

Honoring the Turkey on Thanksgiving (November 2007)

In 1782, 6 years after America issued the Declaration of Independence to England, the Bald Eagle was chosen for the official emblem of the United States. One of the most influential founding fathers, Benjamin Franklin (who appears on the \$100 bill), was outraged by the decision and openly protested the move before congress. **He recommended the Turkey for the official Emblem. In a letter to his daughter he explains why:**

"For my own part I wish the Bald Eagle had not been chosen the Representative of our Country. He is a Bird of bad moral Character. He does not get his Living honestly. You may have seen him perched on some dead Tree near the River, where, too lazy to fish for himself, he watches the Labour of the Fishing Hawk; and when that diligent Bird has at length taken a Fish, and is bearing it to his Nest for the Support of his Mate and young Ones, the Bald Eagle pursues him and takes it from him.

"With all this Injustice, he is never in good Case but like those among Men who live by Sharping & Robbing he is generally poor and often very lousy. Besides he is a rank Coward: The little *King Bird* not bigger than a Sparrow attacks him boldly and drives him out of the District. He is therefore by no means a proper Emblem for the brave and honest Cincinnati of America who have driven all the *King birds* from our Country . . .

"I am on this account not displeased that the Figure is not known as a Bald Eagle, but looks more like a Turkey. For the Truth the Turkey is in Comparison a much more respectable Bird, and withal a true original Native of America . . . He is besides, though a little vain & silly, a Bird of Courage, and would not hesitate to attack a Grenadier of the British Guards who should presume to invade his Farm Yard with a red Coat on."

While beautiful in appearance, the Bald Eagle is somewhat of a coward in action. The Turkey by contrast is a dynamic creature that embodies more of the Spirit of America. It will ferociously defend its territory from all aggressors no matter the size. It can run at speeds of 40 Kilometers per hour (faster than an Olympic sprinter), and fly at speeds of 70 Kilometers per hour. In fact, the Wild Turkey has been clocked at almost 88 Kilometers per hour in flight, ranking it among the fastest birds on earth. The male Turkey's feathers can change to the colors of the American Flag (Red, White and Blue) and he is indigenous to North America. The Wild Turkey is also regarded as one of the smartest birds alive.

Over the years the great qualities of the Turkey have weaved their way through the English language. When it is time to have a direct and honest conversation with someone you would say: "Let's Talk Turkey." When you quit a bad habit (like smoking) once and for all you are "Quitting Cold Turkey." A colorful and outgoing person in the disco era was also called a "Jive Turkey."

I feel that Benjamin Franklin saw in the Turkey these qualities of Courage, Strength, and Freedom which he did not see in the Bald Eagle. He wanted these qualities for his new nation and for its people. He wanted the Turkey to represent America to all other Nations as it took the first steps towards freedom after declaring its independence.

This is a short summary of a small event that became very famous. The fact that one moment because so legendary only shows the true power of the idea. While the Bald Eagle is still the official bird of America the Turkey is the official bird of Conscience and Freedom. As you eat Marcia's beautifully prepared Turkey tonight, enjoy it with the knowing that you are taking in these great qualities. By acknowledging these truths, we can all Honor the Turkey together here and now on Thanksgiving!

-Eric Carver, 11/23/07