



The Life of Benjamin Franklin, Vol. 1

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In *The Life of Benjamin Franklin, Vol. 1: Journalist, 1706-1730*, the initial installment of his multi-volume study, historian J. A. Leo Lemay describes the first two decades of the life of the first American to achieve international fame, Benjamin Franklin. Using a wide array of sources to flesh out Franklin's own account of his childhood and adolescence in his famous *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (1868), Lemay paints a portrait of life in colonial America during the years of Franklin's upbringing as the youngest child of a Boston tradesman to his emergence as the premier printer in Philadelphia. Franklin is presented as an inveterate learner, both at the trade to which he was apprenticed in the printing shop of his elder brother James, and at the studies he undertook on his own in order to get ahead in a world heavily dominated by class prejudice. He was entrepreneurial, sometimes impetuous (he ran away from Boston because he did not like the way his brother treated him at the shop), and always observant, qualities he put to good use from his earliest years in the business world.

Acknowledging that Franklin's life has been the subject of numerous other biographies, Lemay concentrates on Franklin's literary talents. At times the life story is subordinated to extended discussions of political, religious, medical, and commercial issues that engaged the people of these two emerging American cities. This background illuminates Franklin's contributions to debates on matters of importance to his contemporaries. Lemay also provides extensive analysis of Franklin's philosophical writings, demonstrating how the man often called "The First American" developed the ethical standards by which he tried to conduct his life. Interspersed with his literary analysis Lemay weaves a tale of Franklin's growing business acumen, illustrating ways the person known in history as a journalist, scientist, philosopher, and statesman set himself up for success in any profession he chose to pursue.

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