



The Radical Enlightenments of Benjamin Franklin (New Studies in American Intellectual and Cultural History)

Douglas Anderson

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Benjamin Franklin, writes Douglas Anderson in his preface, is "no one's contemporary... Blending elements of the fifteenth-century spiritual discipline of Thomas à Kempis with the journalistic energy of Daniel Defoe, the urbane reason of Lord Shaftesbury with the scientific initiative of Thomas Edison, Franklin places exceptional demands on the historical imagination of his readers?demands that are inevitably slighted by writers who emphasize only one set of interests or one facet of a complex temperament."

In *The Radical Enlightenment of Benjamin Franklin* Anderson takes a fresh look at the intellectual roots of one of the most engaging and multifaceted of America's founders. Anderson begins by tracing the evolution of young Franklin's theology of works between the letters of Silence Dogood (1722) and his impassioned defense of the heterodox Irish clergyman Samuel Hemphill in 1735. He places the twenty-five-year production of *Poor Richard's Almanac* in the context of early eighteenth-century moral and educational psychology. He examines the broad intellectual continuities uniting Franklin's 1726 journal of his return voyage to Philadelphia with successive editions of his *Experiments and Observations on Electricity*, first published in 1751. And he offers a careful examination of Franklin's seminal, and controversial, 1751 essay "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind."

The Radical Enlightenment of Benjamin Franklin brings us a much fuller understanding of Franklin's intellectual and literary roots and his later influence among common readers.

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