

Gordon Wood



Gordon Wood (Fair Use)

Gordon S. Wood is a well-known name in the history field and is the Professor of History Emeritus at Brown University. He earned his bachelor's degree from Tufts University and his Ph.D. from Harvard University. His author credits include *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin*, and *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815*. These works and others have won him the Bancroft Prize, John H. Dunning Prize, Ralph Waldo Emerson Prize, American History Book Prize, and the Pulitzer Prize. His career spans over five decades and President Obama awarded him the National Humanities Medal in 2010.

Hidden History recently had the chance to interview Gordon Wood and discussed his views on some of the different aspects from the American War for Independence.

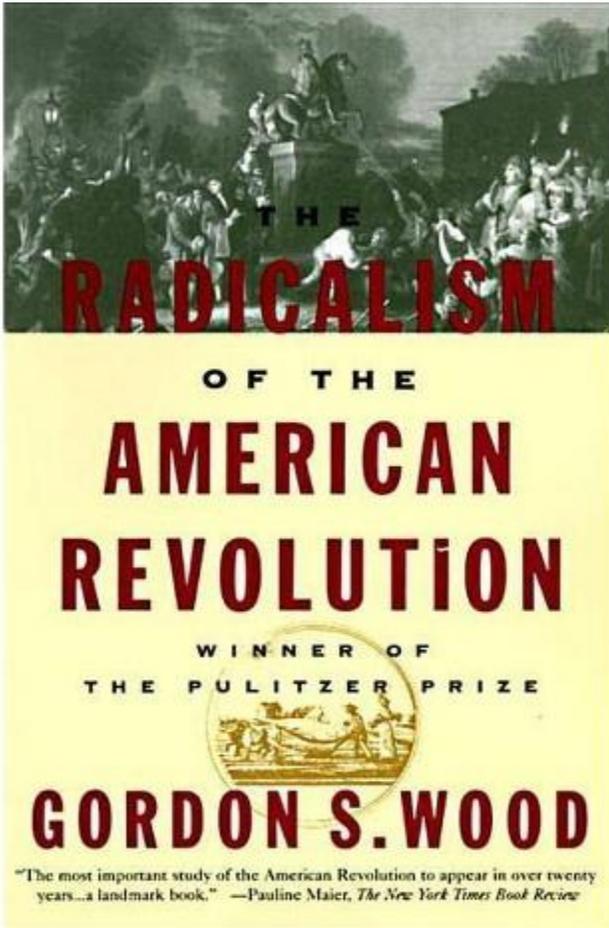
HH: *You are a Pulitzer Prize winning historian; however, you were not always interested in history. What was the defining moment of time that you realized you enjoyed history? Was there a specific person involved in this moment?*

GW: I was always interested in history, but in college I did not intend to become a historian. After my service in the Air Force, I planned on returning to the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy to become a foreign service officer. My service in the military, however, was so strange, and I was treated in such an arbitrary manner that I decided I did not want to work for the federal government and so I applied to graduate school in order to become a historian.

HH: *You served in the military (thank you for your service) and several of your books deal with time periods of war in America's history. How did your own service play a part in deciding to write about these periods of American history? Did your service play a part in how you view past matters of war and did it shape some of your views on American history?*

GW: As I said above, my service in the military was so peculiar (For example, I trained in Texas for nearly a year to be a photo-intelligence officer and yet never practiced my trade, only because a fellow officer did not want to get up early to sign the morning report, and he talked the squadron commander into making me a personnel officer to relieve him of that task) that my service had little obvious effect on my view of history.

“Gordon Wood’s National Humanities Medal Citation: **Gordon S. Wood** for scholarship that provides insight into the founding of the nation and the drafting of the U.S. Constitution. Wood is author and editor of eighteen books, including *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, for which he earned a Pulitzer Prize. ~National Endowment for the Humanities



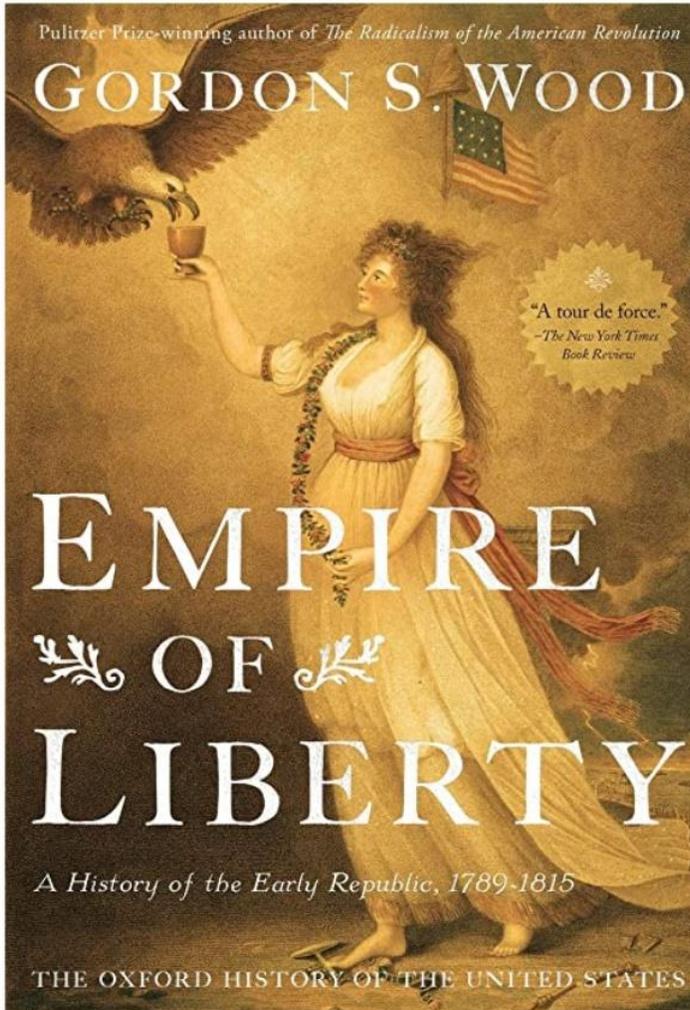
HH: *You consider the American Revolution to be radical in certain aspects. Today many historians tend to see it in a more conservative light. While the War for Independence certainly did have its radical and conservative moments, would you consider it to be more equally balanced or did the war definitely tend toward a radical/conservative trend?*

GW: The war was not the Revolution. It was a prerequisite for the Revolution but not the Revolution. The Revolution changed the society and culture in major ways—that is the radicalism of the Revolution.

HH: *Your research for your books relies heavily on primary sources. In your research for your book *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, what was perhaps the most interesting piece of primary material you came across (quotation, person, ideal, etc.)?*

GW: There was no one document. One thing that interested me was the distinction between the private and public worlds; it was radically changed by the Revolution. One minor example: colleges like Harvard and Yale were public institutions prior to the Revolution. After the Revolution, they became the private institutions that they are today.

HH: *If you could discuss any era in American history, what would that era be? And whom from that era would you want to talk with and why?*



GW: Obviously I prefer discussing the era of the American Revolution. It is the most important event in American history, bar none. It not only legally created the United States, but it infused into our culture our noblest ideals and our greatest values—liberty, equality, the well-being of ordinary people.

HH: *The era surrounding the American War for Independence is one that has had many myths and legends surrounding it, almost making it indiscernible what is really truth. Why do you think that has happened and what is your advice to a historian seeking to separate fact from fiction?*

GW: Every era has myths. The historian's job is to seek the truth, and it is not easy, especially in today's world.

HH: *As a leader in the history field and a well-known historian, what is your advice to other historians looking to succeed in the history field?*

GW: I don't have any secrets to pass on. I guess hard work and imagination are important. I think those who have the inkling will know what to do.