regional focus yields numerous insights into British America's political landscape, we are still left wondering how democracy grew out of prerevolutionary experiences.

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The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin. By GORDON S. WOOD. (New York: Penguin Press, 2004. xii, 299p. Illustrations, notes, index. \$25.95.)

Gordon S. Wood's *Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* is a fascinating interpretation of the reasons Franklin behaved and acted in the ways he did. The attempt to explain why is more challenging and difficult than to give biographical facts, and it is not surprising that some readers will disagree with many of Wood's interpretations. The five chapter titles indicate Wood's major theses, and each corresponds to a chronological period in Franklin's life.

Chapter 1, "Becoming a Gentleman," takes Franklin to his retirement as a printer in 1748. Chapter 2, "Becoming a British Imperialist," stresses Franklin's supposed love for England and the British Empire and covers the years from 1748 to the Stamp Act, 1765. Chapter 3, "Becoming a Patriot," argues that during 1765 to 1775 the English ministers, especially Lord Hillsborough, forced the reluctant Franklin into an Americanist position. Chapter 4, "Becoming a Diplomat," deals with Franklin's activities during the Revolution. The last chapter, "Becoming an American," investigates his final years in America (1785–90) and explores the growth and changing facets of Franklin's reputation.

I have space only to deal with a few reservations concerning Wood's first chapters. Contrary to Wood's argument that Franklin aspired to gentility and