THE AMERICANIZATION OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN


Eminent revolutionary historian Wood illuminates the life and times of perhaps our nation's most symbolic yet enigmatic forefather. Born of modest roots, Benjamin Franklin displayed from an early age a sharp mind and a literary gift, which served him as he went on to amass a small fortune, mostly as a printer, and to emerge as a civic leader. Wood, who won a Pulitzer Prize in 1993 for The Radicalism of the American Revolution, shows how Franklin's skills and charm enabled him to complete the remarkable transition from humble beginnings to gentlemanly status, occupying his later years with scientific experiments, philosophy and statesmanship. Wood also introduces us to Franklin the loyal British subject, who could scarcely conceive of a colonial government independent of the British, yet, in 1776, at the age of 70, came to play a key role in the Revolution. He secured the help of the French, who in turn helped ultimately to define Franklin as the "symbolic American." This is not a comprehensive biography. Instead, Wood's purpose is to supplant our common knowledge of Franklin as the iconic, folksy
richer portrait, a look at how a man not even destined to be an American" became, paradoxically, the "symbol of America." What emerges is a fascinating portrait of Franklin, not only as a forefather but as a man. Illus. Agent, Andrew Wylie. (May 24)