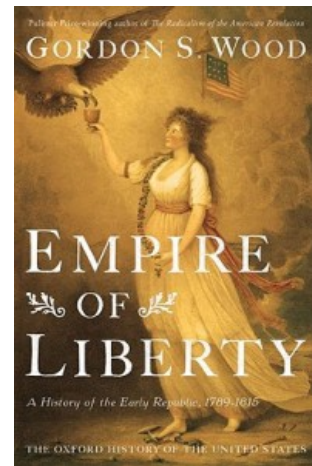


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Empire of Liberty — When America Became American

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Gordon S. Wood is one of the most influential historians writing in the field of American history today. His reputation will only be enhanced with the publication of *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815*, the newest volume in “The Oxford History of the United States.” Wood has written a massive work of over 750 pages, tracing the life of the early Republic and the transformation of America in what amounts to its national adolescence. “By 1815 Americans had experienced a transformation in the way they related to one another and in the way they perceived themselves and the world around them,” Wood observes.



Americans tend to jump from the Revolution to the Civil War with little concern for the period Wood so thoroughly covers in this volume. And yet, America came of age during those years, developing political habits, establishing a national identity, and claiming more new territory than had been claimed during the entire colonial period.

During this period, America left behind its British identity and forged a new American ideal. It was the Age of Jackson and of the notion of the average American as “a new man.” It was also the age of the Second Great Awakening and the transformation of American Christianity. As Wood notes, many of the changes that occurred on the American religious landscape during this period continue to be determinative today.

Empire of Liberty is an important work that is both encyclopedic in scope and incisive in judgment. His treatment of religion during this period, though theologically thin, is genuinely interesting. Evangelical readers should supplement Wood’s volume with Nathan Hatch’s *The Democratization of American Religion* and Iain Murray’s *Revival and Revivalism*.

An excerpt from Wood:

This Second Great Awakening was a radical expansion and extension of the earlier eighteenth-century revivals. It was not just a continuation of the first awakening of the mid-eighteenth century. It was more evangelical, more ecstatic, more personal, and more optimistic. It did not simply intensify the religious feelings of existing church members. More important, it mobilized unprecedented numbers of people who previously had been unchurched and made them members of religious groups. By popularizing religion as never before and by extending religion into the remotest areas of America, the Second Great Awakening marked the beginning of the republicanizing and nationalizing of American religion. It transformed the entire religious culture of America and laid the foundations for the development of an evangelical religious world of competing denominations unique to Christendom.

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