

*Red Star Over Hollywood* contains new material and judgment fortified by new research and information; the second, that the topic has been distorted not only by failures of interpretation but by continuing exploitation, even today. The Radoshes are quite clear on this second point: Hollywood continues to broadcast much mythology about the communists in Lala Land, the HUAC hearings, and all the rest of it. Though the emphasis here is on the 30's, 40's, and early 50's, the subsequent justification, victimology, and mendacity are remarkable in themselves, as contemporary bad movies have something to say about the nature of movies as well as about political-historical amnesia and manipulation.

*The Way We Were* (1973) rather misses the point of its own story, but don't try telling that to Barbra Streisand. *The Front* (1976) is not a Woody Allen movie but a movie starring Woody Allen, the comedy of which fails to mesh with its mawkish revisionism. *Marathon Man* (1976) mixes political mythology with melodrama in such an annoying way as to suggest a new interpretation of the torture scene. In this film, the CIA protects Nazis, and the protagonist's father was a victim of the blacklist. *The House on Carroll Street* (1987) has so much retro charm as a Hitchcock pastiche that you might not notice the political suggestion: Anticommunism equals pro-Fascism. *Fellow Traveller* (1989) wallows in the tragedy of the blacklist, as does *Guilty by Suspicion* (1991). *The Majestic* (2001) is the same old fantasy, and an odd Jim Carrey vehicle. *One of the Hollywood Ten* (2002), about Herbert Biberman and the making of *Salt of the Earth*, contains gross distortions of fact and nuance. And so it goes, as if we knew nothing about the history of the Communist Party in America and in Hollywood. Maybe nothing is what we are supposed to know—or not to know.

To remind us of the way we actually were, to repair some of the damage broadcast by Hollywood and institutionalized by the Academy, and to take advantage of the Venona files and other new information, Ronald and Allis Radosh have recreated the grounded meaning of Hollywood's infatuation with left-wing politics. One of their strongest points is to insist on the specific meaning of Stalinism; another is to emphasize Moscow's control of the American Communist Party.

Hollywood was targeted by the Comintern from early on and penetrated by

agents answering directly to Moscow—including Otto Katz, who, in one of his identities, was involved with Lillian Hellman. Later on, when Katz was tortured and murdered during the Slansky episode in the Czechoslovakia of 1952, his old Stalinist friends in Hollywood knew he was innocent but kept mum—party discipline, you know.

But the penetration of Hollywood by international agents was matched by the conversion of film-industry types to communism, often in connection with a visit to the Soviet Union. Joseph Losey, Jay Leyda, Budd Schulberg, and Maurice Rapf are famous examples. John Howard Lawson and Lester Cole were Stalinists who became part of the "Hollywood Ten" only after years of service to the party in Hollywood. As the faithful danced to the tune that was called, however, a rather disconcerting hitch known as the Nazi-Soviet pact was signed. The political and intellectual contortions that followed this reversal of policy, which revealed the power of the party as well as its profound corruption, was a blow from which the alliance of liberals and communists never recovered. There would still be time, however, to contribute to a "war effort" that included making nice with Uncle Joe Stalin.

The Radoshes' account of a seldom-seen film, *Mission to Moscow* (1943), explains a lot of context that has been forgotten. Based on Amb. Joseph Davies' memoir of the same name (1941), the film is unadulterated Stalinist propaganda—basically a justification of the notorious purges of 1936-8. In an exquisite moment, the Radoshes point out that Jack Warner himself, in testifying to the HUAC, actually employed Stalinist logic, dismissing the criticisms of John Dewey as "Trotskyite." Davies had insisted that the film deny that the Soviet Union had invaded Finland in 1939, and so it did. Such extremity was denounced even by such leftists as James Agee, Edmund Wilson, and Dwight Macdonald. The crop that the Hollywood left was to reap was the one they had sown.

Another vital point registered by the Radoshes has to do with an article published in a French communist journal in April 1945 and signed by Jacques Duclos. Written in Moscow and approved by Stalin, it rejected cooperation with the West. The former head of the Communist Party in America, Earl Browder himself, later called the piece "the first public declaration of the Cold War." Similar-

ly, in their account of the clash between the communists and HUAC, the authors make a new and authentic point in publishing a letter from John Garfield to Dore Schary dated October 13, 1950, in which that "victim" declared he was against communist policy and wanted to appear in anticommunist films. They suggest a revision of the received image of Garfield as a victim of the blacklist to that of a victim of the Communist Party.

Supplying useful perspectives on much disputed history, Ronald and Allis Radosh have given us an indispensable book that tells us what we need to know about such people as Elia Kazan and Victor Navasky. The resulting clarity allows us to begin to understand the power and ambiguity of film and the attraction it exerts over the public—and over those who would deceive the public.

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## A Master of His Time

by Fr. Michael P. Orsi

The Americanization of  
Benjamin Franklin  
by Gordon S. Wood  
New York: Penguin Press;  
320 pp., \$25.95

Gordon S. Wood's *Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* is a welcome testimony to the renewed interest in America's Founding Fathers. Although most Americans have a clear idea as to the importance of Washington's military role and Jefferson's contribution in writing the Declaration of Independence, few appreciate the pivotal part Franklin played in legitimizing the Revolution among foreign powers. Indeed—as Wood points out so clearly—without Franklin, funding from France would have been impossible, and the Revolution would have failed. According to Wood, it was Franklin's personal charm and his friendship with Charles Vergennes, who became virtually first minister under Louis XVI, that moved the French to lend the Americans the money they needed to fight the British. Furthermore, the personality and writings of Franklin, as

Wood explains, were instrumental in forming the ethos of the hard-working, self-made man that led eventually to the establishment of America's middle class.

This book is not a biography but the story of how Franklin, the loyal Tory, came to embrace the American Revolution. Franklin's break with England formally took place in 1775 in the wake of the display of arrogance by the British government toward the rights of the colonists, precipitated by the passage of the Coercive Acts (1774), which closed Boston Harbor in retaliation for the Tea Party. For Franklin, this was not merely a political *faux pas*; the contempt with which he was treated by the British was a deeply personal affront to his dignity. It seems that Franklin gradually (if also grudgingly) came to the realization that England regarded America as essentially a source of raw materials. Despite Franklin's hopes of persuading King George's government to allow American representation in Parliament, it became clear that this was not to be the case.

A good part of the book is dedicated to Franklin's efforts to establish himself as a gentleman. The 18th century defined

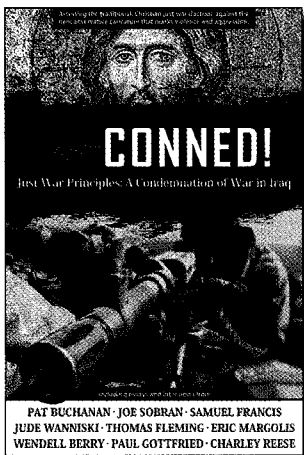
such a person as "one who is master of his own time." By achieving his goal, Franklin gained the status and time necessary to devote himself to public affairs. He was an overwhelming success at this endeavor, thanks to a prodigious intellect, a strong desire to perfect himself in virtue, an entrepreneurial spirit, and an agreeable personality. His famous *Poor Richard's Almanac* was probably America's first offering in the literary genre known today as the "self-help book." The proverbs therein captured, or perhaps invented, the American "can do" spirit and greatly contributed to the rugged individualism that enabled the rapid growth in American industry and the wealth it created.

As a scientist and philosopher, Franklin was a world-renowned celebrity. He reveled in the respect his reputation garnered for him both in England and in France, where he spent the greater part of his later years after retirement from his printing business. So great was Franklin's love of Europe and Europe's love of Franklin that many doubted his loyalty to the American cause. This doubt earned for him some strong enemies in the new republic, who, upon his death in 1790, successfully dampened celebrations of

his life and legacy. His loyalty, however, deserved no such doubt. So adamant was Franklin about the righteousness of the colonists' cause that he broke forever his relationship with his once doted-upon son William who, as the crown-appointed governor of New Jersey, remained loyal to England. Franklin's fame, according to Wood, revived only in the 19th century, and then on account not of his diplomatic accomplishments but of his writings, which were used to inspire virtue and industry among the youth of the burgeoning American population.

Wood shows us why Franklin belongs in the pantheon of American revolutionary heroes on equal footing with Washington, Adams, Jefferson, and Hamilton. His book is a good start in reacquainting America with a national treasure who, early in the life of our republic, made a vital impact on the international scene that enabled the Revolution to succeed and whose literary contributions set the tone for the culture that permeates America to this day.

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## Master of Your Domain

With the U.S. Supreme Court's June decision in *Kelo v. New London*, the truth of this column's conceit—that Rockford, Illinois, is a microcosm of America—has never been more clear. One of the running themes of this column since shortly after it began in 2001 as a "Letter From Rockford" has been the abuse of the power of eminent domain by local government. Now, the Supreme Court has essentially declared that Winnebago County and the city of Rockford were not guilty of abuse; they were simply ahead of the times.

*Kelo* has substantially removed state and local eminent-domain proceedings from review by the federal courts. For this reason, some libertarians have cheered the ruling, seeing in it the beginnings of a reversal of the Incorporation Doctrine by which the restrictions of the Bill of Rights (applied originally only to the federal government) have been extended to the states.

If only it were so simple. While it is true that the Fifth Amendment prohibition on taking private property "for public use, without just compensation" was never meant to apply to the states, it is also true that the amendment was never meant to serve as a summary of the common-law understanding of eminent domain—which did apply to all levels of government—but merely to ensure that, if eminent domain were exercised on the *federal* level (something that did not occur until 1876), "just compensation" would be provided. While it may seem otherwise to latter-day Americans who memorized the Bill of Rights in junior high, it is not self-evident that, if property is to be taken for "public use," "just compensation" must be provided. The Framers, however, agreed that this was the right thing to do, and they codified their understanding in the Fifth Amendment.

The Fifth Amendment does point to one important aspect of the common-law understanding of eminent domain that bound all governments in America—local, state, and federal. Property could be taken only for "public use," and this is where the foes of the Incorporation Doctrine who have greeted *Kelo* with enthusiasm are sorely mistaken. In the process

of removing federal-court oversight of state and local eminent-domain proceedings, the Supreme Court has expanded the concept of eminent domain to include circumstances that the common law would have flatly rejected—and, in so doing, has expanded the power of local and state governments to tyrannical levels. Post-*Kelo*, every governmental body can redistribute any property within its boundaries as it sees fit—as long as it can argue that the new owner will put it to better economic use than the previous one had. And who will judge whether the governmental body has proved its argument? According to *Kelo*, that judgment is left up to the governmental body itself, not the courts.

While, to many of the readers of *Chronicles*, taking a 40-acre parking lot from Wal-Mart and breaking it up into eight 5-acre homesteads is self-evidently a better economic use of the property, no local government will ever see it that way. The quality of the economic use of a property will be based almost entirely upon the aggregate of the monetary transactions that take place on that property—which is simply another way of saying that anyone who can promise that he will generate a greater combination of property taxes and sales taxes than you do automatically has a stronger claim to your property than you have. To cities such as Rockford, where many residents believe that developers have too much control over local government, the Supreme Court has said, "You ain't seen nothing yet."

In small towns and medium-sized cities across the United States, the most expensive block of homes does not come close to generating property taxes comparable to the combination of property taxes and sales taxes that would be generated by a Wal-Mart or a megamall on the same spot. (And, of course, most houses do not generate any sales taxes.) On the day that *Kelo* was handed down, the corporate attorneys in Bentonville, Arkansas, no doubt had to put on waders to protect their fancy cowboy boots from being stained by their drool.

Retiring Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, in a rare moment of clearheadedness, accurately summed up the import of this de-



cision in her dissent: "The beneficiaries are likely to be those citizens with disproportionate influence and power in the political process, large corporations and development firms."

What is most surprising about the *Kelo* decision is not that the Supreme Court has redefined eminent domain; it is that the Court took so long to do so. In 2000, the city of Rockford initiated eminent-domain proceedings against the owners of the Torres Market, a Mexican grocery in the southwest quadrant of the city. At the time, there were no full-service groceries in the area, and, for several years, the Torreses had met the needs of this economically depressed, largely black and Hispanic neighborhood as best they could. When a local developer approached the city with a plan to place an IGA on the Torres property, it should have been obvious that he was trying to increase the chance that his proposed store would succeed by eliminating his only significant competition. (There were plenty of vacant properties on which the IGA could have been built.)

Shortly after then-mayor Charles Box announced that the city intended to take the Torres Market by eminent domain and to hand the property over to the developer of the IGA, I appeared on a local television talk show with the city's director of community development, Barbara Richardson. When I pressed her to explain how the city could justify this redistribution of property under the traditional understanding of eminent domain, she replied that, "If you believe that government has any role in economic development, then you must believe that government can do whatever is necessary in order to facilitate economic development." At the time, that seemed like a socialist argument; today, it is the law of the land. 