



“He grappled with the drama, the tensions and uncertainties”

Reflections on Gordon Wood by Robert A. Gross, June 2026

Gordon Wood was thoughtful and learned, and he was also modest and generous.

Gordon treasured the fact that he was born in Concord, Massachusetts - at Emerson Hospital - to parents living at the time in Acton. He grew up in Worcester. He was glad to accept invitations to speak at the Concord Museum, where he discussed his last book, *Power and Liberty: Constitutionalism in the American Revolution* (2021), with his longtime colleague and friend, Richard D. Brown. He also spoke at the Concord Free Public Library in 2017, when he received the Ruth Ratner Miller Award for Excellence in American History. He appreciated Concord's place in the history of the American Revolution and regularly assigned *The Minutemen and Their World* in his courses.

What made Gordon Wood's achievements as a historian of the American Revolution and the making of the American republic so significant? He didn't write a self-congratulatory account of how the colonists rightly opposed British policies and were pushed by an unresponsive King and Parliament into rebellion. He didn't assume that the U.S. fulfilled a preordained destiny as a constitutional republic. Nor did he reduce the contest to an internal struggle in which Patriots of different social classes fought each other for power even as they waged war for independence, as the Progressives and neo-Progressives had done. Gordon knew that ideas were key to envisioning a new society and polity and as constituents of ideology. If groups clashed over different interests, he asked, what was the political culture through which they carried on conflicts? His writings were so powerful because he grappled with the drama, the tensions and uncertainties, and the world-changing breakthroughs and discoveries unexpectedly cast up in an age of revolution.

The last time we were together was two years ago, when we did a video together about Lexington and Concord for the Federalist Society. If you look at that film, you can see how alive Gordon was to the play of ideas, to the unexpected insight or underappreciated detail. His intellectual curiosity and personal warmth are evident every time he is on camera. He treated colleagues and friends with the same openness and respect as he gave to people, the famous and the little-known, in the past.