



Benjamin Franklin and the Ends of Empire

Carla J. Mulford

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Drawing from Benjamin Franklins published and unpublished papers, including letters, notes, and marginalia, Benjamin Franklin and the Ends of Empire examines how the early modern liberalism of Franklins youthful intellectual life helped foster his vision of independence from Britain that became his hallmark achievement. In the early chapters, Carla Mulford explores the impact of Franklins family history - especially their difficult times during the English Civil War - on Franklins intellectual life and his personal and political goals. The books middle chapters show how Franklins fascination with British imperial strategy grew from his own analyses of the financial, environmental, and commercial potential of North America. Franklins involvement in Pennsylvanias politics led him to devise strategies for monetary stability, intercolonial trade, Indian affairs, and imperial defense that would have assisted the British Empire in its effort to take over the world. When Franklin realized that the goals of British ministers were to subordinate colonists in a system that assisted the lives of Britons in England but undermined the wellbeing of North Americans, he began to criticize the goals of British imperialism. Mulford argues that Franklins turn away from the British Empire began in the 1750s - not the 1770s, as most historians have suggested - and occurred as a result of Franklins perceptive analyses of what the British Empire was doing not just in the American colonies but in Ireland and India. In the last chapters, Mulford reveals how Franklin ultimately grew restive, formed alliances with French intellectuals and the court of France, and condemned the actions of the British Empire and imperial politicians. As a whole, Mulfords book provides a fresh reading of a much-admired founding father, suggesting how Franklins conception of the freedoms espoused in Englands ages old Magna Carta could be realized in the political life of the new American nation.

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