

Words Poorly Used #143 — Nation

According to Reason's online publication, Benjamin Franklin once said, "No nation was ever ruined by trade."

Then a Facebook friend and I engaged in an amicable dispute about Franklin's intent relative to the word "nation." My friend said it was a stand-in for "government."

I responded

I am critical of BF for his lazy use of "nation." I agree that he was probably using it as a metaphor for state. The most frustrating aspect of etymology is to learn that society frequently takes perfectly serviceable words, but through misuse and wordsmithing often changes them to perverted meanings.

I do believe, however, that the quote would be improved by a more precise word, such as "society" or "economy."

I laud [another Facebook friend], nonetheless, for posting the sentiment.

We may recognize that a scant 300 years ago there was not much difference between "nation" and "state" — people were not highly mobile. Then colonization and the religio-territorial wars of Europe began to reshape both words, moving them closer together for politicians and their bandwagons. Concepts of "nation" were sacrificed on the altar of "nationalism" — the presumption that one sort has supremacy over another.

I will link the Facebook thread [here](#). If you choose not to or cannot access Facebook, I am copying the thread in the comment section.

— Kilgore Forelle