

**“There Never Was a Good War or a Bad Peace”:**

**Benjamin Franklin’s Diplomacy and the 1783 Treaty of Paris.**

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July 2014.

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This thesis is an analysis of Benjamin Franklin’s actions and motivations as he negotiated the 1783 Treaty of Paris on behalf of the newly created United States. It examines three distinct phases beginning with Franklin’s dispatch to France as a member of a three-member commission, his tenure as minister plenipotentiary prior to the actual peace process, and the diplomatic strategies he employed while engaging the British in search of an acceptable peace. This revision of Franklin’s diplomatic legacy contributes to his historiography by relying on previously unpublished and obscure sources and by proposing a new interpretation of how Franklin’s diplomatic initiatives had the effect of giving a new shape to the Atlantic world.



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## **Introduction.**

### **Benjamin Franklin's Diplomacy and the 1783 Treaty of Paris**

Benjamin Franklin's diplomacy during the negotiations surrounding the 1783 Treaty of Paris has endured over two centuries of scholarly commentary and critique. Initially dispatched as one of a three-member delegation from the newly fangled United States to France, Franklin soon emerged as America's sole commissioner before the French Court. The main assignments of the American delegation were to create a Franco-American alliance, to secure munitions for the ensuing Revolutionary War, and to wrest from Britain the diplomatic recognition of American independence. To accomplish these lofty goals, Franklin needed to devise a shrewd and farseeing diplomatic strategy. Drawing from his pre-revolutionary experiences in London, he clearly understood that Europe was a continent of royal empires and ancient rivalries. Franklin also recognized that international diplomacy occurred in settings surrounded by deceptive behaviors, questionable loyalties, security breaches, and sharp conflicts. Realizing that his advantageous experience afforded him a special understanding of imperial diplomacy, Franklin developed a three-part scheme to extract the greatest American entity from a behemoth British Empire and create a new Atlantic world order. His first endeavor involved wresting control of the American delegation from the other commissioners and embellishing his existing celebrity in Versailles. Once in command, Franklin consciously wove America's interests into the French political tapestry in a bid to make their aims interdependent. This enabled Franklin to stand with the strength of a French backbone, avert Britain's repeated amity initiatives to weaken the crown's tenacity, and eventually elicit the greatest concessions for peace and an independent United States.

In recent decades, the relevance of revisiting Franklin's diplomatic activities in France has benefitted greatly from the enhanced availability of original source materials. In 1988, the Packard Humanities Institute initiated a project to create a digital database of all available Franklin documents. To celebrate Franklin's 300<sup>th</sup> birthday on January 17, 2006, the Institute opened a new web site as a practical access point to these materials, many of which were previously unpublished. To date, this website contains thirty-seven volumes of published papers dating from the record of his birth until August 14, 1782. The collection also contains nine volumes of unpublished documents dating to his final letter addressed to Thomas Jefferson on April 8, 1790. This has created an unprecedented access to Franklin's intimate thoughts and has enabled a reevaluation of his life and accomplishments.

Franklin's historiography has diverged significantly over the past two centuries. This has not transpired in a clear and tranquil manner. In the decades following his death, despite much controversy about his role in the American Revolution, historians presented his story in a matter-of-fact fashion. This approach consisted mostly of recounting events, dates, and results. By the end of the nineteenth century, historians realized Franklin was a much deeper personality who deserved a more complete analysis. Nevertheless, a thoroughgoing reevaluation of Franklin's life and career did not emerge until the second half of the twentieth century as a cadre of intrepid editors working through the vast Franklin archival collections at the American Philosophical Society and Yale University began publishing a professionally crafted edition of his papers. Prompted by the availability of many of these papers for the first time, a new generation of historians embarked on a dramatic and unprecedented reevaluation of one of America's greatest personalities. This resulted in a complete rebranding of Franklin's image. As the twentieth



century ended, Franklin emerged as a complicated personality who experienced both triumphs and failures. These efforts to humanize Franklin have coincided with the application of new perspectives on his pivotal diplomatic career. Some of these have included recognition of Franklin as America's first foreign minister who helped shape what became the vast State Department of the U.S. government. Other bodies of ideas including the Cold War and the concept of an "Atlantic World" have provoked new assessments of how Franklin's multinational environment influenced him and how his contributions to literature, culture, science as well as diplomacy have influenced the world on a broader scale.

The American delegation to France evolved through three distinct phases. The earliest consisted of a three-person commission with instructions from Congress to engage a foreign court whose willingness to receive them was uncertain. Knowing the magnitude of their mission, Franklin assessed the abilities of his American contemporaries and concluded that he alone possessed the talent and experience to achieve their stated goals. To implement his homespun covert scheme, Franklin took advantage of a vaguely defined mission. This allowed Franklin to establish his personal residence in Paris as the headquarters of the America delegation and control the flow of information among his fellow commissioners. As Franklin consolidated his personal power, the delegation experienced multiple episodes of internal conflict. Franklin was directly and knowingly responsible for a large portion of this infighting that hurt their reputation and impeded the delegation's progress. He also ignored or failed to confront multiple threats to the commission's stability and success. The most startling was Franklin's blatant and lackadaisical approach to protecting sensitive diplomatic information from questionable associates and suspected spies. Using a chaotic environment to his advantage, Franklin provoked divisions within the delegation to sideline the effectiveness of his colleagues. A central

component of this strategy rested on the persistent diplomatic failures and professional embarrassments of fellow commissioner Arthur Lee. These blunders enabled Franklin to align himself unofficially with Commissioner Silas Deane against the hapless Lee. With Lee removed and Deane likewise reduced to a limited sphere of influence, Franklin could embellish his already existing celebrity in Versailles. As Congress continually amended its instructions to the increasingly dysfunctional delegation, it became clear that the nomination of a sole delegate in Paris would quell the infighting and create a greater measure of accountability. At the urging of the French ministry, Congress designated Franklin as its minister plenipotentiary in France thus freeing him to implement the second stage of his diplomatic agenda.

Despite Congressional efforts, the problems plaguing the delegation continued even after Franklin became America's sole delegate before the French court. This new phase exhibited a further breakdown of communications that resulted from what his associates described as Franklin's reckless diplomacy. Despite these criticisms, Franklin increasingly imbedded himself within the fabric of Versailles and managed to maintain French support. Eventually, suspicions arose among the other commissioners and members of Congress about Franklin's true loyalties. To keep an eye on Franklin's activities Congress dispatched Col. John Laurens as a special agent both to assist Franklin and to evaluate the elder statesman's pandering to the French. Franklin perceived the appointment and potential meddling of Laurens as a none-too-veiled condemnation of his performance as minister. He thus used the moment as an opportunity to request Congress for permission to retire because of his advancing age. Congress denied this proposition and requested that Franklin continue as its sole minister in Paris. By reaffirming his assignment, Congress in essence preserved the status quo and enabled Franklin to continue his personal style of diplomacy unchecked and unchanged.

As time passed, it appeared that Franklin was merely performing his perfunctory ministerial duties without actively advancing America's aims. While this was partially true, Franklin also was anticipating the diplomatic strategy of the British during the eventual process of concluding the war. Franklin knew from personal experience and an understanding of Europe's ancient rivalries that Britain would seek to subvert the budding Franco-American alliance. Realizing the depths of Anglo-French animosity from the moment he arrived in France, Franklin consciously cajoled the Versailles elite to be on their guard against the vindictive British.

On January 2, 1782, the British diplomat David Hartley wrote Franklin proposing peace negotiations between Britain and America without French involvement. Franklin sternly rejected separate negotiations, imbedded himself within the French ministry and commenced what marked the third phase of Franklin's French initiative. This stage included both the ending hostilities and achieving peace through the negotiation of the first treaty of the American nation. During a period of eleven months, Franklin brilliantly manipulated the traditional enmities between Britain and France, currying the favor of each when needed, and deflecting one against the other when required. Eventually tired of the long and costly war, the British unexpectedly agreed to a set of terms proposed by Franklin that London had previously rejected as unacceptable. Deftly guiding the process toward a favorable conclusion while remaining behind the scenes, Franklin manipulated the Spanish, French, and British ministers to negotiate an end to hostilities on January 20, 1783. Once British resolve was broken without his direct involvement, Franklin was able to secure the most advantageous peace for America. On September 3, 1783, the definitive peace craftily finagled by Franklin materialized with the signing of the Treaty of Paris.

Following the conclusion of the treaty, Franklin remained in France for almost two years engaging in a multitude of interests, including a continued banter with the British over various incarnations of American independence. Franklin expressed an interest in a reconciliation between Britain and America and offered a variety of ideas on how to achieve it. He also boldly offered suggestions about constructing an Atlantic family alliance among the former belligerent powers to form a new union of mutual interests. Despite his efforts to define the role of a strong American entity within the evolving Atlantic community, Franklin remained removed from the New World and immersed in the pursuit of his rich European lifestyle. While he fulfilled his obligation to his country, he was also entertaining the best options for his impending retirement and last years of life. Franklin continued bargaining with his British contemporaries with or without the blessings of the French to define the outlines of a renewed Anglo-American rapprochement that would perpetrate an English speaking dominion across the North Atlantic world. It was only after he returned in 1785 to the United States he helped bring into existence that he realized that Americans valued their independence and freedom so much that there was no realistic hope that he could participate in creating a new confederation of Atlantic nations.

## Chapter One:

### An Evolving historiography

The historical analysis of Benjamin Franklin has undergone dramatic changes over the previous two centuries. In the decades following his death, scholars constructed their critiques to present Franklin as an infallible American hero. The earliest historians presented their assessments of Franklin in a one-dimensional fashion that championed facts and accomplishments with no in-depth interpretation of the events. Leonard Woods' expansive 1826 biography of Franklin successfully established and cemented this methodology among Franklin scholars. As the nineteenth century progressed, historians slowly began to question the validity of this approach, although no significant revisionism occurred. In 1867, James Parton produced the dramatic two-volume *The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin* that served as a reminder to historians that their craft lacked ingenuity and critical analysis. This prompted a concerted effort by several important scholars to offer new insights and perspectives to Franklin's historiography. Despite this, actual progress remained limited as represented by Jeremiah Chaplin's hero-themed 1876 *The Life of Benjamin Franklin*. The first significant attempt to modernize Franklin's historical legacy occurred in 1899 when Sydney George Fisher actively attacked the failure of his fellow historians to explore Franklin's strengths and weaknesses and produced *The True Benjamin Franklin*. As this growing thirst for truth grew within the historical community, a backlash against modernization was simultaneously brewing. This wave of resistance against revisionism triumphed when Carl Van Doren produced his 1938 Pulitzer Prize winning and remarkably flattering biography titled *Benjamin Franklin*. This definitive work paused Franklin's historiography for nearly three decades until the publication of Richard Morris' 1965 *The Peace Makers*. Morris' work was a watershed moment for the historical review of Franklin because he reinterpreted Franklin's legacy by applying a human component to his study. In the ensuing

decades, historians have appeared increasingly determined to dismiss all biases and humanize Franklin to gain a thorough understanding of his personal strengths and weaknesses. As Franklin's historiography enters its third century, newly available primary sources have combined with contemporary perspectives such as the concept of an Atlantic world to produce unique insights and demonstrate that understanding this dynamic personality is a work in progress.

In 1826 American Protestant theologian, Leonard Woods produced one of the earliest complete works on Franklin titled *The Life of Benjamin Franklin*. This significant publication helped establish the hero-worship that continues to influence Franklin's historiography nearly two centuries later. Despite the work's extensive length, the author failed to present the majority of his source materials, instead opting to include an appendix of various writings credited to Franklin without specific references about their application to the text. Woods began his biography by tracing Franklin's lineage back to 1555 to establish that Franklin came from a line of great thinkers and inventors.<sup>1</sup> The author included an anecdote about how the Franklin family were among the first in England to convert to Protestantism in an effort to inflate their presence during definitive historical changes. Woods also recounted how Franklin's grandfather was a prominent inventor who devised a contraption during the reign of Roman Catholic Mary I that consisted of a stool that concealed the Franklin's English Bible and allowed them to read it without detection from the Catholic proctor.<sup>2</sup> Woods clearly intended to paint the Franklin family as prominent innovators who stood at the forefront of the Reformation. This characterization was

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard woods, *The Life of Benjamin Franklin: Including a Sketch of the Rise and Progress of the War of Independence, and of the Various Negotiations at Paris for Peace; with the History of His Political and other Writings* (London: Hunt and Clarke, 1826), 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

easily applicable to Benjamin Franklin's later rebellious but righteous actions during the American Revolution.

Woods' treatment of Franklin's diplomatic activities demonstrated his calculated intention to avoid any disparaging references in favor of results and achievements. Of Franklin's first residency in London between 1757 and 1762, Woods diminished Franklin's role in the failure of this endeavor by attributing the outcome to Britain's preoccupation with European events and lack of concern for Pennsylvania politics.<sup>3</sup> Woods then quickly turned his attention to more flattering events of the period. He specifically highlighted that the University of St. Andrews, the University of Edinburgh, and Oxford University all awarded Franklin honorary doctorates during this period.<sup>4</sup> Woods' strategy of selective presentation was also evident in his assessment of Franklin's brief return to America. He avoided the political miscalculations that cost Franklin his seat in the Pennsylvania Assembly in favor of promoting the championing of his efforts by the local anti-proprietary party. When analyzing Franklin's second dispatch to London, Woods provided a stale chronicle of events and clearly chose to keep Franklin's role in the repeal of the Stamp Act at the forefront.

Woods' treatment of Franklin's diplomatic endeavor to France mirrored his account of his earlier years in London. The author immediately recounted in detail how the French ministry received Franklin and expressed their utmost respect for him. From this vantage point, Woods focused on the negotiations surrounding the Franco-American alliance and eventual Treaty of Paris by presenting a very plain and straightforward rendition of dates and achievements. Woods clearly avoided any mention of the public controversies that surrounded Franklin during this phase of his public career, instead choosing to inflate Franklin's stature. Woods accomplished

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

this through a series of anecdotes including an account of how British diplomat Richard Oswald advised the British ministry that “nothing was to be expected from Dr. Franklin inconsistent to his duty to America.”<sup>5</sup> This pandering to Franklin’s celebrity continued throughout his examination of the negotiations and signing of the Treaty of Paris. Woods concluded his assessment of the negotiations by describing Franklin’s triumphant return to America and noted “he was surrounded by old men, who had petitioned heaven to live long enough to behold his return.”<sup>6</sup> This flattery continued through Woods’ account of Franklin’s final years.

In 1867, James Parton produced the two volume *Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin*. Parton’s introduction explicitly acknowledged that the central contribution of his study to Franklin’s historiography was the inclusion and consideration on a larger scale of Franklin’s 1725 philosophical pamphlet *A Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure and Pain*. Despite this consideration, Parton’s study closely mirrored Woods’ biography published forty-one years earlier. The author documented this work slightly better than Woods’ study by including sporadic footnotes although most source materials remained unclear. Parton began his examination of Franklin by tracing his lineage back hundreds of years to a family of English blacksmiths. Parton used this to indicate that Franklin’s ancestors supplied their villages with iron and therefore were important contributors to the public good.<sup>7</sup> Parton continued by enhancing Franklin’s exceptional personality and described him as a “devouring reader.”<sup>8</sup> Once establishing Franklin’s exceptionalism, Parton applied this perspective to all phases of his work.

When examining Franklin’s diplomatic exploits, Parton relied heavily on Franklin’s celebrity to present his account. Parton began his assessment of Franklin’s first dispatch to

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>7</sup> James Parton, *Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin*, (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1867), 1: 14.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.



London by highlighting his grand reception at the house of botanist and Fellow of the Royal Society Peter Collinson. The author used this anecdote to construct his study around Franklin's stature with the great thinkers and scientists in London. Parton's overall assessment of Franklin's political activities in London was general, and the author generously declared Franklin's endeavor a partial success.<sup>9</sup> The remainder of Parton's first volume followed Franklin back to Philadelphia and then examines his return to London. Parton's rendition of these events mirrored Woods' in both style and content.

In volume two of this study, Parton championed Franklin's notoriety in Paris claiming, "he came to Paris, to Passy, to Versailles; conferred with ministers, dines with princes, supped familiarity with the most distinguished ladies, and played for some weeks, the role of first lion."<sup>10</sup> About Franklin's election by Congress as minister plenipotentiary to France, Parton claimed, "every true friend to America in Paris rejoiced in this triumph of Franklin over his mean, insidious foes."<sup>11</sup> This dismissal of the other Americans and promotion of Franklin's greatness carried through the remainder of Parton's study. When addressing the problematic relations between Franklin and John Adams, Parton dismissed Adams by stating, "his jealousy of Dr. Franklin sometimes amounted to a mania."<sup>12</sup> Parton concluded his examination of the Paris negotiations by chronicling the events surrounding the signing of the Treaty of Paris in a matter-of-fact tone.

In 1876, Jeremiah Chaplin produced a similarly traditional biography of Franklin titled *The Life of Benjamin Franklin*. This work clearly indicated that Franklin's historiography had grown stale by the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Chaplin's biography mirrored Woods'

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 408.

<sup>10</sup> James Parton, *Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin*, (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott and Co., 1867), 2: 344.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 378.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 504.

and Parton's work in style, presentation, and poor documentation of source material. The importance of this work in the study of Franklins' historiography is that it represents fifty years of frozen scholarship between Woods' contribution and Chaplin's rehashing.

Chaplin began his assessment of Franklin's diplomacy by following Parton's lead and highlighting Franklin's grand welcome by Peter Collinson in London. Chaplin asserted that Franklin was a frugal American who, despite his celebrity, kept his attention focused on his mission.<sup>13</sup> The author presented Franklin's first endeavor to London and offered the same explanation as his fellow historians. He noted that although Franklin fervently pursued his duties, the British were not interested in Pennsylvania politics and failed to engage the matter.<sup>14</sup> Chaplin's account of Franklin's second diplomatic assignment to London revealed his flair for enhancing Franklin's stature. The author described Franklin's responsibilities as "demanding the highest statesmanship, and in which all his greatest qualities were to be brought into exercise and put to the severest test."<sup>15</sup> From here, Chaplin presented Franklin's role in the Stamp Act debate in a precise but stale manner that focused on events and results without much analysis.

Chaplin's treatment of the Paris negotiations focused on the adversity Franklin faced and championed his diplomatic abilities. Chaplin noted that the struggling colonial army discouraged French sympathy, and that Franklin's ability to achieve success in Paris initially appeared unlikely.<sup>16</sup> Once Chaplin painted a picture of Franklin the underdog, he relied heavily on Franklin's celebrity to demonstrate how the Franco-American alliance came to fruition. Chaplin noted how "Franklin and his fellow commissioners were formally introduced to the King but

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<sup>13</sup> Jeremiah Chaplin, *The Life of Benjamin Franklin* (Boston: D. Lothrop and Co., 1876), 222.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 341.

Franklin was the center of attention.”<sup>17</sup> Chaplin’s approach to highlight Franklin’s reputation and focus on his reception heavily diminished his ability to analyze the roles the other American commissioners played. Chaplin also ignored any controversies or suspicions that surrounded Franklin during this period in favor of promoting his infallibility stating that Congress “showed their entire confidence in his ability and integrity.”<sup>18</sup> This hero worship and lack of analysis continued throughout Chaplin’s account of the peace process and the signing of the Treaty of Paris.

By the end of the nineteenth century, historians were began to criticize Franklin’s traditional historiography, although they acted with restraint. Sydney George Fisher and his biography *The True Benjamin Franklin* challenged this caution in 1899. In this work, Fisher explicitly alerted the reader to how Franklin’s legacy became a creation of historians. In the work’s preface, Fisher compared Franklin’s legacy to that of George Washington. He noted that both individuals suffered from the myth making that turned them into abstract qualities and avoided the “eternal truths of human nature.”<sup>19</sup> Fischer then proceeded to explain how this applied to each of them. He noted that historians created Washington’s myth by ignoring personal habits and traits, instead building him into a political and military phenomenon. The author then contended that the legacy of Franklin endured the same treatment. Fisher highlighted that historians frequently ignored components of Franklin’s personality while exaggerating other aspects.<sup>20</sup> The author concluded that Franklin “has been modified into an impossible prodigy.”<sup>21</sup> Despite this, Fisher predicted that the human side of Franklin was bound to shine through

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 342-3.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 361.

<sup>19</sup> Sydney George Fischer, *The True Benjamin Franklin* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1899), 5.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 8.

because “the human in him was so interlaced with the divine that the one dragged the other into the light.”<sup>22</sup>

Fisher’s analysis of Franklin’s diplomatic activities was unique for his time. The author devoted an entire chapter to Franklin’s first dispatch to London and titled it “Difficulties and Failures in England.” The author explicitly declared that Franklin’s mission to change Pennsylvania into a royal province failed. He noted that Franklin did not push the issue, and the king did not entertain the notion.<sup>23</sup> Fisher consciously balanced this account by asserting that despite Franklin’s failure, he did possess notable diplomatic skills. Fisher provided examples of how Franklin “gave those famous answers which enhanced his reputation more than any one act of his life, except, perhaps, his experiment with the kite.”<sup>24</sup> An example used by Fisher was Franklin’s response to a suspicious question from a British minister about whether he was acquainted with Newfoundland to which Franklin answered, “I was never there.”<sup>25</sup>

Fisher titled chapter nine “The Embassy to France and Its Scandals.” At this point, Fisher’s treatment of Franklin became more personal, and the author highlighted Franklin’s personal insecurities and his feeling that he was, “old and good for nothing.”<sup>26</sup> Despite this rhetoric, Fisher noted that Franklin readily accepted his dispatch to France and included several flattering anecdotes. Fisher noted that the French responded to Franklin’s arrival with enthusiasm and adoration that they never had afforded another American.<sup>27</sup> He contended that it turned into extravagant worship, and they embellished every detail regarding Franklin and even altered his

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 234.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 272.

age by four years to inflate his accomplishments.<sup>28</sup> Despite this flattery, Fisher's work remained remarkably balanced given the period of its publication.

Fisher's most dramatic challenge to the established historiography was his analysis of the Franco-American alliance. The author stunningly sidelined Franklin's role in the event. He noted, "this treaty, which secured the success of our revolution by giving us the assistance of a French army and fleet, was the result of unforeseen events, and was not obtained by the labors of Franklin or those of any of the commissioners."<sup>29</sup> The author contended that France desired to align with the colonists but refrained from doing so until the revolution's tide turned against the British. The author credited France's decision to join the colonists to Burgoyne's surrender to American General Gates at Philadelphia.<sup>30</sup> This assessment reflected a growing trend and directly contrasted with Woods, Parton, and Chaplain who all asserted that the alliance resulted from Franklin's celebrity and diplomatic skills.

Fisher also examined the rift between John Adams and Franklin to demonstrate that Franklin's history was more than dates and accomplishments. Fisher noted that after Adams arrived in France he immediately took issue with the climate that he encountered. The author quoted Adams' description of Franklin as, "a great genius, a great wit, a great humorist, a great satirist, and a great politician is certain, that he was a great philosopher, a great moralist, and a great statesman is more questionable."<sup>31</sup> Fisher used this quotation that included both praise and condemnation to demonstrate that Franklin was a complex personality who possessed both strengths and weaknesses.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 273.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 299.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 301.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 307.

In 1931, on the two hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of Franklin's birth, *the Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* published "The Public Career of Benjamin Franklin: A Life of Service" by Herman V. Ames, which directly addressed Franklin's evolving historiography in his introduction and chastised other historians for their failure to present a balanced assessment of Franklin. The author described Franklin's historical caricature as that of a demi-god and argued that historians needed to humanize Franklin to understand who he was as a person. Despite this convincing appeal, Ames' article was brief and vague and contributed little to Franklin's scholarship.

Ames' examination of Franklin's two diplomatic assignments to London were identical to the interpretations offered by Woods, Parton, and Chaplin. The author hastily mentions Franklin's first endeavor to London and offered no synthesis of the events. Instead, Ames focused on Franklin's second dispatch to Britain and presented him as a celebrity who "was the defender of not only of the rights of Pennsylvania but of America in general."<sup>32</sup> This premise remained consistent throughout the article's brief account of Franklin's role in the repeal of the Stamp Act. Ames' discussion of Franklin's diplomatic mission to France was equally brief and unanalytical. The author avoided mentioning any controversies or troubled relations during the negotiations in favor of championing Franklin's greatness. Ames stated of Franklin "it was he who was instrumental in bringing about the alliance with France."<sup>33</sup> This flattery continued throughout Ames' assessment of the signing of the definitive peace and the remainder of Franklin's life.

As the early twentieth century progressed, historians increasingly acknowledged that Franklin's historiography lacked depth and balance. Despite this revisionist rhetoric, the

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<sup>32</sup> Herman V. Ames, "The Public Career of Benjamin Franklin: A Life of Service" *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 55, no. 2 (1931), 200.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

traditional historical interpretations remained prevalent. These calls for humanizing Franklin temporarily ceased when in 1938 literary critic Carl Van Doren produced the Pulitzer Prize winning *Benjamin Franklin*. This monumental biography presented Franklin as the accomplished, selfless American genius whose unwavering loyalty to the colonies embodied enormous virtue. Van Doren's pivotal study guided a quarter century of Franklin scholarship and inadvertently inspired the next generation of historians to champion the revisionist agenda.

Van Doren channeled Woods and Parton among others and began his biography by tracing Franklin's lineage to a line of notable individuals. The author focused on one ancestor of Franklin named Thomas who was a talented blacksmith and also served as clerk of the county court, a lawyer, a conveyance, who participated in other aspects of public business.<sup>34</sup> Van Doren used this individual to establish the greatness of the Franklin family and noted that Thomas "seems a kind of first draft of the great Franklin."<sup>35</sup> Once Van Doren established Franklin's exceptionalism, his biography never wavered from this perception.

Van Doren explained the failure of Franklin's first diplomatic mission to Britain as the result of circumstances he could not control. The author consistently diminished Franklin's role in favor of other miscues including an instance where the British ministers disregarded documents presented by Franklin from the Pennsylvania Assembly because they were difficult to understand.<sup>36</sup> Van Doren concluded that despite Franklin's tireless efforts, to the British he "was merely the agent of a remote colony squabbling with its proprietors."<sup>37</sup> Van Doren's examination of Franklin's second dispatch to London employed a straightforward approach to the events. This included his evaluation of Franklin's famous miscalculation regarding the administration of the

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<sup>34</sup> Carl Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin* (New York: The Viking Press, 1938), 4.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

Stamp Act, the negative reaction among the colonists, and Franklin's eventual testimony before the House of Commons that helped effect the measure's appeal. Van Doren concluded by attributing the Stamp Act's repeal to Franklin's persuasive abilities declaring, "no other man alive could have delivered the argument as Franklin did."

Van Doren's account of Franklin in France espoused the traditional interpretations reflected in the work of Woods, Parton, and Chaplin. Van Doren championed Franklin's manipulation of France's fears about America's potential reconciliation with Britain to facilitate the Franco-American alliance. The author diminished the presence of the other American delegates and declared "Franklin had won a diplomatic campaign equal in results to Saratoga."<sup>38</sup> When discussing the signing of the preliminary articles for peace between Britain and America, Van Doren significantly downplayed the fact that the agreement occurred without French involvement, violated the American commissioners' Congressional instructions, and insulted America's foreign ally. Van Doren instead stated that Franklin's celebrity with the French eased all tensions, and French minister Vergennes believed "they had done well for their country and by securing their independence had overcome a difficult obstacle to the general peace."<sup>39</sup> The author's assessment indicated that even the French believed that Franklin knew what was best for the Paris negotiations. Van Doren's account of the signing of the Treaty of Paris was similarly flattering and straightforward. The author concluded his analysis of Paris with an assessment of Franklin's selfless patriotism noting "but when it came to making terms of peace Franklin's instinct was towards the completest independence of America from all of Europe."<sup>40</sup> Van Doren's work dominated a quarter century of Franklin scholarship and remains a hallmark of Franklin's historiography.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 593

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 695.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 699.



In 1965, Richard B. Morris produced *The Peace Makers: The Great Powers and American Independence*. This study chronicled the personalities of those who negotiated the Treaty of Paris. By examining how the character of Franklin and the other diplomats shaped these events, Morris placed human nature at the epicenter of the negotiations. This approach rippled throughout the historical community and inspired other historians to approach the subject using similar perspectives. This revisionist movement came to define Franklin's historiography during the latter twentieth century.

Morris separated Franklin from the other delegates and devoted an entire chapter solely to his exploits. The author claimed, "there was about Benjamin Franklin a certain suppleness and depth that set him apart from his two more unbending and less complicated colleagues in the peacemaking."<sup>41</sup> Morris examined Franklin's diplomatic tactics and highlighted several instances of behavior that contrasted with the established persona of Franklin the righteous and selfless patriot. The author recounted how after Franklin knowingly allowed his personal notes to fall into the hands of the British, he created and circulated a false excerpt from *the Boston Independent Chronicle* detailing how British officials compensated American Indians for scalping colonists to create a diversion from his professional blunder. Morris also examined how Franklin's personal interests possibly affected his faithful execution of his official duties. The author detailed how during the Paris negotiations Franklin secretly retained his investments in the business syndicate that constituted the proposed British colony of Vandalia in present day Kentucky and West Virginia. Morris concluded that although no concrete evidence exists that this influenced Franklin's actions, there was strong evidence suggesting that Franklin would benefit financially if the British maintained control of the company. Citing such entanglements,

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<sup>41</sup> Richard Morris, *The Peacemakers: The Great Powers and American Independence* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 248.

Morris claimed, “Franklin was the one member of the Peace delegation about whom there might be a suspicion of a conflict of interest.”<sup>42</sup>

Morris evaluated Franklin’s personality and attributed much of the friction between the American commissioners to his demeanor. The author cited how Franklin’s colleagues complained of his “saltiness, his ribald streak, his long spells of apathy and inattention to correspondence, his reticence, and his inscrutable ways.”<sup>43</sup> Morris also clearly painted Franklin as a pessimist who felt disdain for his fellow man. The author quoted Franklin’s referring to humanity as “more easily provoked than reconciled, more disposed to do mischief to each other than to make reparation, much more easily deceived than undeceived, and having more pride and even pleasure in killing than begetting one another.”<sup>44</sup> These abrasive character traits contrasted with the traditional Franklin persona of the diligent patriotic genius. This approach helped differentiate Morris’ study from the work of his predecessors and his influence on other historians was readily apparent.

In 1972, Cecil B. Currey produced the unique and remarkably daring for its time *Code Number 72/ Benjamin Franklin: Patriot or Spy*. Currey’s study argued that Franklin used his fickle diplomacy to effect his personal gains and guarantee his own viability regardless of the outcome of the American Revolution. This premise contrasted with almost two centuries of Franklin’s historical consideration and actually questioned Franklin’s patriotism. Through a careful reevaluation of the letters and papers of Franklin and his fellow diplomats and associates, Currey revisited many of the controversies that historians traditionally averted in hopes of exploring who Franklin really was.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 250.

Currey's treatment of Franklin in France was unflattering and accusatory. The author began by stating that although Franklin significantly aided the American cause, "there is reason to suspect that this was not his primary purpose on his mission to France."<sup>45</sup> Currey claimed that historians have created the myth that Franklin was a man of virtue by suppressing any claims to the contrary, particularly those of his closest associates. The author then extensively provided examples of the other American delegates in France whose opinions of Franklin were anything but flattering. The author cited Adams' repeated inflammatory comments about Franklin and noted that Lee felt Franklin was dangerous and "capable of any wickedness."<sup>46</sup> Currey suggested that Franklin assisted the British in their aims and cited the security breaches in Paris as evidence. The author stated, "if Benjamin Franklin was innocent of complicity in the British spying operations, then the information leakage from his embassy is incomprehensible."<sup>47</sup> Currey supported his notion with a detailed account of the amount of Franklin's official reports and personal correspondence that are in the British Archives. By suggesting that Franklin was disloyal, disliked, and possibly incompetent, Currey's caricature of him differed greatly from the adulation afforded to this founding father by previous historians.

As the twentieth century ended, historians continued to revisit Franklin and offer new interpretations of his legacy. In 1996, David T. Morgan produced *The Devious Dr. Franklin, Colonial Agent: Benjamin Franklin's Years in London*. Morgan's examination of Franklin's diplomatic activities of this era presents Franklin as a multilayered personality who wavered between selfless ambitions and self-serving tendencies. From this premise, Morgan recounted

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<sup>45</sup> Cecil B. Currey, *Code Number 72/ Benjamin Franklin: Patriot or Spy?* (London: Prentice Hall International, Inc., 1972), 9.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

Franklin's diplomatic experiences in London with a clear intention to demonstrate how Franklin's duality showed through his activities.

Morgan used Franklin's first dispatch to London seeking a Royal status for Pennsylvania to demonstrate how a personal vendetta could fuel his actions. The author claimed that Franklin personally despised Pennsylvania proprietor Thomas Penn and concealed the fact that a royal government in Pennsylvania could threaten the liberties of its citizens because he was dedicated to defeating Penn at all costs. Although Franklin's mission faltered, Morgan used this deception to argue that Franklin's animosity towards the Penn family motivated him to "say whatever he had to say and do whatever he had to do to achieve their ouster."<sup>48</sup> Despite this, Morgan concluded that Franklin's ultimate loyalties rested with the United States. The author cited Franklin's estrangement from and partial disinheritance of his son William because of his loyalist activities as proof that above all else Franklin "cast his lot with the colonies."<sup>49</sup>

Also in 1996, Robert Middlekauff produced *Benjamin Franklin and his Enemies*. Written from the perspective of Franklin's adversaries, this work explored the human component of this historical titan by examining how the emotions of love, hate, scorn, and anger drove Franklin and his colleagues. Middlekauff applied these sentiments to evaluate how they affected Franklin's actions during the colonial and revolutionary politics that defined his life. Additionally, Middlekauff analyzed these emotions and actions in the context of a revolution during which politics and passion combined to produce intense animosities.

Middlekauff devoted his first chapter to evaluating which qualities Franklin possessed that contributed to his popularity. The author concluded that Franklin's warmth and natural

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<sup>48</sup> David T. Morgan, *The Devious Dr. Franklin, Colonial Agent: Benjamin Franklin's Year in London* (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1996), 68.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

curiosity combined with “his generosity and largeness of Spirit” to attract admirers.<sup>50</sup> Middlekauff then examined how these qualities earned Franklin enemies among other powerful personalities of his era because “these men disliked anyone larger than themselves.”<sup>51</sup> Once Middlekauff established how Franklin’s dynamic personality could invoke adulation or ire depending on the individual, he focused on four key adversaries of Franklin. The first was Thomas Penn and Franklin’s first dispatch to London. The central theme of this section rested on the well-known animosity between Franklin and Penn and Middlekauff predictably argued that Franklin acted irrationally out of his personal hatred for Penn. Middlekauff attributed Franklin’s problematic relationship with Arthur Lee to the diplomat’s belief that Franklin was corrupt and not trustworthy because of Franklin’s propensity to withhold information.<sup>52</sup> The author then addressed American politician Ralph Izard’s troubled relationship with Franklin and argued that Izard disliked Franklin because Franklin was more powerful and he wanted to acquire Franklin’s pivotal role in the Paris negotiations.<sup>53</sup> Middlekauff concluded his work by examining the relationship between Franklin and John Adams. The author concluded that Adams’ vanity naturally caused him to seek quarrels, and Franklin’s opaque approach to diplomacy played perfectly into his combative tendencies.<sup>54</sup>

Over the last two centuries, historians have both romanticized and castigated Franklin’s legacy. As the twenty-first century dawned, historians have increasingly included new ideas and perspectives into their scholarship of this American icon. A prominent example of this is Jack Fruchtman Jr.’s 2006 study *Atlantic Cousins: Benjamin Franklin and his Visionary Friends*. By

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<sup>50</sup> Robert Middlekauff, *Benjamin Franklin and his Enemies*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 21.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 23

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

applying the concept of an Atlantic world, Fruchtman explored Franklin's role in the circulation of scientific, political, philosophical, and medicinal ideas throughout the Atlantic. Fruchtman's methodology involved examining Franklin's role as the connective tissue among the great liberal thinkers of America, Britain, and France. By dividing his approach into three separate dominions, Fruchtman effectively demonstrated that Franklin's contributions, influences and presence embodied the concept of an Atlantic personality.

Fruchtman began by centering Franklin in the growing American abolitionist movement. The author detailed how Franklin published the anti-slavery writings of George Whitefield and served as an intermediary between Whitfield and Philadelphia schoolmaster and abolitionist Anthony Benezet, who founded a school in Philadelphia for free black children. Benezet wrote to English abolitionist Granville Sharp persuading him to introduce himself to Franklin who resided in London at the time. This effectively united the abolitionist efforts of the English-born Whitefield and Sharp with those of the French-born Benezet and America's Franklin to create an Atlantic web of morality. Fruchtman attributed this connection to Franklin's eventual role in the Pennsylvania abolitionist society and his efforts to persuade Congress to abolish the institution.<sup>55</sup> Fruchtman then expanded Franklin's abolitionist ties and linked him to Philadelphia physician Benjamin Rush. Fruchtman recounted Rush's prolific work and future leadership in the Pennsylvania abolitionist society. The author also detailed Franklin's relationship with Thomas Paine and his role in Paine's immigration to America. Fruchtman then recounted how Paine affected the American Revolution and credited Franklin by noting, "Thomas Paine was a spiritual cousin of Benjamin Franklin."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Jack Fruchtman Jr., *Atlantic Cousins: Benjamin Franklin and his Visionary Friends* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2005), 54.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

Fruchtman applied this same strategy to Franklin's other noticeable relationships, including his connective presence between Welsh philosopher Richard Price and English theologian and political theorist Joseph Priestley. This linked Franklin to the circulation of Price and Priestley's ideas about religious dissent, political reformation, and their respective scientific exploits in mathematics and chemistry. From here, Fruchtman examined Franklin's association with several other prominent personalities. Fruchtman recounted how scientist Jean-Paul Marat actively sought Franklin's endorsement in his bid for acceptance into the Royal Academy of Sciences. Franklin was unimpressed with his work, however and Marat's efforts failed.<sup>57</sup> Fruchtman noted that this caused Marat to give up on his scientific research and focus on politics where he gained infamy during the French Revolution. Fruchtman also analyzed Franklin's troubled relationship with German Physician Franz-Anton Mesmer and Franklin's notable dismissal of him as a "charlatan."<sup>58</sup>

Fruchtman concluded his examination of Franklin's Atlantic influence by examining how his political exploits in America survived him and influenced his associates. He detailed how the French revolutionaries Marquis de Condorcet and Jacques-Pierre Brissot greatly admired Franklin's public and philosophical contributions, specifically the unicameral Pennsylvania legislature that Franklin helped create through the state's constitution. Fruchtman used this setup to demonstrate Franklin's Atlantic presence when he detailed how after the French Revolution Thomas Paine, Condorcet, and Brissot collaborated with others to draft the 1793 French constitution that mirrored Pennsylvania's state equivalent. By detailing this, Fruchtman demonstrated the true presence of Franklin's fingerprint on the Atlantic world.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 231.

As Franklin's historiography enters the twenty-first century, historians appear dedicated to thoroughly reevaluating this American icon through the application of new perspectives and use of previously obscure primary sources. This new phase of scholarship has built from the details documented during Franklin's earliest historical consideration and applied the revelations discovered through repeated revisions to interpret his role in a broader context. These new methodologies and perspectives can be combined to expose more fully and accurately Franklin's true fingerprint on America, Europe, and the entire Atlantic world.



## **Chapter Two: The Falsity of Pretended Friends.**

From the beginning of the American Revolution, the Continental Congress poorly conceived the mission it wanted the American delegation to France to carry out when its members arrived in France. Congressional instructions lacked clarity and were open to a variety of interpretations. This necessitated the passage of multiple congressional amendments to elucidate their intentions during the next thirty months. A fundamental flaw was the appointment of three ministers before the French court. This created a triple-headed monster with three personalities that drove the commissioners to work at conflicting aims. The circumstances the delegates encountered in Paris also exacerbated their predicament. The Americans found themselves immersed in an environment saturated with security breaches and uncertain loyalties. In the center of this almost predictable chaos stood Benjamin Franklin. After the dynamics of the delegation became apparent, Franklin concluded that he probably alone possessed the knowledge and ability to accomplish the American mission properly. This belief stemmed from Franklin's advantageous prerevolutionary experiences in British politics and his unique understanding of the Atlantic world. Franklin surmised that these assets would best equip him to achieve a Franco-American alliance against the British and procure the greatest amount of foreign aid for the American Revolution. Knowing that his associates Arthur Lee and Silas Deane lacked these vital strengths, Franklin developed a strategy to configure the commission so he could dictate how it would operate. This entailed forming an alliance with a controllable Deane against the more adversarial Lee who exacerbated the commission's work through a persistent series of diplomatic blunders. Once he effectively silenced both Lee and Deane, Franklin enjoyed an enhanced presence and existing celebrity in Versailles to promote his hegemony before the royal court. Despite the eventual procurement of an impressive Franco-American alliance, the commission

remained problematic and increasingly provoked the ire of Congress. In an effort to streamline the delegation, Congress eventually replaced Deane by the appointment of John Adams, and at the suggestion of the French ministry chose Franklin as America's sole delegate in Paris. Once achieving this designation, Franklin embarked on a mission of his own interpretation to extract America from the British Empire to the advantage of the emerging United States and cement his prestige within the newly configured Atlantic world.

On September 26, 1776, Congress secretly appointed Franklin and Thomas Jefferson to join Silas Deane in Paris as commissioners to the French royal court. Their mission was to secure a Franco-American alliance against the British. Two days later Congress issued instructions that were flexible by design. They directed the commissioners to use every means in their power to secure a military alliance with the France. This granted the commissioners the power to relax their demands "to enlarge their Offers."<sup>1</sup> These directions contained a list of munitions to secure including "twenty or thirty thousand Muskets and bayonets, and a large supply of Ammunition, and Brass Field Pieces."<sup>2</sup> Congress further directed the commissioners to obtain public acknowledgement of United States sovereignty by both the French court and the British Parliament.<sup>3</sup> This directive also detailed the expected conduct of the commissioners and defined their compensation. The commissioners were to live in a humble manner that supported the dignity of their public character.<sup>4</sup> The American delegates also were to keep a record of their expenses and promised that "a handsome allowance be made to each of them as compensation

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<sup>1</sup> Continental Congress to Benjamin Franklin, Silas Deane and Arthur Lee, instructions, September 24, 1776, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

for their time, trouble, risqué, and service.”<sup>5</sup> This initial approach contained two flaws that almost ensured a period of chaos. By directing the commissioners to use all powers at their disposal, they issued a boundless instruction. This provided a justification for a variety of political misdirected behaviors that were difficult to negate. The directive also authorized the delegation to modify American demands to achieve their goals. This provided the commissioners with a vast defense for failing to adhere to their instructions or perhaps engage in activities that contrasted with their stated objectives.

Five days before to Franklin’s departure from Philadelphia, Congress issued another directive. This guideline focused primarily on diplomatic issues. Congress instructed the commissioners to seek the diplomatic recognition of an independent United States by any willing European power.<sup>6</sup> Congress also directed the commissioners to pursue treaties of peace and commerce with other European states without jeopardizing their desired paramount alliance with France.<sup>7</sup> Despite the directives’ general specifications, Congress clearly stipulated that all agreements carried out on behalf of the United States and a foreign state must avoid any favored nation agreements and “be equal and reciprocal.”<sup>8</sup>

On September 26, Congress drafted a five-point sketch of a proposed peace between Britain and the United States as a guide for the commissioners. Unlike their instructions regarding foreign diplomacy, these stipulations were specific and demanding. The outline’s central goal was to demand a desired statement from the mother country: “Great Britain shall renounce and disclaim all pretense of right or authority to govern in any of the United States of

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Continental Congress to Benjamin Franklin, Silas Deane and Arthur Lee, Instructions, October 22, 1776, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

America.”<sup>9</sup> Following this proposed declaration, the draft contained five other stipulations desired in any peace treaty. The first addressed the legal protections afforded to foreign ambassadors in event of capture.<sup>10</sup> Congress included an expression of its desire that a declared peace would establish and expand commerce between Britain and the United States. The sketch also proposed paying £100,000 annually over one hundred years to Britain to alleviate all financial discrepancies resulting from America’s break from the empire.<sup>11</sup> Another provision addressed Franklin personally and his connection to Britain. It stipulated that following an agreed peace Franklin might freely travel to Britain where he had friends “particularly among the best writers and ablest speakers in both houses of Parliament.”<sup>12</sup> The remaining two points reiterated America’s goal of entering into a formal alliance with France and its intention to purchase their new country because taking the land by conquest would cost more.<sup>13</sup> After solemnly considering the role he could play in America’s first diplomatic mission abroad, Jefferson submitted a request to Congress for dismissal from the American delegation to France. Congress accepted his proposal and elected Arthur Lee to replace him.

The secretive nature of Franco-American relations was evident before Franklin’s departure. On October 1, Franklin and Pennsylvania’s congressional delegate Robert Morris submitted a report to the Committee of Secret Correspondence detailing how Arthur Lee had previously secured a secret arms deal from the French court worth £200,000 sterling.<sup>14</sup> The

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<sup>9</sup> Continental Congress to Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and Silas Deane, September 26, 1776, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Benjamin Franklin and Robert Morris to the Committee of Secret Correspondence, October 1, 1776, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

cryptic nature of this agreement revealed an important obstacle for Franklin and the other commissioners. During the arms negotiation, the French expressed sympathy for the American cause but declared their intention to avoid conflict. In response, Franklin and Morris argued that this deal must remain secret for four key reasons. Most importantly, if their enemies learned of it they could intercept potential future shipments. Besides, disclosing the deal might jeopardize subsequent assistance from the already reluctant French. Another reason for concealing the transaction was the belief that Congress contained too many talkative members and secrecy was virtually impossible. Franklin and Morris concluded that because Morris belonged to all the committees regarding importing and receiving, there was no necessity for informing the entire Congress.<sup>15</sup> This affair was indicative of the clandestine tactics that came to define the delegation throughout the entire mission. It established Franklin and Lee's willingness to withhold information from Congress and proved that members of Congress might employ similar tactics.

On October 27, Franklin embarked on his journey to France boarding the warship *Reprisal*. After thirty days at sea the ship arrived at Quiberon Bay off the west coast of France, where Franklin remained for several days awaiting safe passage to land.<sup>16</sup> Upon leaving the ship, Franklin quietly familiarized himself with his surroundings. This involved traveling incognito and avoiding any "publick character."<sup>17</sup> Franklin's primary concern at this point was his uncertainty if the French court was willing to receive delegates from Congress.<sup>18</sup> He also

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Benjamin Franklin to John Hancock, December 8, 1776, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>17</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Silas Deane, December 7, 1776, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> Benjamin Franklin to John Hancock, December 8, 1776, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

expressed concern over the commissioner's potential to embarrass the French and "subject ourselves to the hazard of a disgraceful refusal."<sup>19</sup>

Upon reaching Paris, Franklin received discouraging news from the American Committee of Secret Correspondence. They warned of British agents intending "to prevent European Powers, but France more especially, from giving America aid in this war."<sup>20</sup> This dispatch also alerted Franklin to lapses in security. The committee revealed that the secretary of Congress misplaced a copy of their directions instructing them to negotiate with other courts besides France. The committee advised, "we think it is necessary to mention this to you, lest the paper should have got into the wrong hands."<sup>21</sup> At this early point in his venture to France, Franklin realized his diplomatic advantage over his colleagues. Lee and Deane clearly lacked comparable experiences to Franklin in the European political theater, and Congress obviously was ill prepared to engage in such complicated matters.

On December 23, Franklin, Deane, and Lee announced their presence to the French foreign minister Charles Gravier, the Comte de Vergennes and requested an audience to present their credentials and propose an alliance.<sup>22</sup> The commissioners advised that out of respect, they were requesting an accord with the French first. On December 28, the Americans communicated to the Spanish diplomat Pedro Pablo Abarca de Bolea, the Conde de Aranda offering their personal respects and announcing their intention to cultivate the friendship of the Spanish

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> The Committee of Secret Correspondence to the American Commissioners, December 21, 1776, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>21</sup> The Committee of Secret Correspondence to the American Commissioners, December 30, 1776, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>22</sup> The American Commissioners to Vergennes, December 23, 1776, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

court.<sup>23</sup> This maneuver by the delegation was actually premature. On January 1, 1777, The Committee of Secret Correspondence wrote to Franklin informing him that the Continental Congress voted to instruct the delegation to negotiate a treaty with the court of Spain.<sup>24</sup> Before receiving the correspondence, Franklin wrote the Congress on January 4 reporting his respectful audiences with the Comte de Vergennes and the Conde de Aranda and their consideration of the American proposal for alliance.<sup>25</sup>

Aside from his public activities, Franklin interacted with various merchants, private citizens and intellectuals throughout Paris. One of these individuals was French merchant Jacques-Donatien Leray de Chaumont. By early January, they developed a business relationship centered on Chaumont's merchant connections and ability to acquire vessels.<sup>26</sup> As the two became more acquainted, it became apparent that Franklin needed suitable quarters. On January 28, Chaumont proposed that Franklin relocate to his Hotel de Valentinois in Passy under five stipulations.<sup>27</sup> The first two indicated that Franklin and any family member would pay the sum of six francs for each dinner served for their entire stay.<sup>28</sup> They also agreed that Franklin would pay six livres for each friend who dined with him.<sup>29</sup> The final two addressed other dining issues and Franklin's obligations to provide wine and spirits to hotel visitors.<sup>30</sup> When Franklin entered

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<sup>23</sup> The American Commissioners to the Conde de Aranda, December 28, 1776, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>24</sup> The Committee of Secret Correspondences to Benjamin Franklin, instructions, January 1, 1777, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>25</sup> Benjamin Franklin to the Committee of Secret Correspondence, January 4, 1777, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>26</sup> Leray de Chaumont to Benjamin Franklin, January 16, 1777, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>27</sup> Leray de Chaumont to Benjamin Franklin, January 28, 1777, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

this agreement, he secured both a permanent residence for himself and established the primary location for American activities in France. This was one of Franklin's first efforts to position himself at the center of the delegation and assert his control over the negotiations.

Although Franklin's experience in international diplomacy was advantageous for the delegation, he was not immune to miscalculations. Franklin's first significant mistake was his role in inviting spies into the delegation's administrative operations. During his tenure in London, Franklin befriended a well-connected Massachusetts-born physician named Edward Bancroft. Through Bancroft, Franklin gained valuable information about those around him. As Deane prepared to leave for France in March 1776, Franklin instructed him via the Committee of Secret Correspondence to write a letter and secure a meeting with Bancroft "on the score of an old acquaintance."<sup>31</sup> This was so that Deane could obtain information about Britain. To ensure Bancroft's attention, Franklin advised Deane to "remit him a small bill to defray his expenses in coming to you."<sup>32</sup> By June 1776, Deane confirmed to Franklin and the committee that he was traveling from Bordeaux to Paris to meet Dr. Bancroft and planned to dispatch letters accordingly.<sup>33</sup>

Bancroft was loyal to Franklin in London but was also a friend of former New Hampshire council member turned British spy Paul Wentworth.<sup>34</sup> Through this connection, the British unofficially recruited Bancroft following Franklin's departure in 1775.<sup>35</sup> Once Franklin arrived

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<sup>31</sup> The Committee of Secret Correspondence to Silas Deane, instructions, March 3, 1776, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Silas Deane to Robert Morris, June 23, 1776, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>34</sup> Cecil B. Currey. *Code Number 72 Ben Franklin: Patriot or Spy* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1972), 84.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.



in Paris in December 1776, Wentworth entered into a formal agreement for Bancroft to work as a British agent.<sup>36</sup> Once Bancroft sold his loyalties, he compromised the American mission. The first significant breach came when Bancroft secretly copied a correspondence between Robert Morris and Silas Deane dated December 20, 1776. From this letter, the British Secret Service learned of American shipping, sensitive war information, and details about the depreciation of American currency.<sup>37</sup> The letter also contained specific information about trade between France and the United States.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, Bancroft forwarded his British contacts copies of the congressional appointments of the commissioners, Jefferson's request for dismissal, and other instructions regarding the mission.<sup>39</sup>

As Franklin settled into his home at Passy, the commissioners waited on a response from the Comte de Vergennes. During this period of uncertainty, the Americans realized that their system of communications was flawed. On March 4 the commissioners wrote to the Committee of Secret Correspondence complaining that "the want of intelligence affects the cause of the United States in every department, what accounts of our affairs arrive in Europe at all comes thro' the hands of our enemies."<sup>40</sup> The American's were more correct than they knew. Also dated March 4, Bancroft wrote Franklin a lengthy letter detailing his pivotal role in their communications. He mentioned his possession of receipts and other books, along with monthly reviews for Deane, letters he was forwarding from various individuals to them, a packet of

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<sup>36</sup> Walter Isaacson. *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 334.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Currey. *Code Number 72*, P.87-8.

<sup>40</sup> The American Commissioners to the Committee of Secret Correspondence, March 4, 1777, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

government dispatches and newspaper articles in his possession.<sup>41</sup> Although the commissioners were unaware of Bancroft's deception, they acted as if they feared their surroundings. On a trip to Madrid, Arthur Lee wrote to Franklin that he stopped halfway "in order to negotiate with more secrecy, there appears to be more timidity here than with you."<sup>42</sup> This demonstrates that loyalties were always suspect, even between and among the American delegates.

By March 1, Franklin had fully established his headquarters in Passy.<sup>43</sup> During this early period, he remained close to his residence and periodically traveled to Paris. Franklin described his routine as, "I am now removed to Passi [sic], but am almost every day at Hotel d'Hambourg with Mr. Deane."<sup>44</sup> As the Americans awaited word from the courts of France and Spain, they again addressed the problems within their mission. To the Committee of Secret Correspondence, the commissioners wrote, "It is now more than four months from Mr. Franklin's departure from Philadelphia, and not a line from thence written since that time has hitherto reached either of your commissioners in Europe."<sup>45</sup> The letter reiterated that the only information they received regarding America came through British sources. The commissioners stated that such ignorance "makes us appear small in the eyes of the people here, and is prejudicial to our negotiations."<sup>46</sup>

During this period, the commissioners became concerned with the futility of their mission. They acknowledged their civil treatment but complained that the French court refrained

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<sup>41</sup> Edward Bancroft to Benjamin Franklin, March 4, 1777, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>42</sup> Arthur Lee to Benjamin Franklin, March 5, 1777, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>43</sup> Carl Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin* (New York: The Viking Press, 1938), 576.

<sup>44</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Arthur Lee, March 2, 1777, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>45</sup> The American Commissioners to the Committee of Secret Correspondence, March 12, 1777, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

from openly receiving them to avoid “giving umbrage to England.”<sup>47</sup> The commissioners were further concerned following a response from the Spanish court. Lee informed Franklin and Deane that the Spanish diplomat the Duke de Grimaldi asked him not to come to Madrid but promised to aid them “as far as his own situation will permit.”<sup>48</sup> This assistance rested on Lee’s ability to secure credit from the Conde d’Arnada through Dutch bankers and greatly complicated matters.<sup>49</sup>

In an effort to address the apparent confusion of diplomatic goals, Congress clarified its instructions by declaring its goal of securing American independence without kindling a European conflict. Congress asserted, “they do not presume to propose that France should enter a war on their account.”<sup>50</sup> Despite this, Congress declared that if France entered into a war with Britain over injuries from the earlier French-Indian conflict on the North American continent it would agree to four protocols. The first was that America’s participation in a joint conquest of Canada, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and all the West Indies on France’s behalf provide mutual rights to the fisheries and sugar crop.<sup>51</sup> Congress also stipulated that the U.S. would provide provisions amounting to two million dollars along with six frigates containing twenty-four guns. This directive also addressed Spain’s role in their proposed reconfiguration of the western Atlantic. Congress declared that if Spain joined France in the American cause, the United States

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Arthur Lee to Benjamin Franklin and Silas Deane, March 16, 1777, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> The American Commissioners to Vergennes, March 18, 1777, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

would declare war against Portugal.<sup>52</sup> This stemmed from Portugal's initial support of Britain in the American Revolution and earlier conflicts with Spain over border issues in South America.

Congress's directive outlined their stipulations for the conclusion of hostilities. The first component was that peace could only result from mutual consent. Congress dictated once this occurred the commissioners should work towards several goals. Most important, Congress requested that the delegates persuade the French to prevent the further dispatch of foreign troops to America at all costs. Congress also instructed the commissioners to seek France's help in obtaining future foreign aid.<sup>53</sup> This was a clear effort to preserve America's independence indefinitely by removing any British presence from the region.

Through March, Franklin and the commissioners awaited word from the Comte de Vergennes and the Spanish court over their proposed alliance. During this period, Franklin's celebrity and position invited an endless stream of visitors and communications. The vast majority were European military officers seeking employment in the American army.<sup>54</sup> The Americans had faced this problem since the beginning of hostilities, and Franklin now found himself in the center of this predicament. Congress advised him that many Europeans in the American army have "found it impossible to render themselves useful."<sup>55</sup> In response, they instructed Franklin to discourage those wishing to come to America for military employment.<sup>56</sup> Franklin reported, "I refuse everyday numbers of applications for letters in favour of officers who would go to America, as I know you must have more upon your hands already than you can

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin*, 578.

<sup>55</sup> The Committee of Secret Correspondence to the American Commissioners, March 25, 1777, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

well employ.”<sup>57</sup> To amend the situation, Franklin devised a document he could issue to those requesting a recommendation without actually involving himself. Titled *Model of a Letter of Recommendation of a Person you are Unacquainted With*, Franklin issue a blanket statement “I know nothing of him, not even his name.”<sup>58</sup>

As newer problems garnered much of Franklin’s attention, old issues threatened the delegation. By now, Bancroft had settled in as a resident of Franklin’s household in Passy. From this vantage point, he concocted an elaborate scheme to relay information to British authorities. This entailed writing in invisible ink over other letters and sealing them in a bottle under the pseudonym “Dr. Edward Edwards”. Bancroft would then hide the bottle in a specific tree in the Tuileries gardens behind the Louvre at 9:30 p.m. every Tuesday.<sup>59</sup> Thomas Jeans, secretary to British diplomat Lord Stormont, would retrieve the bottle from the secret spot and forward the information.<sup>60</sup> In return, Jeans often left false and misleading information for Bancroft to forward to the commissioners.<sup>61</sup> Franklin and Deane harbored no doubts of Bancroft’s loyalty to their cause and often asked him to travel to London to gather intelligence. On one of Bancroft’s trips, he and the British authorities employed a scheme to embellish his dedication to the American cause. In March 1777, the British arrested Bancroft on superficial charges and interrogated him. A perturbed Deane informed Congress of his arrest, warning of potential

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<sup>57</sup> Benjamin Franklin to George Washington, April 2, 1777, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>58</sup> Model of a Letter of Recommendation of a Person You Are Unacquainted With, April 2, 1777, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>59</sup> Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin*, 580.

<sup>60</sup> Eric Evans Rafalko, “Dr. Edward Bancroft,” *The American Revolution and the Post-Revolutionary Era: A Historical Legacy*, National Counter Intelligence Center, <http://www.fas.org/irp/ops/ci/docs/ci1/ch1a.htm> (accessed 6 April 2014).

<sup>61</sup> Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin*, 580.

damage to their mission.<sup>62</sup> Despite the accusations, the British eventually released Bancroft after suggesting he failed to cooperate and he returned to Passy with his credibility inflated.

Bancroft's espionage significantly affected the American mission. The British received weekly updates about the ongoing negotiations between the Spanish, French, and Americans. This enabled British minister Lord Stormont to accuse the Comte de Vergennes of France's infringement of their present status as a neutral nation. These allegations encouraged further French reluctance to support the Americans. Bancroft also helped the British intercept information because they knew the time and location of mail shipments to America.<sup>63</sup>

The web of British intelligence did not end with Bancroft at Passy. Joseph Hyson was a Maryland native living in London during this period. A seafarer by trade, Hyson was recruited by Deane's personal secretary William Carmichael to command privateer and munition ships in France. On February 2, 1777, British agent the Reverend John Vardill approached Hyson and persuaded him to become a spy. The two devised a plan whereby Hyson would go to France and assume command of a vessel. Once in charge of a ship containing sensitive cargo, Hyson would allow the British to capture his vessel.<sup>64</sup> Carmichael detected this plan but instead of alerting the Americans, he offered his assistance. Hyson failed to secure command of a ship but successfully supplied the British with at least one packet meant for Congress detailing the commissioners' actions and recent negotiations.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin*, 335.

<sup>63</sup> Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin*, 581.

<sup>64</sup> Eric Evans Rafalko, "Dr. Edward Bancroft," *The American Revolution and the Post-Revolutionary era: A Historical Legacy*, National Counter Intelligence Center, <http://www.fas.org/irp/ops/ci/docs/ci1/ch1a.htm> (accessed 6 April 2014).

<sup>65</sup> Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin*, 582.

Further security issues arose in early 1777 when New York native Jacobus van Zandt presented himself to Franklin under the pseudonym George Lupton. Following his reception, Franklin invited Lupton to stay on as an assistant.<sup>66</sup> Unbeknownst to everyone including Bancroft, American loyalist the Reverend Vardill previously had recruited Lupton for the British.<sup>67</sup> Lupton's time at Passy was messy because he often clashed with Bancroft. This friction reached a boiling point when Lupton attempted to assume Bancroft's position of secretary. Lupton's bid was unsuccessful and within a year, he left Passy. Despite this, he successfully provided the British with valuable maritime reports during his tenure.<sup>68</sup> Each of these security breaches aided the efforts of British diplomats in France to disrupt the American delegation's success.

Franklin found himself in the midst of spies despite previous warnings and personal experience. Once in France he received a letter from Juliana Ritchie, a Philadelphia native living abroad. Ritchie had witnessed Franklin's disorganized offices in America and sought to advise him of threats. She warned, "you are surrounded with spies, who watch your every movement who you visit, and by whom you are visited."<sup>69</sup> Ritchie further informed Franklin to beware of those "who pretend to be friends to the cause of your country."<sup>70</sup> Ritchie advised Franklin to question the motive of everyone's conduct around him. Franklin also received warnings about suspicions against him personally. Ritchie indicated that many observers questioned his motives and did not trust him. She wrote "one party assures that you are seeking aid and support from this kingdom the other party insinuate that you have given up that cause and are making the best

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<sup>66</sup> Currey, *Code Number 72*, 111.

<sup>67</sup> Harry Thayer Mahoney, Marjorie Locke Mahoney, *Gallantry in Action: A Biographic Dictionary of Espionage in the American Revolutionary War* (Landham, M.D.: University Press of America, 1999), 313.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Juliana Ritchie to Benjamin Franklin, January 12, 1777, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

terms you can for the private advantage of your own family connections.”<sup>71</sup> Ritchie noted that these accusations against Franklin negatively affected all who associated with him. She explained, “I dare not be more explicit for weighty reasons to myself, but of the truth of what I inform you, you may strictly rely.”<sup>72</sup>

Franklin responded to Ritchie’s warnings by indicating that efforts to prevent it would be futile. He wrote, “it is impossible to discover in every case the falsity of pretended friends.”<sup>73</sup> Franklin openly accepted he could not “prevent being watch’d by spies.”<sup>74</sup> He explained he would “be concern’d in no affairs that I should blush to have made publick and to do nothing but what spies may see and welcome.”<sup>75</sup> Franklin explained if he acted with transparency, there was no need to react. He wrote “If I was sure therefore that my Valet de Place was a spy, as probably he is, I think I should not discharge him for that, if in other respects I lik’d him.”<sup>76</sup> Franklin’s reaction to Ritchie’s warning indicates he was mostly concerned about the ability of spies to embarrass him. Despite his recognition of this hazard, the inattentive actions of Lee soon would validate Franklin’s fears.

In April Arthur Lee returned from his unsuccessful mission to Spain. Immediately his relationship with the other two commissioners soured. Bancroft reported to London that Franklin and Deane excluded Lee from most activities and appeared not to trust him.<sup>77</sup> Lee responded to the cold relations with suspicion and resentment. Within days of his return, Lee agreed to travel to Berlin to petition the minister of Prussia for support and permission for American privateers to

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Juliana Ritchie, January 19, 1777, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Currey, *Code Number 72*, 126.



use their ports.<sup>78</sup> Before leaving Lee voluntarily diminished his presence by granting Franklin power of attorney during his absence to handle all of his finances, the right to sue on his behalf, and to conduct whatever correspondence was necessary.<sup>79</sup>

Lee, Carmichael, and their personal associate Stephen Sayre immediately left Paris and travelled to Vienna, Munich, and Dresden before arriving in Berlin. Despite his efforts at all stops, Lee reported, “there is a cold tranquility here that bodes us no good”<sup>80</sup> This reception worried Lee and he requested that Franklin and Deane pressure the Prussian court to be sympathetic to their cause. Lee indicated he believed the goal of his mission was unobtainable.<sup>81</sup> These fears were quickly realized when Lee was officially rebuffed by the ministers in Berlin on June 4. On June 15, he wrote Franklin and Deane advising he was unable to accomplish his goals and was preparing to return.<sup>82</sup> Before Lee could depart, other events compounded this failure and encouraged his further ostracization by Franklin and Deane.

On June 26, Lee discovered the theft of a collection of papers from his lodging in Berlin.<sup>83</sup> Immediately, all suspicions regarding the larceny fell on a servant. Within an hour, the papers mysteriously reappeared on Lee’s doorstep. Accusations soon emerged that the suspect claimed his master offered him two thousand ducats to steal the documents.<sup>84</sup> This information

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<sup>78</sup> The American Commissioners to the Committee of Secret Correspondence, April 28, 1777, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>79</sup> Arthur Lee to Benjamin Franklin, May 12, 1777, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 5, 2014).

<sup>80</sup> Arthur Lee to Franklin and Silas Deane, May 27, 1777, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Arthur Lee to Benjamin Franklin and Silas Deane, June 15, 1777, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>83</sup> Arthur Lee to Franklin and Silas Deane, June 28, 1777, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

traced the plot to staff members of Hugh Elliot, an English representative to Prussia.<sup>85</sup> Elliot's assistants reportedly copied the papers during their brief absence and soon the affair became a public controversy. In response, England recalled Elliot although he faced no real repercussions. This incident became a very important lesson for the Americans. No one was to be trusted, not even public officials. In reflection, Lee wrote to Franklin and Deane "public ministers have been regarded as spies; Mr. Elliot will give them the additional title of robbers."<sup>86</sup>

The effect of this security breach was immense. Lee communicated to Franklin that the copied papers were an account of all that had occurred in both France and Spain.<sup>87</sup> Concern over repercussions prompted Lee to ask the Americans to notify the two courts to prepare "should the court of G.B. charge them with having assisted us."<sup>88</sup> Lee suggested that all concerned parties deny the allegations because the British had copies of the papers and not the originals. Lee suggested that the thief's failure to keep the original papers would make suspicions of forgery ten times stronger. He explained the urgency to act because information had already reached London.<sup>89</sup> Lee's disastrous endeavor in Berlin exposed his diplomatic inexperience and became a source of strife between the commissioners.

Upon Lee's return, Franklin and Deane scolded him for his failures.<sup>90</sup> Lee soon became enraged because he disapproved of the other delegate's negative judgments. In response, Lee began to openly question Franklin's personal loyalties and cast doubt on the entire American mission. Lee first objected to Franklin's appointment of Jonathan Williams Jr. as the American

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<sup>85</sup> Currey, *Code Number 72*, 130.

<sup>86</sup> Arthur Lee to Franklin and Silas Deane, June 28, 1777, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>87</sup> Arthur Lee to Franklin and Silas Deane, July 6, 1777, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Currey, *Code Number 72*, 130.

commercial agent at Nantes. According to Lee, Franklin was “planning to throw a considerable part of the mercantile business into the hands of Mr. Williams, his nephew.”<sup>91</sup> Lee also claimed this appointment was illegal because Congress had previously appointed Thomas Morris as the American agent to Nantes.<sup>92</sup> Lee angrily wrote to Congress stating that Franklin “attached himself to those he tho’t would support him and his nephew.”<sup>93</sup> He was further irritated upon learning that Franklin repeatedly opened correspondences from America and only shared the information with Deane.<sup>94</sup> Lee took this exclusion personally. He claimed Franklin expressed enmity towards him, and his friends in Passy “were daily treated with invectives against me.”<sup>95</sup> Lee also rebuked Deane claiming he “has artfully mixed so much personal injury and offense against me” and cited his “trespasses against the public.”<sup>96</sup> The basis of this accusation was Lee’s discovery that financial bookkeeping by the delegation was virtually non-existent. Lee contended an investigation turned up no ledgers or vouchers, only massive debt and silence.<sup>97</sup> Despite the severe accusations, Lee refrained from any formal complaints fearing the misconception that his motivations were for private vengeance not public justice.<sup>98</sup>

Reports of Lee’s accusations readily influenced British strategy. When Paul Wentworth traveled to France seeking reconciliation, he ignored Lee in Favor of Franklin and Deane

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<sup>91</sup> Arthur Lee to Samuel Adams, February 17, 1778, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>92</sup> Currey, *Code Number 72*, 131.

<sup>93</sup> Arthur Lee to Samuel Adams, February 17, 1778. In *Letters of Arthur Lee*, ed. C. Isham. <http://www.silasdeaneonline.org/documents.htm> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>94</sup> Currey, *Code Number 72 Benjamin Franklin*, 131.

<sup>95</sup> Arthur Lee to Samuel Adams, February 17, 1778. In *Letters of Arthur Lee*, ed. C. Isham. <http://www.silasdeaneonline.org/documents.htm> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Currey, *Code Number 72*, 132.

<sup>98</sup> Arthur Lee to Samuel Adams, February 17, 1778. In *Letters of Arthur Lee*, ed. C. Isham. <http://www.silasdeaneonline.org/documents.htm> (accessed April 6, 2014).

because he believed them corruptible.<sup>99</sup> In a meeting on January 7, Wentworth used Franklin's previous expressions favoring reconciliation to ask, "how short of independence he wished."<sup>100</sup> Franklin rebuked Wentworth, explaining his past opinions as "done at the time they were given."<sup>101</sup> Wentworth pressed Franklin asking what "terms and means he would suggest to induce reconciliation?"<sup>102</sup> Franklin responded by expressing his full allegiance to the American cause. Wentworth concluded that Franklin's view of reconciliation "would be that of the Congress."<sup>103</sup>

Despite this, Wentworth pushed the issue by suggesting Franklin's earlier failures in London fueled his dismissal of reconciliation. Franklin rejected Wentworth's insinuation and went on the offensive exclaiming he did not act out of personal injury but from the barbarities inflicted upon his country. Wentworth later wrote of Franklin, "here he lost his breath in relating the burning of towns."<sup>104</sup> Franklin continued with examples of ill-treated prisoners, the devastation and cruelty pursued by British generals, eventually comparing English men to barbarians. Franklin asserted his personal loyalties and rejected any susceptibility to Wentworth's persuasion. He declared, "the spirit of America was so high nothing but [independency] would be at all listened to."<sup>105</sup> Realizing the conversation accomplished nothing, Wentworth asked to see Franklin again the next day. Franklin instead summoned Deane to join them for dinner. The three discussed issues of debt relief, international commerce and Franklin's return to London but they found no common ground. Wentworth understood reconciliation was a

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<sup>99</sup> Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin*, 584.

<sup>100</sup> Paul Wentworth to William Eden, January 7, 1778, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

failure and did not call on Franklin the next day commenting, “I do not see any good end it can answer.”<sup>106</sup>

The possibility of American and British reconciliation inspired the French to act on the American’s proposal for alliance. On January 7, 1778 Louis XVI’s council secretly voted in favor of a Franco-American alliance.<sup>107</sup> On January 8, French foreign minister Conrad-Alexandre Gerard visited the commissioners but refrained from informing them of the decision. Instead, he presented three questions to the commissioners and withdrew so they could formulate answers. The first asked, “what is necessary to be done to give such satisfaction to the American commissioners, as to engage them not to listen to any propositions from England for a new connection with that country?”<sup>108</sup> Franklin began to write as Deane and Lee debated the proposition. They decided that a formal alliance with France would enable the Americans to reject reconciliation. Franklin stated their goal was “the entire freedom and independence of America, both in matters of government and commerce.”<sup>109</sup>

The two other questions expanded the conditions of the first. The second asked what was necessary for America to reject “all propositions from England for peace inconsistent with that independency?”<sup>110</sup> The last inquired about the importance of the Spanish to the alliance.<sup>111</sup> The commissioners did not reach a consensus, but Franklin wrote down preliminary answers to the second two queries. He surmised that if they did agree to the alliance, Congress was willing to

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin*, 593.

<sup>108</sup> The American Commissioners Interview with Gerard, January 8, 1778, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> The American Commissioners Third Interview with Gerard on January 8 1778, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>111</sup> The American Commissioners Fourth Interview with Gerard on January 8 1778, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

fight until the defeat of the British in America. Franklin enticed French and Spanish participation concluding that a quick end to the war would prevent their acceptance of anything short of absolute independence.<sup>112</sup> Upon returning, Gerard was satisfied and informed them of the council's previous vote in favor of an alliance.

On February 6, 1778, French officials and the American commissioners signed two treaties constituting the Franco-American alliance. The first formed a military coalition stating that if a European war erupted the U.S. and France would make it “a common cause and aid each other mutually.”<sup>113</sup> With this premise, both parties agreed that complete independence for the U.S. was a condition of peace. Additionally, the treaty permitted any other parties to join their cause if they were willing the “accede to the present alliance.”<sup>114</sup> This agreement permanently expanded the role of the United States in Europe's political arena. The second treaty established a permanent system of commerce and correspondence between France and the U.S. It declared the alliance perpetual among the “most Christian King his heirs his successors and the said United States.”<sup>115</sup> The agreement included a clause granting most favored nation status between the two regarding commerce and navigation. A final stipulation addressed mutual interests, respective fishing rights, and parameters for addressing contraband and commerce.<sup>116</sup>

Despite their success, cohesion among the commissioners continued to decay. Following the treaty, Franklin and Deane privately collected several correspondences intended for America. On February 13, Franklin wrote Lee about their pending dispatches regarding the alliance and

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> The Treaty of Alliance, February 6, 1778, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> The Treaty of Amity and Commerce, February 6, 1778, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

other public matters.<sup>117</sup> Lee responded explaining he did not understand his exclusion from the process.<sup>118</sup> Franklin initially replied aggressively that it was a proposition for Lee's consideration and claimed he confused the words "propose and purpose."<sup>119</sup> For unknown reasons Franklin reconsidered and did not send this hastily crafted response. Instead, he wrote a shorter more pleasant note offering, "to consult with him whenever he pleases upon any circumstance."<sup>120</sup>

Franklin's offer was too late as Lee responded the same day with a lengthy letter expressing displeasure with Franklin's conduct. Lee stated that "according to all rules of doing business" it is proper to inform him when dispatches were ready for consideration.<sup>121</sup> Lee also accused the commissioners of receiving important letters and not communicating them to him. According to Lee, this was a continuous problem noting his past accusations against Deane. Lee contended Franklin validated his allegations by stating, "such things had been done."<sup>122</sup> After claiming Franklin's admission, Lee inquired about the other delegate's motives. He asked, "Is there, Gentlemen, any public utility to be derived from conduct, which sets me in light of an incapable or suspected person, and annuls the appointment of Congress?"<sup>123</sup> This question sought explanation while also reminding Franklin and Dean they were circumventing their government. Lee compounded this by challenging the other commissioners to find cause for such treatment. He offered, "if there were I should submit to it without reluctance."<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Arthur Lee, February 13, 1778, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>118</sup> Arthur Lee to Benjamin Franklin and Silas Deane, February 14, 1778, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>119</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Arthur Lee, February 15, 1778, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> Arthur Lee to Benjamin Franklin and Silas Deane, February 15, 1778, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

On March 16, Lee heard rumors that other official letters were set to sail without his consultation and again he demanded an explanation.<sup>125</sup> Franklin admitted that people from Bordeaux sending packages to America had offered to carry their dispatches.<sup>126</sup> He claimed he had dismissed the offer noting, “we could not know the captains, nor the degree of confidence that might be placed in them.”<sup>127</sup> Franklin did acknowledge mentioning the offer but claimed whoever informed Lee “misunderstood more than I said to him, when he imagined there was a packet to sail soon with our dispatches.”<sup>128</sup> Franklin then assured Lee of his inclusion in any business regarding their dispatches.

As the relations between the commissioners dissolved, rumors from America further flamed their divisions. On March 13, Lee received word that Congress recalled an unidentified commissioner and corresponded with Franklin on the matter.<sup>129</sup> Franklin responded that passengers from an American ship reported Congress chose John Adams to replace Deane, but no official word had arrived.<sup>130</sup> The rumors sparked an effort within the delegation to prepare for a possible reorganization. On March 31, Lee wrote Franklin suggesting they settle the public accounts, a request he “long ago and repeatedly made.”<sup>131</sup> Lee contended that resolving this was a fundamental part of their duty to the public. He further requested that Deane leave all papers in his possession relating to the commission with Franklin and Lee. This correspondence provoked

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<sup>125</sup> Arthur Lee to Benjamin Franklin, March 16, 1778, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>126</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Arthur Lee, March 17, 1778,” in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> Arthur Lee to Benjamin Franklin, March 13, 1778, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>130</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Arthur Lee, March 13, 1778, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>131</sup> Arthur Lee to Benjamin Franklin and Silas Deane, March 31, 1778, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).



a fiery response by Franklin. He wrote “there is a stile in some of your letters, I observe it particularly in the last, whereby superior merit is assume to yourself in point of care, and attention to business, and blame on your colleagues is insinuated without making yourself accountable by a direct charge, of negligence or unfaithfulness, which has the appearance of being as artful as it is unkind.”<sup>132</sup> Franklin denied Lee’s accusations that he and Deane purposely impeded the settlement of their accounts and called the accusation groundless. Franklin in turn accused Lee of failing to act on any of these purported wrongs. He contended Lee could have obtained the account at any time and demanded an explanation but “did neither.”<sup>133</sup> Franklin informed Lee that Deane left all public papers and account related materials in his possession. To settle their dispute, Franklin stated that Lee only needed to name the day and place.<sup>134</sup>

On April 2, Lee learned of Conrad-Alexandre Gerard’s choice as French minister to America from an outside party.<sup>135</sup> Lee used this to accuse Franklin again of failing to inform him of important matters. He claimed such conduct constituted “so great an injury and injustice to me.”<sup>136</sup> Lee questioned Franklin’s integrity, asking “if success to the mission, and unanimity on the subject in Congress was your wish, with what propriety could you make it a party business, and not unite all the commissioners in the advising and approving a measure, in which you desired their friends and constituents might be unanimous?”<sup>137</sup> Lee contended Franklin’s actions were inexcusable. He noted, “I do not live ten minutes distance from you, the communication

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<sup>132</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Arthur Lee, April 1, 1778, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> Arthur Lee to Benjamin Franklin, April 2, 1778, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

therefore could not be attended with delay or difficulty.”<sup>138</sup> Of Franklin’s deception Lee noted, “you could not have done it more effectively.”<sup>139</sup> Lee then implored Franklin to explain his dereliction of public duties. Franklin replied to these allegations by dismissing the validity of Lee’s arguments. He claimed it was not his practice answer angry letters because “I am old, cannot have long to live, have much to do and no time for altercation.”<sup>140</sup> He then claimed Lee had a sick mind “which is forever tormenting itself, with its jealousies, suspicions and fancies that others mean you ill.”<sup>141</sup>

The next day Franklin wrote to Lee informing him of Deane’s pending departure. To deflect unwanted criticisms Franklin stated that if Deane had not contacted him “it is from him you should demand his reasons.”<sup>142</sup> Franklin then proceeded to address several of Lee’s claims in a more civil tone. He defended the appointment of Gerard by the French court without consulting them as their “undoubted right.”<sup>143</sup> Franklin then deflected Lee’s hostilities by claiming Deane decided to exclude him regarding Gerard for reasons, “that appeared to me satisfactory.”<sup>144</sup> Despite his fierce defense of Lee’s exclusion from the delegation’s activities, Franklin concluded by promising open communications in the future.

Franklin then rejected Lee’s insinuations that he had prevented the settling of public funds by taking possession of all the financial vouchers. Franklin explained that the vouchers naturally came to him because Deane purchased all goods in France since Lee was in Spain,

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Arthur Lee, April 3, 1778, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Arthur Lee, April 4, 1778, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

Vienna and Berlin. Franklin also deflected Lee's suggestion that he purposely blocked open communications with Congress via Deane's departure to conceal his behaviors. Franklin claimed Congress and the delegation already corresponded on every important matter and "I therefore did not propose, or write any letter to the committee by him."<sup>145</sup> Of Lee's insinuation that he was inconsistent with his public duties, Franklin denied the claim. He also questioned Lee's authority to level such accusations by stating "it is to the public I am accountable and not to you."<sup>146</sup> Franklin then reminded Lee of his lengthy history of public service and "there is not a single instance of my ever being accused before of acting contrary to their interests or my duty."<sup>147</sup> This prompted Franklin to declare that he gladly would account to Congress for any supposed crimes and predicted, "I have no doubt of their equity in acquitting me."<sup>148</sup>

On March 30, John Adams arrived at the River Bordeaux in southwestern France and anchored for the evening.<sup>149</sup> On March 31, Deane quietly exited Paris under an assumed name possessing an endorsement from Franklin, a gold snuffbox from Louis XVI, and a testimonial from Bancroft. Gerard left Paris separately intending to meet Deane at Toulon on the Mediterranean coast and sail to America aboard Admiral d'Estaing's seventeen-ship squadron that the French dispatched to aid the American cause.<sup>150</sup> On April 10, Franklin and Lee informed Vergennes of Adams' arrival. They advised Vergennes that Adams possessed several resolutions from Congress intended to discourage British efforts for reconciliation.<sup>151</sup> Franklin and Lee also informed Vergennes that Adams expressed confidence that Congress would ratify the treaties of

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<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> Gordon Wood, ed., *John Adams Revolutionary Writings 1775- 1783* (New York: Library of America, 2011), 155.

<sup>150</sup> Schiff, *A Great Improvisation*, 151.

<sup>151</sup> The American Commissioners to Vergennes, April 10, 1778, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

alliance and commerce when received.<sup>152</sup> The following day Adams traveled to Versailles with Franklin and Lee to wait on Vergennes. Over the next week, Adams met French Prime Minister Jean-Frédéric Phélypeaux, the Count Maurepas, was present when King Louis XVI passed through his court, and toured galleries and the royal apartments. Adams described his grand reception in France as “friendly, as polite, and respectful as was possible.”<sup>153</sup> Despite his positive introduction, Adams soon learned of the delegation’s many challenges.

Adams described the cohesion between the commissioners and others working at Passy as “a rope of sand.”<sup>154</sup> He vowed to remain untainted by the prejudices fearing the pernicious effects of such divisions. Adams appeared intrigued by the suspicions and accusations that plagued the American delegates. He insinuated that the extravagance that Deane traveled back to America in would provoke negative reactions in Congress. Adams surmised this would compound the allegations that Deane was inattentive to his duties, profited from English privateers and trade, and lived expensively. Adams also recorded several suspicions about Lee’s character. He noted the consensus was that Lee’s motivations were selfish and he retained too much affection for Britain.<sup>155</sup>

Adams’ initial assessment of his colleagues was that he did not know whom to believe. He noted that the commissioners did not methodically conduct public business. Adams expressed dismay because no minute, account, or letter book existed. With no official record of actual events, the words of his colleagues were all he knew. This troubled Adams because he expressed displeasure at the idea of differing with one party or another and offending persons. This caused

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<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> Wood, ed. *John Adams*, 158

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

Adams to conclude, “it is not possible to obtain a clear idea of our affairs.”<sup>156</sup> Despite his indication that his colleague’s actions were unscrupulous, Adams did acknowledge their demonstrated merit by securing the French alliance.

Adams’ harshest criticism came not against his colleagues but of their fundamental approach to diplomacy. On May 21, he reported to Congress “in my humble opinion our system is wrong in many particulars.”<sup>157</sup> Adams pointed out three flaws to their mission and suggested how to amend them. The first was that they did not need three commissioners in France when one easily would suffice. His second reflected on the excess of his colleagues’ lifestyle. He noted that leaving their salaries uncertain guaranteed poor accounting and tempted them to live beyond their means. Adams’ also addressed the blending of the business of a commercial agent with that of a public minister. He argued that this assured no public satisfaction from their actions and exacerbated the existing suspicions and divisions. Adams suggested that Congress separate the commercial agents from the ministers and recall or reassign all the commissioners except one. He also argued that Congress should determine a specific allowance for the remaining delegate and enforce financial limits.<sup>158</sup>

Franklin echoed Adams’ argument that multiple commissioners complicated the mission. He reported to the Committee of Foreign Affairs that their appointment of a fourth ambassador to Tuscany and fifth to Vienna increased this complexity.<sup>159</sup> Despite any strength in numbers, Franklin argued, “all the advantages in negotiation that result from secrecy of sentiment, and

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<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> Benjamin Franklin to James Lovell, July 22, 1778, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

uniformity in expressing it, and in common business from dispatch, are lost.”<sup>160</sup> Franklin contended that any lack of cohesion between the commissioners before a court impeded their success because every word is “watched and weighed.”<sup>161</sup> From this, Franklin concluded “and in consideration of the whole, I wish the Congress would separate us.”<sup>162</sup> Franklin also cited the financial benefit of a single commissioner in Paris and used Lord Stormont’s personal extravagance and downfall as an example. Claiming each American spent comparably, Franklin detailed how Stormont “left behind him the character of a niggard, and when the advertisement appear’d for the sale of his household goods, all Paris laughed at an article of it.”<sup>163</sup>

After considering the matter, the French Court expressed its support for the nomination of a single American commissioner in Paris. Gerard personally lobbied Congress to select Franklin as the sole delegate because the French government was most receptive to him.<sup>164</sup> On September 15, Deane wrote Franklin informing him that Congress selected him “minister Plenipotentiary to the Court of France.”<sup>165</sup> Deane expressed great pleasure in the appointment and reported that Congress acted with great unanimity.<sup>166</sup> The only vote against Franklin came from his home state of Pennsylvania. This resulted from his conservative enemies and their objection to the presence of his grandson Temple at Passy whom they smeared because his father, William Franklin, was a loyalist.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin*, 608.

<sup>165</sup> Silas Deane to Benjamin Franklin, September 15, 1778, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin*, 608.

On October 21, Congress officially wrote to Louis XVI informing him of Franklin's appointment as sole delegate.<sup>168</sup> On October 26, Congress wrote to Franklin detailing eleven instructions defining his new position. Congress directed Franklin to assure Louis XVI that the U.S. expressed the highest sense of gratitude for his continual military aid.<sup>169</sup> Franklin also was to assure the French monarch that Congress and the states are unwavering in their determination to become independent. To reassure the king, Congress dictated that Franklin should emphasize America's commitment to prosecuting the war at all costs. This directive also addressed America's maritime war strategy. The central premise of this objective was the confinement of the war to European waters to ensure the safety of the American coasts. A fundamental component of this strategy centered on the destruction of the British fisheries in Newfoundland in a bid to deprive them of supplies gained from Halifax and Quebec.<sup>170</sup> The remaining instructions focused on the internal politics of Franco-American relations. Congress asserted that Franklin was to present the "deranged" state of American finances before the French court to prevent an economic collapse of the American cause.<sup>171</sup> Congress indicated that the evolving state of their finances would require several future revisions to this directive. To encourage French assistance, Congress encouraged Franklin to take any action necessary to perpetuate Franco-American relations indefinitely.

The congressional dispatch also included two documents for presentation before the Court of Versailles. The first detailed a plan "to attack Detroit and destroy the towns on the route

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<sup>168</sup> Continental Congress to Louis XVI, October 21, 1778, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>169</sup> Continental Congress to Benjamin Franklin, instructions, October 26, 1778, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

thither of those Indians who are inimical to the United States.”<sup>172</sup> To justify the endeavor Congress offered four reasons as to why the campaign would benefit France. These included the possession of Newfoundland and ownership of its fisheries, the strengthening of their American allies by preserving their independence, and the control of the fur trade to French commerce. The proposal also outlined six benefits of this campaign to the United States. These included securing peace on the American frontier, the acquisition of two states, and the stabilization of their domestic finances. The remaining three addressed American interests in the north Atlantic fisheries. They contended that this action would protect and secure commerce, enable them to cultivate fisheries more efficiently, and gain such prizes at the expense of the British. The final two points from Congress argued that its action was justified because of British belligerence in both the North Atlantic and West Indies mutually harmed France and the U.S.<sup>173</sup>

The second congressional document focused on American finances. Topics included America’s present inability to repay loans, lack of available resources, currency depreciation and counterfeiting.<sup>174</sup> The focus of this presentation was to reiterate the importance of European aid to America’s success. To validate its claims, Congress examined and discredited several proposed alternative sources of revenue. The first was domestic taxation, a solution that Congress dismissed because it could not produce sufficient funds. Congress also argued that the U.S. did not possess a strong enough central government to enforce such tariffs. Additionally, Congress claimed the lack of available financiers and that made domestic borrowing

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<sup>172</sup> Continental Congress to Benjamin Franklin, Proposal, October 26, 1778, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Continental Congress to Benjamin Franklin, Observations, October 26, 1778, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).



impossible.<sup>175</sup> After discrediting all alternatives, Congress concluded by declaring that the continuance of war rested on Franklin's successes in France.

Despite Franklin's appointment and the urgent situation, infighting and petty distractions continued to plague the American delegation. On January 2 1779, American politician Ralph Izard petitioned Franklin to renew his allotted credit line for services rendered.<sup>176</sup> On January 4, Franklin drafted a letter denying Izard's request citing the "distress for money in America."<sup>177</sup> Franklin explained that America's income from tobacco had not equaled its demands. He explained, "they are long since mortgaged to the farmers general, so that they produce us nothing, but leave us expenses to pay."<sup>178</sup> The letter further implied that Izard could not expect credit because the American delegation was in danger of receiving none itself. Franklin actually proposed that Izard repay credit he previously received "if it may be done with any possible convenience to your affairs."<sup>179</sup>

Franklin justified his refusal citing Izard's wealth from rice plantations in South Carolina.<sup>180</sup> Despite this, Adams and Lee both rejected Franklin's stance arguing it was unreasonable considering Izard's service to America. Izard, the father of five with an expectant wife, decided to appeal directly to Henry Grand, America's European banker. Grand declined to help, and Izard then borrowed from a personal financier and presented the bill directly to the American commissioners. Defying Franklin's objections, Lee and Adams accepted Izard's bank

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ralph Izard to Benjamin Franklin, Arthur Lee and John Adams, January 2, 1779, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>177</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Ralph Izard, January 4, 1779, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Schiff, *A Great Improvisation*, 197.

note.<sup>181</sup> On January 15, Franklin drafted an account of the incident for Congress to defend his actions. He began by clarifying that in February of 1778 the commissioners advanced Arthur's brother, William Lee, and Izard four thousand guineas without any order from Congress.<sup>182</sup> Noting their previous generosity, Franklin argued that if they issued more credit public interests would suffer. This argument was an attempt by Franklin to make himself appear to be acting in the best interests of America's finances. He also expressed his complete surprise that Izard petitioned a private banker and placed all responsibility on Lee and Adams claiming the bill "to be accountable to them only."<sup>183</sup>

On February 7, Lee received word that the other commissioners had sent Bancroft to Britain on official American business without consulting him. Lee was further enraged after Franklin only provided a verbal response to Lee's written request for an explanation.<sup>184</sup> In turn, Lee unleashed a furious letter to the other commissioners discrediting Bancroft's character and personally attacking the other commissioners by claiming they knew of Bancroft's misdeeds and "his living in open defiance of decency and religion you are no strangers to."<sup>185</sup> Lee also insinuated that Franklin and Adams' relationship with Bancroft proved their personal disdain for him because of Bancroft's "enmity against me."<sup>186</sup> Despite his temporary solidarity with Adams against Franklin on the Izard affair, Lee found himself again ostracized from the delegation.

Lee continued his objections claiming the actions of the other commissioners represented a dereliction of duty. He recounted how Bancroft was in league with Deane who libeled

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<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> Benjamin Franklin to the Continental Congress, January 15, 1779, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> Arthur Lee to Benjamin Franklin and John Adams, February 7, 1779, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

Congress, harmed the American affairs in Europe and disgraced their national character. Lee continued with a concerted effort to accuse Franklin and Adams and excuse himself of any blame. He attacked the two claiming he could only expect Bancroft to be “the last person in the world you would have chosen to represent us.”<sup>187</sup> Once Lee linked Franklin and Adams to Bancroft, he leveled threats suggesting impending repercussions from such actions. Lee noted, “I have evidence in my possession which makes me consider Dr. Bancroft as a criminal with regard to the United States, and that I shall have him charged as such, whenever he goes within their jurisdiction.”<sup>188</sup>

Despite the serious accusations, Franklin focused on his official duties and did not respond. On February 18, he wrote two separate letters to Lee pertaining to his new role as sole delegate. In the first correspondence, Franklin shared the Congressional resolutions of September 11 and 14 and of October 12, 1778, on the matter and declared his intentions to comply with his appointed duties.<sup>189</sup> Franklin’s second dispatch requested that Lee forward to him all public papers in his possession.<sup>190</sup> In response, Lee dramatically changed his tone and offered Franklin his personal congratulations. Lee also indicated he supported the acts of Congress because they appeared to restore harmony and he found their conflicts to be “detrimental to the public and dishonorable of ourselves.”<sup>191</sup>

On February 17, Franklin became afflicted with gout. Within days, he withdrew from the public eye both delaying his official presentation as sole delegate and impeding his ability to

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<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>189</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Arthur Lee, February 18, 1779, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>190</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Arthur Lee, February 18, 1779, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>191</sup> Arthur Lee to Benjamin Franklin, February 18, 1779, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

communicate with others.<sup>192</sup> On March 14, he wrote Vergennes informing him that he currently was confined to his chair and unable to appear before the court on the 16<sup>th</sup> as planned.<sup>193</sup> This delay was temporary, as Franklin's recovery exceeded expectations. On March 23, Franklin ceremoniously triumphed over his colleagues when he appeared before Louis XVI to present his credentials and pay homage to the royal family as the sole delegate of the United States.<sup>194</sup> This effectively put Franklin at the forefront of the American mission to France and the flourishing reconstruction of the imperial Atlantic world.

The achievement of a Franco-American alliance and Franklin's ascension to minister plenipotentiary of the American delegation to France was both theatric and convoluted. Initially a three-member commission created by a muddled Congress, the American diplomats found themselves entrusted to secure munitions and alliances on behalf of their frail and budding government. Armed largely with ambiguous instructions, the three American ministers embarked on a tangled endeavor to win peace and independence through diplomacy. As Franklin wrestled control of the delegation from the other commissioners, he immersed himself in the culture of Versailles and laid the foundation for America's diplomatic strategy in France. This monumental achievement was the genesis for a new phase of the American mission with the destiny of the United States in the palm of Franklin's hand.

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<sup>192</sup> Schiff, *A Great Improvisation*, 204.

<sup>193</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Vergennes, March 14, 1779, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 6, 2014).

<sup>194</sup> Schiff, *A Great Improvisation*, 206.

## **Chapter Three:**

### **Minister Plenipotentiary.**

As Franklin attempted to settle into his role as America's minister plenipotentiary during the spring of 1779, familiar problems continued to plague the commission. The arrival of Adams did little for the divisive politics within the American delegation, as Lee immediately leveled accusations that Franklin and Adams were acting in collusion against him. Other familiar hindrances also remained prevalent including the ever-problematic system of communications and the monumental threat of America's financial collapse. As Franklin attempted to ease Congressional worries, his detractors took to the court of public opinion to destroy his reputation. A primary source of these embarrassments were a series of calculated embellishments against Franklin's character circulated in pamphlets and published in loyalist presses on both sides of the Atlantic. Despite these problems, Franklin embraced his new leadership role and embarked on an endeavor to cultivate the negotiations in a manner that reflected his vision for an emerging American presence within the international community. This was evident when Franklin interjected himself into the planning of a military campaign in the European theater by acting as a liaison between French General Marquis de Lafayette and Scottish born American sailor John Paul Jones during a proposed land and sea invasion of Britain. As Franklin expanded the focus of his aims, a series of complications confronted the minister and threatened to unravel the American delegation. Despite the troubles, Franklin remained focused on his official duties in Paris and his standing before the French ministry. As Franklin increasingly wove himself into the fabric of Versailles, the other American diplomats and members of Congress grew increasingly fearful of his loyalties and intentions. This provoked accusations that Franklin displayed excessive affection for the royal court and refrained from petitioning aid because he feared causing offense to the French ministry. In response, Congress voted to dispatch Col. John

Laurens to Paris to assist Franklin in soliciting aid for America. Franklin perceived this as a threat, dismissed America's demands as not practical, and requested that Congress relieve him of duty. Congress denied Franklin's dismissal and cemented his role as minister plenipotentiary. This affirmation validated Franklin's diplomacy and effort to create a Franco-American communion that could provide him with the backbone needed to engage the British in a diplomatic dalliance and extract a new American entity that could rival old Europe.

Franklin's triumph in Europe did little to quell the internal problems that plagued the Americans in Paris. On March 19, 1779, Lee responded to Franklin's previous request for his official papers with a renewed resistance and insisted he could only send copies.<sup>1</sup> This was in stark contrast to Adams who dutifully obliged Franklin and dispatched all documents in his possession. To justify his insubordination, Lee voiced suspicions that Franklin and Adams were in collusion against him. Lee also insinuated that Adams' character was not under attack like his own and any comparisons of the two was illegitimate. Once Lee distanced himself from the actions of Adams, he reiterated his claim that retention of his original papers was necessary to defend himself properly.<sup>2</sup>

Franklin responded to Lee conceding that copies of his papers would suffice.<sup>3</sup> Despite his agreeable response, Franklin quickly dismissed Lee's suspicious demeanor. Franklin claimed he and Adams had no agreement regarding the consolidation of their public papers. In response to Lee's other claims, Franklin insisted they were groundless and asserted that when he requested the originals he in no way intended to deprive Lee of any form of defense. Franklin also refuted

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Lee to Benjamin Franklin, March 19, 1779, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 7, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Arthur Lee, March 27, 1779, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 7, 2014).

Lee's accusations by offering complete transparency among the commissioners. This included offering Lee authenticated copies of any papers held in Franklin's possession.<sup>4</sup>

During the spring of 1779, the dynamics of European involvement in the war dramatically changed. The American commissioners had successfully secured a French alliance but failed to induce much Spanish reaction. Spain appeared reluctant because with Louisiana serving as a buffer between the United States and Mexico, responding to a fight in British North America was not urgent. This changed when France and Spain invoked the 1761 Family Compact that stipulated the two would assist one another regarding mutual threats and interests. The premise of this engagement was that France would aid Spain in its bid to regain Gibraltar from Britain in exchange for Spanish support of the United States.<sup>5</sup>

Franklin initially appeared to embrace the newfound role of the United States in international politics. During the transitional period, Lafayette proposed an attack on Britain with his land forces assisted at sea by John Paul Jones.<sup>6</sup> Franklin quickly embraced the proposal responding, "I admire much the activity of your genius."<sup>7</sup> In an effort to inflate the plan, Franklin declared, "it is certain that the coasts of England and Scotland are extremely open and defenseless."<sup>8</sup> However, even the deft Franklin acknowledged that he was dabbling in a war policy where he lacked experience. He championed the idea but admitted, "I have not enough knowledge in such matters to presume upon advising it."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin*, 612.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 616.

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Franklin to the Marquis de Lafayette, March 22, 1779, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 7, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Yet Franklin continued to act as an intermediate between Lafayette and Jones. On April 27, Franklin wrote to Jones offering his personal insight on the matter. He admitted that expeditions of land and sea forces “often miscarry” because of misunderstandings between the two officers involved.<sup>10</sup> These misfortunes arise, he continued “where there are little minds actuated more by personal views of profit or honor to themselves, than by the warm and sincere desire of good to their country.”<sup>11</sup> Franklin quickly dismissed this possibility by praising Lafayette and Jones’ capabilities and citing their “mutual goodwill and harmony.”<sup>12</sup> Franklin speculated to Jones that the success of this expedition would be a definitive moment in their mutual careers. He wrote, “I look upon this expedition as an introduction only to greater trusts and more extensive commands.”<sup>13</sup>

The following day Franklin issued an official six-point set of instructions to Jones. The first commanded him to receive and accommodate the French troops accordingly.<sup>14</sup> Franklin dictated that once the troops had landed, Jones was to offer all support to their endeavors within his power. He further advised Jones to maintain his position at all times to protect the land troops throughout their expedition. Other points focused on post-invasion details including bringing all captured Englishmen to France to use in prisoner exchanges for Americans and Frenchmen held captive. Franklin also outlined a code of personal conduct for Jones and his men. Citing the treatment of prisoners by the English, Franklin forbade any “barbarous” behavior and advised against any intimidation of the prisoners “for the sake of humanity and for the honor of the

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<sup>10</sup> Benjamin Franklin to John Paul Jones, April 27, 1779, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 7, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Benjamin Franklin to John Paul Jones, instructions, April 28, 1779, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 7, 2014).



country.”<sup>15</sup> Franklin cited the British history of burning defenseless towns in America and ordered Jones not to follow this example and treat the sick, elderly, women and children ethically. Despite the ambitious planning by Franklin and the French, the expedition never occurred. Lafayette’s attention turned to other matters leaving Jones to engage the British Navy alone. His daring exploits at sea made him a famous American hero when he returned to France.<sup>16</sup>

After sending Jones to engage English warships, Franklin turned his attention to America’s deteriorating financial situation. On May 3, he wrote to the French minister the Comte de Vergennes on behalf of Maryland and Virginia petitioning for aid in the form of ammunition, arms, and clothing.<sup>17</sup> This solicitation exposed a significant problem facing Franklin’s ability to secure necessities. As American money depreciated, he had to contend with a European economy where hard money with a known value was required.<sup>18</sup> This forced Franklin to seek credit from Vergennes. He explained that America actually needed double the supplies but could not purchase “for want of money.”<sup>19</sup> Franklin understood that this made the American government appear vulnerable and fragmented and offered Vergennes his personal advice to decrease the perceived risk. He explained that the individual states prompted him to petition supplies but it was in Vergennes’ best interests to grant aid to Congress who could distribute it and be accountable for repayment.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin*, 617.

<sup>17</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Vergennes, May 3, 1779, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 7, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin*, 619.

<sup>19</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Vergennes May 3, 1779, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 7, 2014).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

On May 26, Franklin wrote to the Committee of Foreign Affairs detailing the state of the Paris diplomatic operation. He recalled presenting his credentials before Louis XVI who “in the most gracious manner express’d his satisfaction.”<sup>21</sup> Franklin continued with his assurance that he would fulfill the wishes of Congress with the French court.<sup>22</sup> He also assured the committee that despite reports, his standing remained solid with the French. Franklin commented, “much pain is constantly taken by the enemy to weaken the confidence of this new court in their new allies.”<sup>23</sup> Despite this effort, Franklin reported, “all this has very little effect.”<sup>24</sup>

Franklin chose this opportunity to address questions about the delegations apparent financial discrepancies. He informed the committee that he had hired an accountant to organize a detailed report for congressional inspection. When it was completed, he promised to send the final account at the “first safe opportunity.”<sup>25</sup> To satisfy the committee’s immediate interests Franklin offered several insights into the delegation’s financial state. He specifically noted advancing £20,000 sterling to a “Mr. Ross,” paying congressional drafts of 93, 080 livres, and advancing to William Lee and Izard £5,500 sterling.<sup>26</sup> Franklin then concluded his financial detail with a more ambiguous assessment. He noted that he spent a large amount of money on “great quantities of clothing, arms, ammunition and naval stores” and paying Americans in distress “a great sum.”<sup>27</sup>

Franklin chose this moment to defend his decision to deny other financial claims by Lee and Izard. He acknowledged the legitimacy of their power to draw monies but challenged the

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<sup>21</sup> Benjamin Franklin to the Committee for Foreign Affairs, May 26, 1779, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 7, 2014).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

validity of their requests. Franklin wrote that his responsibility was to provide for expenses incurred before foreign courts and asserted that with the exception of Lee they had not recently incurred any expenses. He continued by asserting that Lee and Izard had received an ample provision of £5,500 and suggested, “both of them might command money from England.”<sup>28</sup> Franklin reiterated his earlier contention that Lee and Izard both possessed private fortunes that kept them properly supplied.<sup>29</sup> Despite his adamant position that he did no wrong, Franklin submitted himself to the will of Congress. He wrote, “I am however in the judgment of Congress, and if I have done amiss must submit dutifully to their censure.”<sup>30</sup>

Franklin also took this opportunity to inform the committee of three threats to their mission. The first was his inability to negotiate the shipping and receiving of cargo with ship captains. He attributed this to his lack of experience in the business and claimed that his distance from any port “renders my having anything to do with it extremely inconvenient.”<sup>31</sup> The second issue was the problem of a fragmentation between the states. Franklin indicated that individual petitions for European loans separate from Congress interfered with his work. He noted applications from three different states requesting “great quantities of arms, ammunition & clothing or money upon credit to buy them.”<sup>32</sup> Franklin claimed this compromised the integrity of the United States before foreign courts. He commented “I find the ministers do not like these separate applications, and seem to think that they should properly come only thro’ Congress.”<sup>33</sup>

Franklin’s public image continued to deteriorate through 1779. A great source of embarrassment came in the form of a falsified pamphlet called *Green Box of M. de Sartine*. This

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

short book appeared to be a collection of official correspondence belittling Franklin and the Americans unintentionally misplaced by the French naval minister.<sup>34</sup> One particularly unflattering exchange came in the form of a letter to de Sartine from the Superintendent of the Queen's household, Princess de Lamballe. The princess wrote of the American minister's audience before the court describing it as "perfectly awful" and declared that if it had lasted any longer, it would have given her a "headache."<sup>35</sup> Lamballe also recounted how the queen responded to the Americans. She described her majesty as having "all the trouble in the world to refrain from laughing" upon their entrance.<sup>36</sup> Of their apparent simplicity the queen reportedly had commented, "I must say that they are nothing but rabble."<sup>37</sup> Lamballe personally dismissed Franklin's aptitude commenting, "look at Dr. Franklin's white hat; it is the emblem of innocence."<sup>38</sup> The Countess also commented on his spectacles stating, "they are what I call real economy" because one was supposedly broken.<sup>39</sup> The pamphlet concluded with a quote from the Queen describing Franklin as "really very singular in everything."<sup>40</sup>

These dismissive caricatures of Franklin were not unique in the European press. On June 1, 1779, London's *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* published a scathing portrayal of Franklin. Written as an anonymous letter to the editor, it detailed Franklin's illegitimate son he had with a "wench in Philadelphia, whom he left to die in the streets of disease and hunger."<sup>41</sup> The letter also questioned Franklin's loyalty to the American people he represented. It declared, "modern

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<sup>34</sup> Schiff, *A Great Improvisation*, 220.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Tickell, *The Green Box of Monsieur de Sartine*. (New York, J. Byrne and Son, 1779), 24.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Editorial, *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, June 1, 1779.

history scarcely furnishes an example of such consummate hypocrisy.”<sup>42</sup> The portrayal claimed this made Franklin the worst traitor because he was only loyal to himself. It declared “if the axe or the halter are to be employed on this occasion, it were much to be wished the first example could be made of the hoary traitor.”<sup>43</sup>

Suspicious and accusations against Franklin also flourished in America. On September 20, John Adams wrote to Congressman Thomas McKean calling for the appointment of a secretary to assist the delegation with commercial and maritime matters. He attributed their difficulties to Franklin claiming “he is not a sufficient statesman, he knows too little of American affairs or the politics of Europe.”<sup>44</sup> Adams also described Franklin as “too old, too infirm too indolent and dissipated to be sufficient for the discharge of all the important duties of Ambassador.”<sup>45</sup> Questions about Franklin’s abilities and loyalties also echoed throughout the American press. On October 20, the loyalist *New York Gazette* published an article that accused Franklin of lacking character and working against American independence. The piece insinuated that Franklin was in concert with the Catholic church and was causing America to “go to the devil” because he relinquished Canada to the French and Florida to the Spanish.<sup>46</sup> This scathing portrayal suggested Franklin contrasted with North America’s British and Protestant identity and therefore could not be trusted.

As 1780 approached, both the war in America and the mission to France faltered. On December 24, Silas Deane wrote Franklin from Virginia informing him of his impending

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Gordon Wood, ed., *John Adams*, P.241

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Schiff, *A Great Improvisation*, 221.

dispatch to France aboard a twenty-four-gun ship commanded by marquis de Vaudreuil.<sup>47</sup> Deane provided Franklin with a poignant assessment of the state of the war. He anxiously wrote of an impending invasion of Virginia and other southern states by the British. Deane noted that America was not prepared to oppose the forces “as I wish we were.”<sup>48</sup> He continued by surmising that the British would attempt to control the Chesapeake to gain a significant advantage by preventing the use of the waterway. Deane indicated how desperate the situation was by acknowledging they were relying on severe weather to prevent the British attempt on the bay.<sup>49</sup>

On December 27, John Jay wrote Franklin informing him of his approaching departure for France and forwarding a congressional resolution passed on October 15 regarding salaries and funding for American commissioners.<sup>50</sup> Jay used this resolution to request salary owed and to inform Franklin of an acquired debt of 3,379 livres and “eight Sols Tournois”<sup>51</sup> The resolution provided explicit instructions for Franklin to establish a fund of “two thousand Louis d’ors” for distribution according to their respective salaries.<sup>52</sup> Congress assured Franklin it would replace the funds and establish a permanent resource for future salary payments.<sup>53</sup> By instructing him to fund the other ministers, Congress appeared to rebuke Franklin’s argument the previous May for denying funds to Lee and Izard.

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<sup>47</sup> Silas Deane to Benjamin Franklin, December 24, 1779, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 7, 2014).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> John Jay to Benjamin Franklin, December 27, 1779, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 7, 2014).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Continental Congress to Benjamin Franklin, resolution, October 15, 1779, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

The American mission to Europe continued to struggle through early 1780. On January 26, Jay wrote to Franklin describing his turbulent accident-prone travel across the Atlantic claiming Franklin doubtlessly would have “been amused.”<sup>54</sup> Jay informed Franklin of financial charity offered to him upon his arrival in Cadis noting he was “a little embarrassed on the article of money.”<sup>55</sup> He also took the opportunity to remind Franklin of the consequences of his financial actions. Jay noted, “American credit suffers exceedingly in this place from reports that our loan office bills payable in France have not been duly honored.”<sup>56</sup> After charging Franklin with negligence, Jay also offered a personal criticism. He commented, “how far you may be in capacity to answer the demands made upon you I cannot determine.”<sup>57</sup> This clearly indicated that Jay was on the offensive against Franklin, and that their two egos were destined to clash.

Franklin waited until February 22 to respond to Jay. He wrote that the news of Jay’s safe arrival gave him “infinite pleasure.”<sup>58</sup> Franklin responded to the contents of Jay’s letter by assuring him that he had complied with all instructions regarding debts and salaries and avoided any mention of the hostile rhetoric. Franklin also informed Jay that he had established a fund of 24,000 livres at Madrid for him and instructed him to fulfill Carmichael’s request of 4,800.<sup>59</sup> This cordial response temporarily eased the tension between Franklin and Jay but reoccurring communication problems within the commission eventually would further divide them.

On March 5, Juliana Ritchie wrote Franklin seeking any information about the fate of her husband. This letter symbolized the continued problem of broken communications among

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<sup>54</sup> John Jay to Benjamin Franklin, January 26, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 7, 2014).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Benjamin Franklin to John Jay, February 22, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 7, 2014).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

Americans in Europe. Ritchie informed Franklin that all correspondences between her and her husband were routinely intercepted thus leaving her in a state of “suspense and intire [sic] ignorance.”<sup>60</sup> She also detailed her several unsuccessful attempts of gaining information from contacts in London. This was troubling for Ritchie who expressed profound fears for her husband. She explicitly asked Franklin if he knew of any information regarding rumors about American officers killed by the British including one named Richards or possible Ritchie.<sup>61</sup>

Ritchie’s letters assumed that Franklin possessed intimate knowledge of such matters. She wrote that Franklin must have this information regularly sent to him and brought by recent American arrivals in France who she assumed were “well informed of those events.”<sup>62</sup> Expressing no perceived possibility that Franklin remained ignorant of these matters, Ritchie requested he dispatch any relevant information to her. Ritchie further suggested that she and Franklin establish a consistent line of communications for their mutual benefit. She wrote that in the coming months she planned to leave France for England. Once established in London she offered to “render you any service.”<sup>63</sup> After three weeks without a response from Franklin Ritchie wrote again on March 29. She expressed concern about Franklin’s silence and referenced his lack of response to another letter three years earlier.<sup>64</sup> Ritchie expressed that the continued lack of information increased her apprehension. After explaining her situation, Ritchie pleaded with Franklin to respond with information as an act of “charity.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Juliana Ritchie to Benjamin Franklin, March 5, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 7, 2014).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Juliana Ritchie to Benjamin Franklin, March 29, 1780, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.



Franklin responded to Ritchie informing her that he had learned nothing of her husband since leaving America in 1776.<sup>66</sup> He also addressed her inquiries into American officers including those who migrated to Paris. Franklin claimed that in Paris they were “scarce” and that he did not know where they were at present.<sup>67</sup> Despite his lack of knowledge, Franklin assured Ritchie that he would keep the lines of communication open in case he learned anything. Franklin also addressed the problem with correspondence between America and Europe. He described the communication between the two as “interrupted.”<sup>68</sup> Franklin cited two important causes for this including letters intercepted by the enemy at sea and poor organization between the Americans and their allies. He also noted that a large number of letters were sunk at sea to avoid capture, and he commented, “I do not wonder at your not hearing from Mr. Ritchie.”<sup>69</sup>

This lack of communications continued to be problematic for the American commissioners. On April 7, Franklin wrote to Jay that he had been in “suspense” sometime about contacting him because he did not know if Jay was in Cadiz or Madrid.<sup>70</sup> The problem with correspondence between the two delegates appeared to be a result of poor effort by Franklin. He used this letter to “now acknowledge the receipt” of letters from Jay dating September 26 from Philadelphia, December 27 from Martinique, and January 26, 28 and March 3 from Cadiz.<sup>71</sup> After this, Franklin addressed problems with false information that hurt their effectiveness and credibility. Franklin informed Jay that his reports of rumors in Cadiz that he had failed to honor

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<sup>66</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Juliana Ritchie, April 5, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 7, 2014).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Benjamin Franklin to John Jay, April 7, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 7, 2014).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

Loan Office Bills payable in France were “wicked falsehoods.”<sup>72</sup> He assured Jay that he refused no bill from the original proprietor and actually paid those guaranteed by the presenter or an alternative form of credit. After denying all suggestions that he refused payment of bills, Franklin contemplated the source of such information. He surmised the source to be “enemies of our country” or “persons who proposed an advantage to themselves by purchasing them at an under rate.”<sup>73</sup>

On April 14, Jay responded to Franklin’s recent letter. Jay dismissed Franklin’s excuse for not writing noting that Gerard successfully delivered all his correspondences to Paris.<sup>74</sup> Jay surmised, “I find it therefore difficult to account for my not having been favored with a single line from you since my arrival.”<sup>75</sup> Despite this, Jay did admit there were security problems within their lines of communications. He claimed he drafted several letters but did not send them by post because of espionage. Jay also stated he did not send them special express because as a stranger “I knew not whom to trust.”<sup>76</sup> He did offer a solution to their broken line of communication. Jay wrote that because he received no advice or orders from Franklin over the past three months he would send Franklin’s letters in a packet addressed to an American tobacco merchant in Nantes named M. Joshua Johnson.<sup>77</sup> Jay concluded his letter reminding Franklin of the importance of open communications and affirmed his dedication to transparency.

Despite the problems with Jay, Franklin and Adams’ relationship appeared less complicated at this point. On April 19, Adams informed Franklin that he had received

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> John Jay to Benjamin Franklin, April 14, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 7, 2014).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

instructions from Maryland for Franklin to choose an agent in Britain to draw money from their “English funds” at a compensation rate of two percent.<sup>78</sup> Adams offered Franklin his personal suggestions regarding five potential nominees chosen by Maryland. Despite this, Adams admitted he had no right to interfere and asked Franklin’s pardon for his “presuming to advise.”<sup>79</sup> Franklin responded quickly on April 21 suggesting his mistrust of the information delivered to Adams. Despite this, Franklin declared Adams recommendations came with great weight to him and he would consider them. Franklin concluded that he would nominate a Mr. Williams, someone Adams considered a proper person.<sup>80</sup>

As tensions eased between Franklin and Adams, an old issue escalated into an outright crisis and highlighted how confused the lines of authority in the American government were during the Paris negotiations. A year before Franklin had ordered commander of the *USS Alliance* French Captain Pierre Landais to join John Paul Jones in his campaign against England. Franklin explicitly instructed Landais to “put yourself and ship under his command as your senior officer.”<sup>81</sup> On September 23, 1779, Landais’ *Alliance* fired on Jones’ ship the *Bonhomme Richard* killing several men and ultimately sinking the vessel.<sup>82</sup> This followed a series of schisms between the two captains and resulted in accusations of insubordination from Jones against Landais. Franklin reluctantly led an inquiry of the allegations but rendered no judgment because he felt it was not within his authority and was better suited for an American court.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> John Adams to Benjamin Franklin April 19, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 7, 2014).

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Pierre Landais, April 28, 1779, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 7, 2014).

<sup>82</sup> Schiff, *A Great improvisation*, 225.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

In early March, Franklin relieved Landais of the *Alliance* for acting “captious and critical.”<sup>84</sup> Franklin specifically cited Landais’s tendency to misconstrue any part of the English language he did not understand as an intended insult.<sup>85</sup> Despite Franklin’s intentions to limit or entirely sever their communications, Landais continued to correspond. Landais wrote to Franklin denying the charges and announced his intentions to seek a court martial in America for vindication.<sup>86</sup> He also insulted Jones personally claiming he “behaved so well in all respects for to not take or destroy the whole fleet of the enemy, that I must say loudly, that the King of England ought to reward him for it.”<sup>87</sup>

Landais later wrote to Franklin asking for passage to America, his personal effects, prize money, and monthly pay “since I am in Europe.”<sup>88</sup> Franklin responded to these requests claiming it was not in his power to give Landais passage to America and that concerning his wages and prize money “payment of them does not belong to me.”<sup>89</sup> Landais altered his approach in response asking Franklin to use his influence to persuade the officers of the *Alliance* to return his possessions as a favor.<sup>90</sup> He also provided Franklin with an account of his unfortunate financial situation and asked to whom he must apply to for his monies. Landais further implored Franklin to advise him of his best options to obtain passage given his circumstances.<sup>91</sup> This attempt at civility by Landais was short-lived. The next day he wrote claiming Franklin relieved him of

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<sup>84</sup> Benjamin Franklin to John Paul Jones, March 1, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 7, 2014).

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Pierre Landais to Benjamin Franklin, December 30, 1779, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 7, 2014).

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Pierre Landais to Benjamin Franklin, February 28, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>89</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Pierre Landais, March 1, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>90</sup> Pierre Landais to Benjamin Franklin, March 10, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

command of the *Alliance* over accusations “that none but a court martial can judge.”<sup>92</sup> Landais further accused Franklin of keeping him in France four months longer than his instructions from America dictated.<sup>93</sup> From this Landais asked as a “right” that Franklin either restore command of the *Alliance* to him or provide him with a written refusal for him to present to Congress.<sup>94</sup>

Franklin responded the next day with a letter that offered multiple reasons for his actions. He informed Landais that the continued quarreling between captain and crew as well as Landais’s repeated written criticisms of his men prompted Franklin to take action.<sup>95</sup> Franklin supported the validity of this decision by citing the lack of complaints of the crew regarding their new commander.<sup>96</sup> He also stated that Landais’s only ambition in returning to the *Alliance* during his four months in Paris was to retrieve his possessions. Franklin clearly intended to portray Landais as an ineffective commander who abandoned his post.

Franklin also insinuated that Landais pleaded for reinstatement just prior to the ship’s sailing for the sole reason of obtaining a written denial to aid his cause in America. Despite this, Franklin assured him he would provide him with a denial “as positive and clear as you require it.”<sup>97</sup> Franklin continued by declaring that he had not informed anyone in America of his opinion of Landais’s actions to prevent a promotion of bias against him. This was a clear attempt by Franklin to embellish his neutrality and fairness regarding final judgment of Landais in America.

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<sup>92</sup> Pierre Landais to Benjamin Franklin, March 11, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Pierre Landais, March 12, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

Despite this, Franklin declared that if “I had 20 ships of war in my disposition I should not give one of them to Captain Landais.”<sup>98</sup>

Following these exchanges, Franklin assumed that Landais had sailed to America.

Landais actually traveled to L’ Orient in northwest France where the *Alliance* prepared to sail to America.<sup>99</sup> On May 29, Landais surprised Franklin with a letter stating “I have been waiting ever since I came to L’ Orient for your order to me to retake the command of the frigate *Alliance*.”<sup>100</sup>

Landais wrote that he figured Franklin had had enough time to reflect on the issue and reminded him that Congress appointed him captain. Landais then informed Franklin “I consider it my duty to return to my station on board her.”<sup>101</sup> He justified this using a letter dated April 1 from the

Secretary of the Board of Admiralty John Brown addressed to Captain Peter [sic] Landais or the Commanding Officer of the Continental frigate *Alliance* instructing whoever to return to the

United States.<sup>102</sup> Landais included a copy of this letter and reminded Franklin that he was

answerable for any “disagreeable consequences.”<sup>103</sup> Franklin responded on June 7 claiming no

knowledge of Landais’ presence at L’ Orient and reminded him that both of their actions would

be laid before their superiors for judgment.<sup>104</sup> Franklin concluded by warning Landais about the

consequences of his actions and declared, “I wave therefore any further dispute with you.”<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Pierre Landais, June 7, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>100</sup> Pierre Landais to Benjamin Franklin, May 29, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> John Brown to Pierre Landais, April 1, 1780, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>103</sup> Pierre Landais to Benjamin Franklin, May 29, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>104</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Pierre Landais, June 7, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

After rejecting Landais's claims, Franklin wrote to Jones informing him of Landais's actions and instructed him to act "with all possible expedition."<sup>106</sup>

The actual situation in L' Orient differed from Franklin's understanding when he rebuked Landais's request for reinstatement. When Landais moved to take the ship, Jones ridiculed the lack of loyalty from the crew and left the vessel for the taking.<sup>107</sup> Landais informed Franklin on June 14 that he had "taken the command yesterday as my right."<sup>108</sup> The reinstated captain asked Franklin again to explain under what authority he relieved his command. Landais also discredited Franklin's previous claims over crew complaints against him and their admiration for Jones. He wrote that his officers and crew informed him that they wrote Franklin "begging" that their lawful commander be restored and they received no response.<sup>109</sup> Landais then resumed his standard captaincy dialogue asking Franklin to pay owed prize money to the crew and send him his dispatches so "I may fulfill the orders of Congress."<sup>110</sup> Franklin responded with surprise at Landais' disobedience and ordered him "to quit the ship immediately."<sup>111</sup>

Landais ignored Franklin's demands and responded with a detailed inventory of the arms and ammunition on board.<sup>112</sup> He also repeated his demand that Franklin pay his crew their prize money, stating "I am sure it would be for the interest of the United States that no more time be lost by that delay."<sup>113</sup> Franklin ignored Landais and wrote to Jones the following day revoking

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<sup>106</sup> Benjamin Franklin to John Paul Jones, June 1, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Pierre Landais to Benjamin Franklin, June 14, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Pierre Landais to Benjamin Franklin, June 16, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

his order that he receive Lee as a passenger.<sup>114</sup> This was done because Franklin believed Lee “advised or promoted” the mutiny on the *Alliance*.<sup>115</sup> Franklin left the decision to Jones suggesting that he might judge Lee for himself and decide to allow or prevent his passage.

Jones did not confront Landais following the mutiny.<sup>116</sup> He instead traveled to Versailles in an attempt to win the favor of the court.<sup>117</sup> Jones claimed that Congress believed Landais was well respected by the court and therefore appointed him captain to please the king.<sup>118</sup> Jones asked the king’s ministers to relay their opinion of Landais’ recent conduct to America because Congress should know if the account he gave of himself was true.<sup>119</sup> The Court of Versailles, convinced of Landais’ improper conduct, ordered a blockade to prevent his departure, and instructed the port citadel to fire on the ship if he attempted to escape.<sup>120</sup>

Knowing Landais’s pending fate, Jones wrote to naval officer Mathew Parke on board the *Alliance*. Appearing sympathetic, he informed him of the king’s arrest order and referenced Landais’ inevitable ruin asking, “why should he draw you in to share his fate?”<sup>121</sup> Jones also rejected Landais’ justification for the mutiny warning, “men are not to fly in the face of order and authority, and Mr. Franklin is too wise to exceed the limits of his power.”<sup>122</sup> Later Jones acquired a flotilla of warships and advanced on the *Alliance*. Instead of engaging, Jones stood

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<sup>114</sup> Benjamin Franklin to John Paul Jones, June 17, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> Schiff, *A Great Improvisation*, 245.

<sup>117</sup> John Paul Jones to Benjamin Franklin, memorandum, June 17, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Schiff, *A Great Improvisation*, 245.

<sup>121</sup> John Paul Jones to Matthew Parke, June 20, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*



down and permitted Landais to pass avoiding the potential of sinking an American ship.<sup>123</sup> The following day Jones justified his actions to Franklin stating “your humanity will I know justify the part I acted in preventing a scene that would have rendered me miserable for the rest of my life.”<sup>124</sup> Jones also informed Franklin of his true opinion of Lee’s loyalties. He wrote Lee “is not a little disappointed that his operations have not produced bloodshed between the subjects of France and America.”<sup>125</sup>

The *Alliance* was granted permission to pass from L’ Orient but was ultimately towed and anchored outside of Port Louis in western Brittany.<sup>126</sup> This was because Landais refused to depart without first receiving the prize money from his earlier privateering exploits.<sup>127</sup> Franklin responded by discrediting Landais and calling his prizes illegitimate. He noted that the two ships Landais captured reported his illegal seizures and demanded damage payments of £500 sterling and 60,000 livres respectively.<sup>128</sup> Franklin also cited Landais’ capture of an Irish ship with an English passport and predicted that, “damages will also be demanded.”<sup>129</sup>

Despite Franklin’s insistence that Landais was completely negligent and not owed money, he contacted Adams and inquired his opinion. Franklin asked Adams three sets of questions. The first was if he felt that Landais was guilty of capital crimes.<sup>130</sup> He further inquired Adams’ opinion about whether relieving Landais from duty and denying him funds to travel was proper. Franklin also asked if Adams felt Landais was to blame for delaying the ship’s departure

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<sup>123</sup> Schiff, *A Great Improvisation*, 245.

<sup>124</sup> John Paul Jones to Benjamin Franklin, June 21, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Pierre Landais, June 24, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> Benjamin Franklin to John Adams, June 26, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

and sought advice about the future. He inquired if Adams believed they should allow Landais to retain control of the *Alliance* and sail to America where he would face trial.<sup>131</sup> By asking for Adams' opinion of his actions, Franklin was expressing some level of uncertainty regarding how he handled the situation.

Adams responded to the queries by stating that his opinion was unimportant because in a court martial he could neither witness nor judge.<sup>132</sup> Adams instead explained his legal understanding of instructions given by the Navy Board and Congress. He claimed he was unaware of Landais's receiving any instructions to obey the minister plenipotentiary. Adams also stated that only Congress could remove Landais from command "because the Navy Board themselves had not as I apprehend such authority."<sup>133</sup> Adams explained that he believed that such an event required the presentation of formal charges before Congress. This prompted Adams to conclude that no American in Europe possessed such authority because he knew of no formal complaints against Landais before Congress. Adams also informed Franklin that the American admiralty laws were inadequate and legally there was no evidence that supported the charge that Landais abandoned his duty.<sup>134</sup>

On June 27, Franklin wrote to Jones acknowledging that he would not likely regain command of the *Alliance* and commented, "so that affair is over."<sup>135</sup> Following Franklin's acceptance of Landais's command, he commented, "the business is now to get the goods out as

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> John Adams to Benjamin Franklin, June 26, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Benjamin Franklin to John Paul Jones, June 27, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

well as we can.”<sup>136</sup> Franklin also wrote to Landais on the 27<sup>th</sup> focusing strictly on business. He instructed him to receive a shipment of gunpowder, arms, and cannon from Prince de Montbary for transport to Philadelphia.<sup>137</sup> Landais responded on July 2 arguing his case to Franklin one last time. Landais claimed he was right to demand prize money, rejected Franklin’s reasons for denying him payment, and dismissed the claims of damages and illegal capture.<sup>138</sup> Franklin chose not to reply to Landais’ final effort. On July 7, Landais notified Franklin of his departure referencing his last response on June 24 stating, “you charged me in the letter with the prejudicial delay of the sailing of the *Alliance*, and given no hopes of having my people righted, I have prevailed upon them to go to our own country to seek justice.”<sup>139</sup>

As this crisis subsided, Franklin found himself entangled in another. Throughout the spring, Adams questioned the dedication of the French to the alliance. He became convinced that they pursued the war halfheartedly because they feared the emergence of a powerful nation in the Americas.<sup>140</sup> When Adams voiced this opinion, his relationship with the Comte de Vergennes suffered dramatically. On June 22, Adams wrote Franklin about the matter and stated his belief that French sources were planting false information in their dispatches to Congress intending to cause distress in America.<sup>141</sup> On June 24, Franklin wrote the Comte de Vergennes about Adams’ claims and requested to delay and examine all correspondences to America for

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Pierre Landais, June 27, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>138</sup> Pierre Landais to Benjamin Franklin, July 2, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>139</sup> Pierre Landais to Benjamin Franklin, July 7, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>140</sup> Schiff, *A Great Improvisation*, 247.

<sup>141</sup> John Adams to Benjamin Franklin, June 22, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

misrepresentations.<sup>142</sup> This briefly aligned Franklin with Adams against the Comte de Vergennes. On June 29, Adams wrote Franklin admitting that his argument with the Comte de Vergennes was out of his typical pursuit “and therefore I may be inaccurate in some things.”<sup>143</sup> He continued by asking Franklin that if he believed him to be wrong on anything to please inform him “for I am open to conviction.”<sup>144</sup> When Adams questioned his own actions, Franklin immediately retreated from his earlier support.

On June 30, the Comte de Vergennes wrote Franklin dismissing Adams’ argument as “abstract reasoning.”<sup>145</sup> The Comte de Vergennes also addressed Adams’ claims that the French were not in full support of American independence. He noted that the King was confident that Franklin’s opinion differed from Adams’ and assured him of no repercussions. The Comte de Vergennes provided Franklin with copies of all his correspondences with Adams on the matter. He also informed Franklin that the king expected him to put everything in front of Congress.<sup>146</sup> On July 10, Franklin wrote the Comte de Vergennes attempting to distance himself from the rift between him and Adams. Franklin wrote that he was trying to comprehend the issue but explained, “I cannot say that I yet perfectly understand it.”<sup>147</sup> Franklin also dismissed Adams’ insinuation that the French did not fully support the American cause. He assured the Comte de Vergennes that the sentiments of the United States differed dramatically. Franklin asked the Comte de Vergennes to assure the king that Americans were fully aware of their obligations to

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<sup>142</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Vergennes, June 24, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>143</sup> John Adams to Benjamin Franklin, June 29, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> The Comte de Vergennes to Benjamin Franklin, June 30, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> Benjamin Franklin to the Comte de Vergennes, July 10, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

France for their support.<sup>148</sup> Franklin clearly saw Adams as a threat to his effort to remain in the favorable graces of the court and therefore declined to stand in unity with his fellow American commissioner.

On July 31, the Comte de Vergennes wrote Franklin expressing his trust and admiration for his wisdom and principles.<sup>149</sup> He further requested that Franklin inform Congress of Adams' ill will and actions against the French for their judgment.<sup>150</sup> Franklin responded by reiterating that Adams did not represent the opinion of America and spoke "from his particular indiscretion alone."<sup>151</sup> He further explained that his communications with Adams were limited declaring, "I live upon terms of civility with him, not of intimacy."<sup>152</sup> Franklin concluded by assuring he would honor the Comte de Vergennes' request to inform Congress of the situation as asked.

On August 9, Franklin wrote to the President of Congress Samuel Huntington detailing both the *Alliance* affair and the rift between Adams and the Comte de Vergennes. Of the *Alliance* Franklin warned that the disorder and mutiny that infected her crew might cause them to "carry her into England."<sup>153</sup> To support this Franklin cited the existence of a conspiracy for this purpose during the ship's initial voyage to Europe. Franklin stated that the quarrels between, Landais, Jones and the crew resulted in her delay and eventual sailing at under capacity. Franklin used this opportunity to deflect any potential criticisms of his handling of the affair. He claimed the

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> The Comte de Vergennes to Benjamin Franklin, July 31, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Vergennes, August 3, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Samuel Huntington, August 9, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

distance between him, the ports, and the lack of a code of laws involving ships abroad “give me infinite trouble.”<sup>154</sup>

When informing Huntington of the conflict between Adams and the Comte de Vergennes, Franklin allowed the Comte de Vergennes’ words to explain the affair. Franklin simply forwarded to Congress all correspondences from the Comte Vergennes on the matter and noted that Adams provided him with no documents. This approach enabled Franklin to fulfill his promise to the Comte de Vergennes and use the French minister’s words against Adams while diminishing his direct involvement. Franklin limited his personal insight on the matters to a couple of explicit observations. He stated that Adams’ belief that Franklin expressed too much gratitude towards France was “mistaken.”<sup>155</sup> Franklin then offered his understanding of how this affair affected the negotiations. He noted that Adams no longer was effective because the Comte Vergennes declared he would not hold any discussions with him.<sup>156</sup> Franklin’s critique of Adams by Franklin clearly outlines their different perspectives on America’s diplomatic relations with France and its war effort. Adams doubted that a strong allegiance with France could be a mechanism to create a strong American entity because he believed America would trade British domination for French subjugation. In contrast, Franklin expressed little concern about France’s imperial intentions and believed French assistance was essential for America to gain independence.

On August 10, Franklin wrote a second letter to Huntington describing settled debts, actions of key French and American diplomats, and details about the pending departure of the

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<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

ship *Ariel*.<sup>157</sup> He also provided information about the gains of privateers whom he commissioned in France to harass British “coasting trade.”<sup>158</sup> Franklin concluded by addressing the growing denunciation of his character among those connected to the negotiations in Europe. He acknowledged that Lee, Izard, and Landais would lay accusations against him before Congress and declared he would fight the charges “knowing the uprightness and clearness of my own conduct.”<sup>159</sup>

On August 17, Adams wrote Franklin detailing Dutch perceptions of the United States. He declared, “everyone has his prophecy, and every prophecy is a paradox.”<sup>160</sup> Adams claimed some believed America would align with the British and break with the French.<sup>161</sup> He immediately dismissed this possibility citing the stability of the Franco-American alliance. Adams also addressed other popular predictions including the belief that France and Spain would abandon America, Spain would forsake France, or all of Europe would abandon America. These varying perceptions demonstrate the common idea that although no one was certain how, the revolution was doomed. Adams explained the most popular reason the populace questioned Europe’s commitment to the American cause. He cited Europe’s fear that America would become the leading manufacturing base and ruin its economy and that America would become a “great and an ambitious” military power and turn against Europe.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Samuel Huntington, August 10, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>158</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Samuel Huntington, August 10, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> John Adams to Benjamin Franklin, August 17, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

Adams clearly did not trust Europeans and reiterated his belief that the Americans could not rely on their support. He theorized that European rhetoric indicated they desired the assimilation of Americans back into Europe as “paupers.”<sup>163</sup> Adams sternly rejected the idea of any reconciliation between Europe and America. Instead, Adams declared that Americans should stop believing in “delusive dreams of peace,” utilize their own strength, and “depend upon themselves.”<sup>164</sup> When Franklin responded over a month later, he dismissed Adams’ claims about American delusions as untrue. He declared, “all the accounts I have seen, agree, that the spirit of our people was never higher than at present, nor their exertions more vigorous.”<sup>165</sup>

Despite a growing schism between the American delegates over diplomatic strategy, financial issues again consumed their attention. On September 20, Franklin wrote to Vergennes about securing another loan. Franklin expressed his reluctance claiming he asked Congress not to request this because the cost to the French already was immense.<sup>166</sup> Franklin also admitted that he could not reasonably expect to make repeated requests for money with any success. Despite this, Franklin explained that the state of America’s currency could not sustain its troops and current operations without new loans. Franklin feared if he protested America’s bills it would destroy Congressional credit and America would be “bound hand and foot” unable to fight.<sup>167</sup> He also informed the Comte de Vergennes that he fully believed France was America’s only hope. He claimed that the effort to gain credit from the Netherlands failed, and “we have had hopes of

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<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> Benjamin Franklin to John Adams, October 2, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>166</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Vergennes, September 20, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*



aid from Spain; but they are vanished.”<sup>168</sup> Franklin concluded by reiterating America’s commitment to settling all its debts following the war.

On October 14, Adams wrote to Franklin regarding European loans and America’s diplomatic strategy. He commented that he had felt the same “mortification” as Franklin about soliciting money but attributed this to their failed efforts.<sup>169</sup> Adams justified the continued American effort to borrow funds. He claimed there was no shame in borrowing because “England has been all the time borrowing of all the nations of Europe, even of individuals among our allies.”<sup>170</sup> Adams noted that England annually borrowed a sum equal to its exports while America one twelfth of its export. He also expressed support for the dispatch of American diplomats to all courts in Europe. Adams argued this was necessary because Britain had emissaries in every corner of Europe, “by which they keep up their own credit and ruin ours.”<sup>171</sup>

On October 22, Jay wrote Franklin supporting his actions and offered an alternative if they failed. He suggested that if France declined their request they must borrow from individuals despite higher interest rates.<sup>172</sup> Jay continued claiming they should secure funds on any terms because “almost anything will be better than a protest.”<sup>173</sup> He offered an assessment of the potential fallout from such an event consistent with Franklin’s view. Jay believed a protest was an intolerable disgrace and the consequences could cost Congress more than just its credit.<sup>174</sup> On October 24, Adams wrote Franklin in support of Jay. He advised that the contents of Jay’s letter

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> John Adams to Benjamin Franklin, October 14, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> John Jay to Benjamin Franklin, October 22, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

“will certainly be of great weight and use.”<sup>175</sup> Adams expressed his belief that private funding of the American effort was plausible. He wrote, “I am assured of the good will of a number of very worthy and considerable people and that they will endeavor to assist a loan.”<sup>176</sup> Adams also advised Franklin that their financial problems were not unique. He noted that in the Netherlands “English credit certainly staggers.”<sup>177</sup>

On November 28, Samuel Huntington wrote Franklin detailing the recent activity of the American government. Huntington indicated that Congress had passed a resolution petitioning Louis XVI for loan of 25,000,000 livres.<sup>178</sup> From this, Huntington provided four specific directives for Franklin. The first stipulated that Franklin forward the resolution to the king and “on all occasions and in the strongest terms” represent congressional resolutions. The resolution also directed Franklin to procure the longest respite possible after the war for repayment. This included various suggestions regarding interest, repayment methods, and issues of financial security. A final directive urged Franklin to expand his diplomatic presence by cultivating a friendship with Consul to Morocco Stephen D’Audibert Caille in hopes of securing a treaty of commerce.<sup>179</sup>

Huntington used this opportunity to inform Franklin of an effort to undermine him in Congress. He reported a pending vote on December 2 for the appointment of an American secretary to the Court at Versailles.<sup>180</sup> Huntington explained that the initial effort was only to provide Franklin with a personal assistant but a movement emerged to expand the appointee’s

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<sup>175</sup> John Adams to Benjamin Franklin, October 24, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> Samuel Huntington to Benjamin Franklin, instructions, November 28, 1780, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

powers. He detailed several reasons this effort had gained strength. Huntington pointed out that Congress was irritated because they only received two letters from Franklin in 1780. Of these two correspondences, both addressed negative events. In his March 4 letter, Franklin reported his failure to obtain most of the military supplies Congress instructed him to secure. Huntington then noted that although Franklin's second letter on May 31 reported his successful procurement of arms, few actually reached America. This indicated that even when Franklin found success he was underachieving. Huntington concluded by stating that Congress canceled the vote and elected an envoy to Versailles "for the special purpose of soliciting in conjunction with our minister plenipotentiary."<sup>181</sup>

Huntington amended his initial instructions to Franklin in a letter dated December 27. He reported that Congress dispatched Col. John Laurens to France with authority to negotiate "the important affairs to which they more immediately relate."<sup>182</sup> Huntington praised Laurens and expressed admiration for him. He stated that Laurens had "opportunities of information" about America's troubles that particularly qualified him to explain their circumstances to Louis XVI.<sup>183</sup> Huntington also explained that Laurens' dispatch eased concerns over Franklin's ability to perform his duties during these critical negotiations. He commented this would "guard against the accident of your want of health."<sup>184</sup> Huntington concluded by stating "Congress doubt not that the success of the measure will be much promoted by the assistance he will derive from

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Samuel Huntington to Benjamin Franklin, instructions, December 27, 1780," in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

you.”<sup>185</sup> On January 1, 1781, Huntington wrote Franklin again forwarding a congressional resolution respecting the empress of Russia and a copy of Laurens’ instructions.<sup>186</sup>

Lafayette wrote Franklin following these events providing his own insights. He informed Franklin that Congress had struggled to select a secretary because of politics and the “spirit of party.”<sup>187</sup> Despite this, Lafayette expressed support for the Col. Laurens. He informed Franklin that he would have chosen no other person for the role citing his “uprightness, candor and patriotism.”<sup>188</sup> Lafayette concluded his letter with a candid description of Franklin’s position within the politics of Philadelphia. Lafayette commented that Franklin had enemies but this was the nature of politics. Despite this, he assured Franklin of his allies noting, “You have in Congress as well as everywhere many faithful friends.”<sup>189</sup>

On March 9, Laurens wrote Franklin announcing his arrival at L’ Orient and his possession of several dispatches from Congress.<sup>190</sup> Laurens then bypassed Franklin and directly addressed Vergennes presenting the congressional orders outlining his directives. These Congressional extracts declared that America’s victory rested on the achievement of naval superiority and the acquisition of loans in excess of those previously sought.<sup>191</sup> He argued that France should increase its loans because the belief that the previous amount was adequate betrayed “the common cause of France and America.”<sup>192</sup> Laurens’ heavy-handed approach

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Samuel Huntington to Benjamin Franklin, January 1, 1781, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>187</sup> The Marquis de Lafayette to Benjamin Franklin, February 1, 1781, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> John Laurens to Benjamin Franklin, March 9, 1781, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>191</sup> John Laurens to the Comte de Vergennes, March 1781, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

before the French court continued. He claimed that Congress believed France's regard for "the rights of man" should dictate its actions and therefore "demand every effort" to prevent British domination in America.<sup>193</sup> He also noted that Congress demanded "the abasement of this rival" and the securing of an ally based on mutual interests.<sup>194</sup> Laurens concluded his argument regarding French obligations by declaring "the decisive measures insisted upon in the forgoing extracts are necessary" because the war appears to be in peril.<sup>195</sup>

On March 12, Franklin carefully constructed a letter to Samuel Huntington detailing the state of the American delegation. He first declared that he had attempted to the best of his abilities to comply with the instructions he received on November 28 and December 27 respectively.<sup>196</sup> Franklin admitted his initial attempts proved futile because the French ministry was preoccupied with other matters. He then explained that subsequent efforts to procure the 25,000,000 livres requested by Congress ultimately failed. Franklin attributed this to the great expense France had already endured in the war effort, to Versailles and other domestic burdens, and the poor state of American credit. Franklin reported that although securing the requested loan was impractical, Louis XVI did offer a grant of 6,000,000 livres to show his solidarity with America. This assistance compounded an earlier gift of 3,000,000 livres for congressional drafts and interests owed. Franklin concluded his financial detail by noting that this grant was for military use and warned Congress against using it for "general purposes."<sup>197</sup>

Once Franklin outlined the state of America's finances, he addressed a personal matter. Franklin admitted his role in the current state of affairs and offered several reasons for his

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Samuel Huntington, March 12, 1781, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

conduct. He noted that he had passed seventy-five years of age and stated his recent case of gout had “shaken me exceedingly.”<sup>198</sup> Franklin noted that his health woes and overwhelming public duties combined to prevent him from any personal satisfaction or activities. He expressed bewilderment over this personal development commenting, “I do not know that my mental faculties are impaired, perhaps I shall be the last to discover that.”<sup>199</sup> Despite any uncertainty of the cause for Franklin’s shortcomings, he was positive about a “diminution in my activity.”<sup>200</sup> Citing his previous decades of public service, Franklin suggested his career was over and that Congress should replace him as its delegate in Paris. He noted that his decision was not based on doubts of their success or ill experiences during his service but “purely and simply on the reasons above mentioned.”<sup>201</sup>

Franklin included a copy of this letter with a separate one to Jay on April 12, in which he elaborated on his decision to retire. Franklin purposely left his letter to Huntington unsealed for Jay’s inspection.<sup>202</sup> The reasons and specifics he included in Jay’s letter mirrored the ones in his letter to Huntington with one major exception. Franklin expressed his wish for Jay to succeed him in Paris.<sup>203</sup> Having omitted this in his letter to Huntington, Franklin advised Jay to write to his associates accordingly if he desired this appointment. Franklin concluded this letter by advising Jay that he had not informed anyone in France of his intentions.<sup>204</sup>

On May 14, Franklin again wrote to Huntington expanding upon the situation in Paris and offered advice regarding his dismissal. Franklin noted that since the arrival of Col. Laurens

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Benjamin Franklin to John Jay, April 12, 1781, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

the French had appeared more receptive to their requests for aid. Despite this, Franklin warned Congress not to burden his successor with future applications that were unobtainable.<sup>205</sup> Franklin also directly addressed his issue with William Palfrey, the U.S. Consul in France. He claimed that Palfrey had failed to communicate with Franklin for over four months and recommended he be relieved of all his business affairs. Franklin concluded his letter by addressing his pending retirement and declaring his intent to remain in France indefinitely.”<sup>206</sup>

As Franklin awaited word from Congress about his retirement, the earliest hints of a peace process emerged. On June 15, British minister David Hartley wrote Franklin offering to travel to France and meet to “think of some means of putting a stop to the horrors of universal wars.”<sup>207</sup> To accomplish this Hartley requested Franklin’s assistance. He expressed no desire to visit without the knowledge of the French ministers and asked Franklin to gain their consent.<sup>208</sup> Hartley also informed Franklin that their potential meeting would occur at an important time. He noted that his brother moved a conciliatory bill through Parliament in hopes of achieving a “honorable and universal accommodation of peace.”<sup>209</sup>

Franklin wrote to the Comte de Vergennes on June 27 providing him with a copy of Hartley’s letter. He expressed a desire to see Hartley as a friend but Franklin predicted that without official consent from the British court no good could come politically.<sup>210</sup> Franklin also predicted that a diplomatic meeting of the two would cause more harm than good. He noted the

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<sup>205</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Samuel Huntington, May 14, 1781, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> David Hartley to Benjamin Franklin, June 15, 1781, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Benjamin Franklin to the Comte de Vergennes, June 27, 1781, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

likelihood of it generating false reports and “conjectures.”<sup>211</sup> The Comte de Vergennes responded in agreement noting Franklin’s intelligence on such matters.<sup>212</sup> Despite this, the Comte de Vergennes did not completely reject the notion of such a conference. He suggested that Franklin and Hartley both should seek official approval to meet, stating his intention to assist with all legalities.<sup>213</sup> Instead, Franklin responded to Hartley on June 30 denying his request and attributing the decision to the Comte de Vergennes.<sup>214</sup>

On June 15, Congress drafted three letters to the American commissioners redefining their mission. The first informed them that the emperor of Germany and the empress of Russia had offered their mediation between Britain and America.<sup>215</sup> In light of this, Congress enclosed several instructions regarding the matter. Congress expressed a desire to terminate the war with an honorable peace by gaining justification for their cause from their “imperial majesties.”<sup>216</sup> The instructions continued by directing the commissioners to accept Germany and Russia’s mediation on their behalf using the letter as proof.<sup>217</sup>

The second letter from Congress altered the dynamics of the negotiations and clarified its directives. Congress granted Adams full “general and special” powers to negotiate with the Courts of France and Britain along with all other European states to achieve peace.<sup>218</sup> Congress took the opportunity to guarantee there were no misunderstandings regarding American

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Vergennes to Benjamin Franklin, June 29, 1781, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Benjamin Franklin to David Hartley, June 30, 1781, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>215</sup> Continental Congress to the American Commissioners, June 15, 1781, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Continental Congress to the American Commissioners, June 15, 1781, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).



authority. Congress named Franklin, Jay, Laurens and Jefferson along with Adams to possess the power to negotiate and “make a treaty or treatise.”<sup>219</sup> Congress concluded by expressing its faith in the commissioners. They stated they would “accept, ratify, fulfil and execute whatever shall be agreed and concluded and signed by our said ministers.”<sup>220</sup>

The third letter recommended that the commissioners adhere to instructions provided on August 14, 1779, and October 18, 1780, regarding boundary disputes.<sup>221</sup> Despite this, Congress advised the commissioners to use their own judgments on such matters. Congress felt it was unsafe to “tie you up by absolute and peremptory directions” as long as the negotiations secured the interests of the United States.<sup>222</sup> Congress also instructed the commissioners to provide the “most candid and confidential” communications about the negotiations to the French court.<sup>223</sup> The correspondence concluded by providing a guideline if the negotiations faltered. Congress granted the commissioners the authority to enter into a truce if peace was unobtainable given that Britain retain no possessions in the United States.<sup>224</sup>

Congress convened again on August 16 and further amended its strategy for achieving peace. Their first resolution granted full powers for Adams to enter into a treaty of amity and commerce with the Netherlands.<sup>225</sup> Congress also addressed the issue of Europe’s balance of power. To bend this in America’s favor, Congress agreed that Adams should propose a treaty of alliance between Louis XVI, the Netherlands and the United States. Congress specifically

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Continental Congress to the American Commissioners, instructions, June 15, 1781, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Continental Congress, Minutes, August 16, 1781, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

outlined its desired parameters of an agreement. Congress stipulated that the duration be limited to the present American war with Britain and conform to the existing treaties between France and the United States. Congress resolved that the Netherlands recognize U.S. sovereignty and only to accept a unanimous peace. The directive further stipulated that once the compact materialized, the commissioners were to invite the court of Spain to join the alliance.<sup>226</sup>

On August 20, Jay wrote Franklin offering his opinion on Congress' proposal for the use of mediating parties and an expansive European alliance. Jay expressed suspicions about Germany and Russia's potential involvement because he believed "every nation in Europe except Prussia wish better to England than France."<sup>227</sup> This motivated Jay to offer a suggestion about the negotiators course of action. He advised they should delay the mediation and focus on the alliance between France, Spain, the Netherlands, and the United States. Jay offered several reasons for his conclusion. He surmised that both Spain and the Netherlands would eagerly join, and this would rapidly facilitate an acceptable peace. To support this he offered an assessment of the Spanish Court. Jay reported that the Spanish were not tired of the war and had ambitions to gain territory including Gibraltar, Jamaica and Port Mahon on the Mediterranean island of Menorca. He also detailed the importance of a Spanish alliance for the American cause. Jay noted that if the Spanish acknowledged and supported American independence it would give "Britain a mortal wound."<sup>228</sup>

On August 25, Adams wrote to Franklin outlining his perspective on their new orders. Adams disliked the plan stating, "I am very apprehensive that our new commission will be as

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> John Jay to Benjamin Franklin, August 20 1781, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

useless as my old one.”<sup>229</sup> He continued by offering his personal insight into ending the war. Adams claimed that Britain would only consider peace following the death or capture of every British soldier in the United States.<sup>230</sup> Following this assertion, he issued a warning to Franklin. Adams contended that if Congress soon expected word of peace it would only find disappointment. He concluded by asserting his role in his vision for the American cause. Adams claimed, “my talent, if I have one lies in making war.”<sup>231</sup>

On August 15, Franklin received a dispatch from Congress denying his dismissal and expanding his role in the peace negotiations in an apparent validation of Franklin’s advantageous diplomatic skills, understanding of European politics, and celebrity in Paris.<sup>232</sup> Franklin openly accepted his continued appointment but remained relatively silent on the new congressional directives. On September 4, he wrote to Jay regarding accounts and mentioned receiving a letter from Adams about the commission but provided no details.<sup>233</sup> On September 13, Franklin wrote to Huntington expressing gratitude for his continued appointment. Franklin advised Congress about the complexities involved in achieving its stated goals and cautioned it against relaxing its war efforts in anticipation of a quick peace.<sup>234</sup> Franklin responded to Adams on October 5 claiming he knew nothing new about the mediation efforts and described them as in a state of stagnation.<sup>235</sup> The stalled progress continued until news of Lt. General Cornwallis’ surrender at

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<sup>229</sup> John Adams to Benjamin Franklin, August 25, 1781, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Benjamin Franklin to John Adams, August 16, 1781, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>233</sup> Benjamin Franklin to John Jay September 4, 1781, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>234</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Samuel Huntington, September 23, 1781, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>235</sup> Benjamin Franklin to John Adams, October 5, 1781, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

Yorktown reached Versailles on November 19.<sup>236</sup> This did not end the war but caused disenchantment in British Parliament, poor morale among British troops and renewed the push for peace negotiations.<sup>237</sup>

During the first thirty-two months of his role as minister plenipotentiary to Paris, Franklin laid the foundation of what would become the cornerstone of his diplomacy during the coming peace process. With a clear intention of leaving his personal fingerprint on both sides of the Atlantic, Franklin expanded his presence and influence in such matters including military campaigns within the European arena. As Franklin championed the efforts of the French on the Americans' behalf, Adams and certain members of Congress expressed anxiety about the course of the American diplomacy in Paris. The central premise of Franklin detractors was that American delegate was too affectionate towards the French. Franklin vehemently disagreed with this insinuation and recognized the amalgamation of French and American interests would create a balance of power and increase the likelihood that Britain would concede to their most advantageous demands. Worried over America's increasingly fragile state, Congress dispatched Col. Laurens to assist Franklin in Paris and solicit an ever-increasing amount of aid out of concern that Franklin's acquisition of aid failed to match America's need. Recognizing the impracticality of the Congressional aims, Franklin offered to relinquish his duties. Congress instead reaffirmed his role as sole delegate to France and Franklin emerged with a renewed purpose and a sense of vindication. This development coincided with a British initiative to commence negotiations to end hostilities and formulate a peace. With the consent of America

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<sup>236</sup> The Comte de Vergennes to Benjamin Franklin, November 19, 1781, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 8, 2014).

<sup>237</sup> Middlekauff, *Benjamin Franklin and His Enemies*, 590.

and the strength of the French, Franklin was now free to engage the peace process from a diplomatic vantage point of his own design.

## *Chapter Four: The Peace Process.*

Although Franklin's diplomacy invited criticism from multiple sources, it became immediately apparent that he accurately anticipated British actions once the peace process commenced. British minister Hartley immediately informed Franklin that the only avenue for effective negotiations rested on the elimination of French involvement. Foreseeing his adversary's strategy, Franklin remained imbedded within the French ministry and rejected Britain's repeated proposals for separate arbitration. With the support and protection of Britain's greatest antagonist, Franklin could effectively delay the mediation until the optimum circumstances emerged to negotiate. This enabled Franklin to strike an advantageous accord and create the greatest possible American empire. As Franklin continually affirmed his position, the British employed a series of tactics to sever the Franco-American alliance. These attempts including Hartley's use of London-based American agent Thomas Digges in an attempt to compromise Adams; the dispatch of British diplomat Thomas Grenville to engage Versailles; and the dispatch of British merchant Richard Oswald to discuss potential solutions directly with Franklin. As this cat and mouse game continued, Franklin employed a scheme where he offered a series of preliminary stipulations for peace that he expected to fail. Despite Franklin's nonsensical proposals, British desperation eventually crested, and in a shocking development, the terms were accepted. This initial agreement propelled the negotiations forward, and on January 20, 1783, the American, French, British and Spanish ministers signed the preliminaries, ending hostilities. This sent a wave of delight and relief across both Europe and America. After finalizing the details, Franklin, Adams, Jay, and Hartley signed the Treaty of Paris on September

3, 1783. This was Franklin's greatest public achievement and cemented his fingerprint on the new Atlantic world order where the extraction of an independent United States from a fractured British Empire created a social, political and economic shockwave that rippled throughout the entire globe.

On January 2, 1782, Hartley wrote a lengthy letter to Franklin proposing peace negotiations between Britain and America without French involvement.<sup>1</sup> Hartley argued this was the only logical solution. He claimed Britain would rather “fight to a straw to the last man and the last shilling rather than be dictated to by the French.”<sup>2</sup> This mirrored Hartley's previous suggestions that Franklin had resisted. Hartley again reiterated his claim that the Franco-American alliance impeded the wish of the British people for peace and was the single largest hurdle to negotiations.<sup>3</sup> Hartley suggested the negotiations use the Conciliatory Bill passed through Parliament on June 27, 1780, as a foundation. This bill contained five clauses. The first dictated the negotiations would address the removal of British troops from the “thirteen provinces”, security of British interests, and an agreement not to aid their respective enemies.<sup>4</sup> The bill also defined the non-military aspects of the negotiations and proposed the establishment of a “free and mutual intercourse, civil and commercial” between Britain and the “thirteen provinces.”<sup>5</sup> The bill's other provisions addressed a variety of issues including the proposed suspension of certain British decrees detrimental to the peace process and parameters for relations between Britain and the United States following the conclusion of hostilities.

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<sup>1</sup> David Hartley to Benjamin Franklin, January 2, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Franklin responded swiftly to Hartley's proposal with a stern rejection. Regarding French involvement Franklin claimed, "I believe there is not a man in America, a few English Tories excepted, that would not spurn at the thought of deserting a noble and generous friend for the sake of a truce."<sup>6</sup> Franklin also reminded Hartley that he had previously rejected Britain's offers of separate negotiations. Franklin commented those proposals "always gave me more disgust than my friendship for you permitted me to express."<sup>7</sup> He also addressed Hartley's assertion that the inclusion of the French impeded the will of the British to desire peace. Franklin commented that if one party proposes terms of peace and the others view it as "dictating" then "no treaty of peace is possible."<sup>8</sup> He concluded this commentary with an assessment of what Congress might instruct and what he personally would do. Congress would never instruct its commissioners to gain peace on these terms, he explained, and if it did, "I certainly should refuse to act."<sup>9</sup> Here Franklin was using his communications with Hartley to create the framework he desired for the burgeoning negotiations.

The burden of paying for the American commissioners' expenses continued to grow dire as peace negotiations stalled. On January 9, Franklin wrote to Robert Morris explaining that neither the Netherlands nor Spain had offered assistance in subsidizing their living costs.<sup>10</sup> Franklin explained this put him in a difficult position. He claimed that the duty of paying bills drawn by Jay, Laurens, and Adams fell on him, and his current resources would only permit this to continue another six weeks until the end of February.<sup>11</sup> On January 11, Franklin relayed a

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<sup>6</sup> Benjamin Franklin to David Hartley, January 15, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Robert Morris, January 9, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.



similar message to Adams, adding “I have not only no promise of more money, but an absolute promise that I shall have no more.”<sup>12</sup> The other commissioners reported to Franklin similar situations. Jay reported his inability to settle his debts and stated that Franklin’s intervention would be necessary to prevent America’s default of its existing bills.<sup>13</sup> He also offered a bleak view of his future economic prospects. Jay reported his difficulty in obtaining loans from individuals. Despite Spain’s promise of assistance he claimed, “I have no reason to rely on receiving it soon.”<sup>14</sup>

Franklin responded to Jay with heavy criticism of the Spanish court. He claimed he did not know the amount of aid Jay received but if it was not significant, he “wished you had never been sent there.”<sup>15</sup> Franklin expressed this opinion because he felt that Spanish actions hurt their cause. He surmised that their slight of America’s proposed friendship was “disreputable to us” and hurt their relations with other courts.<sup>16</sup> Franklin also addressed Jay’s solicitation of aid and offered his assessment of the situation. He claimed that he had no power to assist him and he perceived Spanish reluctance as a refusal of their offer of alliance.<sup>17</sup>

On January 25, Adams dispatched a detailed assessment of the financial situation in the Netherlands. He mirrored Jay’s request for assistance claiming his inability to obtain funds.<sup>18</sup> Adams continued by explaining the reason he was not successful. He claimed four people controlled all loans and acted in concert together. Adams asserted this monopoly consciously

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<sup>12</sup> Benjamin Franklin to John Adams, January 11, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>13</sup> John Jay to Benjamin Franklin, January 11, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Benjamin Franklin to John Jay, January 19, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> John Adams to Benjamin Franklin, January 25, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

worked against the American cause because they received their salaries on the condition that they resist his requests for loans.<sup>19</sup> Adams' failure along with Jay's difficulties in Spain threatened to give the appearance that the United States was more of a poorly conceived and politically unstable experiment than an emerging nation.

On January 24, Hartley wrote Franklin again attempting to arrange negotiations claiming his efforts were misunderstood. Hartley contended that the offer of separate negotiations stood "with the consent of the allies of America."<sup>20</sup> Hartley argued that this was feasible given the present situation. He claimed he understood the French to be disposed to consent, and Franklin had not told him different. Hartley concluded by assuring Franklin that peace was obtainable. He claimed that multiple treaties would conclude the war offering, "let us have one treaty begun, and I think the rest will follow."<sup>21</sup> This demonstrated that Hartley understood Franklin's refusal and attempted to entice him to negotiate by assuring a British acceptance of the Franco-American alliance.

On January 28, Franklin wrote Louis XVI assuring him of America's firm commitment to independence and its determination to achieve an honorable peace.<sup>22</sup> On February 16, Franklin responded to Hartley claiming that if the British truly desired peace they must "make propositions for that purpose."<sup>23</sup> Franklin purposely placed all the initiative on Hartley. With tongue in cheek, he claimed that one of the war parties must take the first step, and "America

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> David Hartley to Benjamin Franklin January 14, 1782," in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Louis XVI, January 28, 1782," in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>23</sup> Benjamin Franklin to David Hartley, February 16, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

being a novice in such affairs has no pretense to that character.”<sup>24</sup> Despite his commitment to non-action, Franklin reiterated his position, stating the United States stood with its allies and would negotiate “but do not dream of dividing us, you will certainly never be able to affect it.”<sup>25</sup> Despite feigning inexperience, Franklin clearly understood the diplomatic game and was simply waiting for the right opportunity to bring the negotiations forth.

The dynamics of the negotiations changed again in early 1782. On March 21, Hartley wrote Franklin informing him that George III intended to change his ministers in hopes of facilitating negotiations.<sup>26</sup> Hartley insinuated to Franklin that this offered an opportunity for the Americans to reevaluate their demands for peace. He asked if Franklin desired him to inform the new ministry that the Americans firmly rejected a peace separate from France.<sup>27</sup> Hartley continued by reiterating his desire for negotiations and the end of hostilities. Franklin responded on March 31 affirming his aversion to a separate peace but hinted he alone could not decide the matter. He wrote “but I am but one of five in the commission, and have no knowledge of the sentiments of the others.”<sup>28</sup> By clouding the process, Franklin used Britain’s invigorated push for peace to bait Hartley into a less advantageous position.

Despite their revitalized efforts to produce effective negotiations, Britain remained committed to a peace without France. On March 26, Adams wrote Franklin detailing an attempt by American agent in London Thomas Digges to engage him on business with authority from

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> David Hartley to Benjamin Franklin, March 21, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Benjamin Franklin to David Hartley, March 31, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

Hartley.<sup>29</sup> Adams assured Franklin he rejected the offer explaining he would not meet without witnesses and advised Digges to engage the commissioners at Paris. Despite this rejection by Adams, Digges again visited Adams inquiring about his authority to enter into a truce with Britain. Adams assured Franklin that he asserted that he could not offer any opinion without consulting the other commissioners. He also commented on Digges' representation of British politics and public opinion. According to Adams, Digges claimed Britain was "gloomy" citing "the distresses of the people and the distractions in administration and parliament."<sup>30</sup> Adams then informed Franklin of a growth in popular support for America in the Netherlands, claiming "ten or eleven cities of Holland" favored the Americans.<sup>31</sup> This news strengthened Franklin's resolve to deflect negotiations until an opportune time when the British would agree to the most desirable terms.

To compound their efforts in the Netherlands, the British devised a scheme to divide America and France. Franklin wrote Adams on April 13 informing him that he had learned of British diplomats addressing the French ministry in hopes of convincing the royal court to negotiate a treaty without the Americans.<sup>32</sup> He noted the British offered to give the rest of Canada to the French as a sacrifice.<sup>33</sup> Franklin assured Adams that Americans had already stated their position on such matters. Also on the 13<sup>th</sup>, Franklin wrote Hartley expressing his displeasure at British attempts to sever the Franco-American alliance. He wrote, "you may judge from hence, my dear friend, what opinion I must have formed of the intentions of your

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<sup>29</sup> John Adams to Benjamin Franklin, March 26, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Benjamin Franklin to John Adams, April 13, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

ministers.”<sup>34</sup> Franklin continued recounting the French response to the British proposition. He insisted Louis XVI asserted that the British must be prepared to negotiate with France’s allies. Franklin also used this opportunity to reiterate the French and American commitment to their alliance. He cited the principles of the French court and described their attempts to circumvent the Franco-American alliance as “vain.”<sup>35</sup> Franklin concluded by suggesting that France’s reception of its ministers offered all sides possibilities. On April 45, Franklin added an additional note to the correspondence advising Hartley that if the British desired negotiations, Laurens possessed the authority to hear all proposals regarding “time, place or any other particulars.”<sup>36</sup> Clearly such extensive efforts by the British to produce negotiations with America and France separate from one another indicated the importance of preventing such an occurrence to cement an American advantage.

Despite continuous rejection of the idea, Britain relentlessly tried to facilitate negotiations without a Franco-American alliance. On April 16, Adams wrote Franklin detailing a visit the day prior by American merchant and politician Henry Laurens. Adams wrote that Laurens informed him that the British ministers again proposed a separate peace “upon any terms short of independence.”<sup>37</sup> Adams noted that Laurens advised the British that he believed a treaty without France was impossible. Adams wrote that he agreed stating, “I told him I was fully of that opinion.”<sup>38</sup> Adams also forwarded information presented to him by Laurens. He noted that the British ministers no longer trusted Digges’ character and had dispatched a British commissioner

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<sup>34</sup> Benjamin Franklin to David Hartley, April 13, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> John Adams to Benjamin Franklin, April 16, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

named Oswald to engage Franklin. Adams concluded his correspondence by stating a desire to meet only with “a plenipotentiary” in the future if Franklin permitted.<sup>39</sup>

Unbeknownst to Adams, Oswald petitioned Franklin on April 16 requesting to meet with him the following day.<sup>40</sup> Oswald presented himself as a peace emissary despite not possessing an official title or diplomatic status.<sup>41</sup> Franklin engaged Oswald discussing a durable peace and removing “what may give occasion for future wars.”<sup>42</sup> A key component of their conversation was the role of reparations during negotiations. Franklin noted his belief that peace could only be secure with reparations because American resentment from injuries guaranteed future conflict. Despite this belief, Franklin admitted that he was unsure if Americans would demand reparations but still suggested it would be to their advantage if the British offered it. Their conversation also addressed British possessions in Canada. Citing the cost of governing the territory, Franklin suggested the British cede control in favor of profitable trade agreements.<sup>43</sup> Franklin clearly was candid during this discussion because he understood any agreements were not binding. Such an environment afforded Franklin the opportunity to gauge his British adversary while reiterating his stipulations for peace.

The following day Franklin wrote Adams stating that Oswald liked the idea of using Canada for reparations because of Britain’s present financial constraints.<sup>44</sup> Despite Franklin’s account of his meeting with Oswald, Franklin failed to inform Adams about a significant blunder

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Oswald to Benjamin Franklin, April 16, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>41</sup> Schiff, *A Great Improvisation*, 297.

<sup>42</sup> Benjamin Franklin, notes for a Conversation with Oswald April 19, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Benjamin Franklin to John Adams, April 20, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

he had committed. During his meeting with Oswald, Franklin scribbled notes on the subjects discussed. At the conclusion, Oswald requested if he could present the notes to his British beneficiaries and Franklin agreed.<sup>45</sup> Franklin soon realized his mistake because he failed to confer with Vergennes as instructed and had no authority to discuss reparations.<sup>46</sup> Franklin immediately went into damage control and resorted to libel to distract attention from the negotiations.

Franklin printed and circulated a fictitious excerpt from the *Boston Independent Chronicle* detailing atrocities committed by Indians with British encouragement. These included an account attributed to a Capt. Gerrish describing the discovery of eight boxes containing American scalps intended as a present for Canadian Governor Col. Haldimand.<sup>47</sup> Franklin also fabricated correspondences between Indian tribes and the Canadian governor. These included a letter from the Seneca asking Haldimand to send the scalps to “the great King” to assure him “our faithfulness in destroying his enemies.”<sup>48</sup> The excerpt also detailed multiple examples of how this discovery affected the American populace. The examples included an account from Boston dated March 20 claiming that after the scalps arrived thousands of people flocked to see them “and all mouths are full of execrations.”<sup>49</sup> To make the excerpt appear legitimate, Franklin included ads for claims against estates and the sale of houses and land.

Franklin used this interruption to strengthen his support structure and requested that Jay return to France. On April 22, Franklin explained he could not negotiate without his colleagues

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<sup>45</sup> Schiff, *A Great improvisation*, 298.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

<sup>47</sup> Benjamin Franklin, Supplement to the Boston Independent Chronicle, April 22, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

and because Spain was unlikely to aid them, Jay's talents were more useful at Passy.<sup>50</sup> On April 23, Franklin wrote Jay again informing him that Vergennes agreed to the move and suggested they leave Carmichael in Madrid.<sup>51</sup> On April 24, Franklin wrote Jay a third time explaining his perception of where the negotiations were heading. Franklin noted that Britain agreed to a prisoner exchange with the Americans. He stated this resulted from Parliament's passing an act that designated them as prisoners of war instead of being charged with high treason.<sup>52</sup> Franklin perceived this as a vague acknowledgement of American independence. He stated that in response to America's rejection of a treaty without France, Britain appeared to entertain the possibility of a general peace.<sup>53</sup> On May 8, Jay wrote Franklin informing him of his intentions to travel to Paris and commenting that the French ambassador in Madrid agreed with the move.<sup>54</sup>

Franklin also expressed a desire for both Laurens and Adams to travel to France given the possibilities of negotiations.<sup>55</sup> Despite this, Franklin understood the importance of Adams' presence in the Netherlands during this crucial period. He informed Laurens that if Adams could not attend then he wished him to arrive with expressed knowledge of Adams' opinion.<sup>56</sup> On April 30, Laurens wrote Franklin informing him of his pending departure for Paris.<sup>57</sup> Laurens also brought Franklin up to date on recent conversations about American and British relations.

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<sup>50</sup> Benjamin Franklin to John Jay, April 22, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>51</sup> Benjamin Franklin to John Jay, April 23, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>52</sup> Benjamin Franklin to John Jay, April 24, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> John Jay to Benjamin Franklin, May 8, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>55</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Henry Laurens, April 20, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Henry Laurens to Benjamin Franklin, April 30, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).



He reported that Lord Shelburne was receptive to the proposed prisoner exchanges that various American and British parties had discussed.<sup>58</sup>

On May 2, Adams wrote Franklin informing him that his ability to attend was uncertain.<sup>59</sup> Adams chose this correspondence to clarify his position on peace and offer an assessment of their loan prospects. He claimed that he had previously hinted that acknowledgement of their independence was paramount, but reiterated that he did not mean they insist on such an article in the treaty. Regarding finances, Adams reported less than desirable news. He explained that Dutch profits from trade had fallen sharply and they were exhausted from loans for “France, Spain, England, Russia, Sweden, Denmark and several other powers.”<sup>60</sup> Adams also informed Franklin that domestic debts impeded their assistance commenting, “there is scarcely a Ducat to be lent.”<sup>61</sup> Despite this, Adams expressed optimism for their future. He wrote that although enthusiasm for their cause had faltered, “another year, if the war shall continue, perhaps we may do better.”<sup>62</sup>

On May 3, Hartley wrote Franklin informing him that the British government issued a general order releasing all American prisoners.<sup>63</sup> This event revitalized the peace process because it demonstrated Britain’s apparent acquiescence for negotiations under the present conditions. Hartley commented that this was the first step towards “sweet reconciliation.”<sup>64</sup> Franklin responded on May 13 commenting, “I rejoice with you in this step” and “I think it will

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> John Adams to Benjamin Franklin, May 2, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> David Hartley to Benjamin Franklin, May 3, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

tend greatly towards a reconciliation.”<sup>65</sup> He concluded his letter by expressing his hopes for a durable peace built upon this development.

On May 13, Deane wrote Franklin a lengthy epistle from his adopted lodgings in Ghent offering his differences of opinion with Franklin. Deane immediately addressed their lack of communication, commenting on Franklin’s lack of or short responses to his correspondences.<sup>66</sup> He continued by warning Franklin of how their relationship could negatively affect their important task. Deane wrote that they must not let their “resentments and passions get the better of our reason and judgment.”<sup>67</sup> He continued by reminding Franklin of their goal. Deane wrote, “the great object before us is to secure peace, liberty and safety for our country.”<sup>68</sup> Despite their shared objective, Deane detailed their differing opinions about what was best for the United States. Deane wrote, “you believe that the peace, liberty and happiness of our country will be best secured and supported by a close alliance with France.”<sup>69</sup> Deane explicitly disagreed with Franklin’s opinion. He explained he believed America “was formerly the most happy and free country in the world whilst under the British constitution.”<sup>70</sup> Despite their differences, Deane concluded his letter with an expression of his personal interests. He claimed, “I have neither correspondence or interest or the prospect of any in G. Britain- the small remains of my fortune, the most of my friends and family and all my future hopes and prospects are in America.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Benjamin Franklin to David Hartley, May 13, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>66</sup> Silas Deane to Benjamin Franklin, May 13, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

On May 17, Laurens wrote Franklin informing him that for health reasons he intended to decline his Congressional appointment to negotiate.<sup>72</sup> Laurens justified his decision by disagreeing with Franklin's earlier assertion that he could not enter into mediation without his colleagues. He stated that he believed that Congress and its constituents never intended or expected everyone named in the commission to act. Despite his refusal to negotiate, Laurens did express interest in continuing his assistance to the American cause. He explained his intention to contact Adams and assume his financial role in the commission.<sup>73</sup> This put Franklin in a peculiar position. Within two weeks of Britain releasing American prisoners, one of Franklin's colleagues expressed his aversion to independence and another elected not to participate. This proved to be the beginning of a series of events that immediately negated any progress made in the recent weeks.

With the stability of the commission in peril, Adams composed a letter on May 24 but failed to send it. In the letter, he made several prophetic assertions about the integrity of those with whom they would negotiate. He questioned whether Lord Shelburne and "his royal master" actually had lowered their ideas of "British omnipotence?"<sup>74</sup> Adams continued his assessment of Britain's intentions. He predicted that Britain's desire to maintain possessions gained in the Peace of 1763 would prolong the war indefinitely. Adams also believed that new British ministers would refuse to make concessions, attempt to turn the tide of the war, and prevent successful negotiations.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Henry Laurens to Benjamin Franklin, May 17, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> John Adams to Benjamin Franklin, May 24, 1782, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

On June 2, Franklin wrote Adams detailing the events surrounding British diplomat Thomas Grenville's appearance at Passy. Franklin described his rhetoric as a repetition of Oswald's assertions that the British would negotiate with all powers.<sup>76</sup> Despite this, Franklin reported a deception at the hands of the British. He noted that the French court had requested an agreement that France could share with Spain and Holland assuring Grenville's authority. Franklin reported the arrival of a British document twelve days later supposedly declaring Grenville's authorization to negotiate with the French and their allies. When Franklin arrived at Versailles and read the document he noticed there was no mention of France's allies and noted that the Comte de Vergennes had dismissed the event as a ruse to gain time. Franklin claimed that because Grenville declared his dedication to including America's allies in the negotiations, it indicated Britain's intention to continue the war.<sup>77</sup>

On June 13, Adams responded to Franklin's correspondence about the events. He immediately declared that Grenville's intent to negotiate only with France did not surprise him.<sup>78</sup> Adams continued with an assessment of the situation that mirrored the sentiment from his unsent letter to Franklin in May. He noted that because of divisions among the British ministers and their unwillingness to make concessions, they would likely never make peace. Adams continued with his personal desires for the conclusion of the war. He stated, "I wish their enemies could by any means be persuaded to carry on the war against them in places where they might be sure of triumphs."<sup>79</sup> Adams also declared his personal commitment to negotiations with their allies. He stated he had not taken any engagements to make peace without the Dutch and only would with

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<sup>76</sup> Benjamin Franklin to John Adams, June 2, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> John Adams to Benjamin Franklin, June 13, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

their blessing. Adams declared, “it would be with infinite reluctance that I should see a peace made between England and any of her enemies, unless it is made with all.”<sup>80</sup>

Franklin responded with cautious optimism. He wrote to Oswald expressing the belief that his dedication to the good will of both countries indicated his willingness to negotiate with the American commissioners.<sup>81</sup> Franklin indicated he believed that recent events resulted from the politics of negotiations. He surmised that despite Grenville’s initial commission to negotiate only with France, Britain’s plan was to enable Oswald to mediate with the Americans later. Franklin attributed this to the pending “Enabling Bill” before Parliament that authorized negotiations with the United States.<sup>82</sup> He concluded with an expression of hope for an honorable and swift conclusion to the war.

Franklin’s optimism was not evident when he wrote to Laurens on July 2. He theorized that the British delayed negotiations hoping that they could manipulate the situation for their advantage.<sup>83</sup> Franklin also suggested that the British intended to make the American commissioners irrelevant. He claimed that British General Guy Carleton was preparing to offer a proposition before Congress that would make a treaty in Paris unnecessary. Franklin also offered an unfavorable commentary on the European climate. He noted Oswald had not received a commission, and Grenville “does not very clearly comprehend us according to British ideas.”<sup>84</sup>

Franklin actively addressed the potential negotiations between General Carlton and Congress. On July 6, he provided the Comte de Vergennes with a resolution from Maryland’s

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Richard Oswald, June 27, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Henry Laurens, July 2, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

general assembly indicating their rejection of any proposition.<sup>85</sup> Franklin specifically highlighted the importance of such a strong rebuke from the state. He noted that Maryland was last to accede to their “confederation” and therefore “esteemed by some the least hearty in the cause.”<sup>86</sup>

Franklin also wrote Hartley expressing his displeasure at the slow pace of the British peace effort. He informed Hartley of Maryland’s unanimous resolution exclaiming their dedication to “continuing the war at all hazards than violate their faith with France.”<sup>87</sup> Franklin concluded by predicting the present state of affairs would produce negative results.

As Franklin voiced his displeasure, Hartley responded with his own complaints. He wrote that Franklin’s strategy of gaining independence before a treaty impaired progress. Hartley explained that Britain likely wished to gain something for American independence.<sup>88</sup> Hartley suggested that Franklin abandon his position and seek independence as the first article of the treaty. He concluded by expressing his belief that dependence could only arise “from the failure of the treaty.”<sup>89</sup> As the diplomatic dance between the two began, Franklin again resorted to deflection as a means to stall the process in hopes of finding the best opportunity for the Americans. This came in the form of limited communications with Hartley designed to string him along but accomplish little.

On August 16, Hartley wrote Franklin communicating much warmer relations. He commented that Franklin’s “honest, anxious and unremitting” efforts for peace must endear him

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<sup>85</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Vergennes, July 6, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Benjamin Franklin to David Hartley, July 10, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>88</sup> David Hartley to Benjamin Franklin, July 8, 1782, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ellen R. Cohn, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

to America “and to all mankind.”<sup>90</sup> From this premise, Hartley detailed the noble role he and Franklin played in the peace process. He noted, “I can give the strongest testimonies of the constant honor and good faith of your conduct and correspondences, and my letters to you will bear me equal testimony.”<sup>91</sup> Hartley continued by dismissing any future criticism of their actions during the negotiations. He claimed neither should fear censure because under scrutiny they would claim “the poet’s character of the sincere statesmen.”<sup>92</sup> Hartley continued with an assessment of their affairs arguing that he and Franklin agreed in sentiment.

Despite Franklin and Hartley’s apparent truce, criticism began to surround the minister plenipotentiary. On September 5, American statesman Robert Livingston wrote Franklin explicitly addressing the consequences of Franklin’s lack of communication. Reminding Franklin his last correspondence occurred in March, Livingston reported that the Americans had resorted to private letters as their primary source of information.<sup>93</sup> Livingston noted that of Adams’ position in Holland, Lauren’s liberation, and Jay’s travel to France, “Doctor Franklin has told us nothing.”<sup>94</sup> His criticism addressed the entire American system, not just Franklin. Livingston stated the Americans had adopted a system based on ignorance that impeded their ability to function. He continued by venting his personal frustration over their state of affairs. Livingston noted that he blushed when he met “a member of Congress who inquires into what is passing in Europe.”<sup>95</sup> He continued by highlighting a point that plagued the Americans from the beginning of the revolution. Of intelligence Livingston asked, “how does it happen that all our

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<sup>90</sup> David Hartley to Benjamin Franklin, August 16, 1782, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Robert Livingston to Benjamin Franklin, September 5, 1782, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

information of what is transacting in Europe should come through indirect channels or from the enemy?”<sup>96</sup>

Franklin quickly responded to Livingston and attributed his poor correspondence to their bad postal service and the interrupted peace process. He claimed that he had written “sundry letters” and expressed hopes that they had not all “miscarried.”<sup>97</sup> Franklin continued with an update of the negotiations. He claimed they “amounted to little more than mutual professions of sincere desires.”<sup>98</sup> Franklin continued by pleading with Livingston for patience. He noted the number of interests under consideration in a peace between five nations, and “it will be well not to flatter ourselves with a very speedy conclusion.”<sup>99</sup> Franklin concluded his short letter with an assurance of future communications containing important information and various relevant documents.

On September 27, Robert Morris wrote Franklin detailing two acts of Congress identifying three points of consideration. The first act dated September 14 consisted of a three-part directive defining Franklin’s agenda before the French court. The first instructed Franklin to solicit a four-million-dollar loan from Versailles while reassuring the French of America’s admiration. The second and third points directed Franklin to highlight America’s reliance on France and convince them of the present loan’s necessity. For reference, Morris included cost estimations for the year 1783 to support their petition for assistance.<sup>100</sup> Such a directive from

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Robert R. Livingston, September 26, 1782, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Robert Morris to Benjamin Franklin, September 27, 1782, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).



Congress placed much pressure on Franklin because Congress appeared to ignore his earlier assertion that its financial demands were impractical.

On September 23, Congress approved a second directive reinforcing its expectations of Franklin. They expressed doubts about Britain's suspicious change from "vengeance and war to kindness and conciliation" and instructed Franklin not to consider British compliments when negotiating.<sup>101</sup> Congress also reiterated the importance of America's continued friendship and alliance with Versailles. The final point implored Franklin to accept the necessity of these congressional loan applications because America lacked the ability to raise sufficient funds through taxation. Despite the official decree of Congress, Morris disclosed his personal doubts to Franklin regarding America's strategy. He stated his belief that foreign assistance was a necessity but expressed fears that "we shall be considered as relying too much on France, or in other words doing too little for ourselves."<sup>102</sup>

On September 28, Morris wrote a second letter addressing Franklin's critics in America. He noted that many believed Franklin's perceived allegiance to France "seals your lips when you should ask their aid."<sup>103</sup> Morris wrote that this viewpoint caused "Mr. Lee and company" to continuously assert that Franklin's connections and influence before the French court were "extremely feeble."<sup>104</sup> He also informed Franklin that these detractors were gaining influence in America at his expense. Morris noted that Congress believed "your grateful sensibility might render you unwilling to apply with all that warmth which the sense of their necessity convinces

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Robert Morris to Benjamin Franklin, September 28, 1782, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

them is necessary.”<sup>105</sup> Despite the apparent singling out of Franklin, Morris offered a personal assessment of the source of these resentments. He claimed that those “who censure you are well disposed to place like censure on France.”<sup>106</sup>

Despite negative information from America, Franklin remained focused on the diplomatic wrangling at hand. On October 14, Franklin wrote Livingston detailing his latest attempt to influence the course of the negotiations. He stated that the Americans had sent preliminary propositions to Oswald, although he doubted the British court would approve them.<sup>107</sup> The first article insisted the British king renounce for himself and all his successors any claims within the dominion of the thirteen colonies. The second addressed fishery rights dictating that America claimed the rights to the seas they possessed when they were under British dominion. Franklin’s provisions also discussed postwar financial and commercial relations between Britain and America. It proposed that citizens of each nation should enjoy the same protections in each other’s ports as afforded to their native subjects. Franklin concluded with an expression of hope that the British agree to the proposals. He claimed that if they were successful, “I apprehend little difficulty in the rest.”<sup>108</sup>

On November 4, Oswald wrote the American commissioners outlining several obstacles to successful negotiations. The first was America’s refusal to accept Britain’s insistence that all seized property be restored to loyalists and those who fought on behalf of the crown.<sup>109</sup> Oswald continued by asserting that if restoration was impractical, the American’s must agree to provide

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Robert R. Livingston, October 14, 1782, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Richard Oswald to the American Commissioners, November 4, 1782, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

adequate compensation. He continued by indicating that this stipulation united the British commissioners. Oswald claimed that Paris-based British diplomat Henry Strachey “has most strenuously joined me” in insisting on the restoration of property.<sup>110</sup> Britain also issued demands regarding British citizens under American control. Oswald insisted that America must grant general amnesty to those held in confinement with full restoration of property and rights.<sup>111</sup> Oswald concluded with an assertion that America must accept these stipulations before negotiations could progress further.

Henry Strachey reinforced Oswald’s demands the following day in a letter to the American commissioners. He claimed America’s refusal would be the great obstacle “to a conclusion and ratification of that peace which is meant as a solid, perfect, permanent reconciliation and reunion between Great Britain and America.”<sup>112</sup> Despite this warning, Strachey expressed his personal desire to achieve such an agreement between the two. He claimed he would not leave Paris without submitting the matter for consideration one last time.<sup>113</sup> Strachey concluded by indicating that American independence and territory would suffer if the American commissioners continued to reject the propositions.

The American commissioners unanimously responded to Oswald on November 5. They rebuked his proposals and claimed they could not enter into an agreement regarding restoration because confiscation occurred under the laws of individual states, and Congress had no

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Henry Strachey to Benjamin Franklin, November 5, 1782, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

constitutional authority to interfere.<sup>114</sup> The commissioners also dismissed the validity of Britain’s proposal regarding amnesty. They claimed to agree “to an amnesty more extensive than justice required” but could not extend it further.<sup>115</sup> The commissioners concluded by stating that if their inability to comply would induce Britain to continue the war “we hope that the utmost latitude will not be given to its rigors.”<sup>116</sup> The following day the commissioners forwarded a copy of the correspondence to Strachey.<sup>117</sup>

On November 21, Livingston wrote Franklin informing him that Congress appointed Jefferson to the commission but expressed doubts whether he would undertake the task.<sup>118</sup> Livingston’s letter included a personal assessment of the negotiations. He argued the British did not truly desire peace and compared them to church ministers unwilling to quit the pulpit even “when they have tired out their hearers.”<sup>119</sup> He also reported that the war effort in America was stagnant. Livingston explained the French army at Providence stalled without orders despite their preparedness to proceed.<sup>120</sup> He concluded his correspondence by expressing concerns over the commercial repercussions of British naval advances in the Caribbean.

On November 26, Franklin wrote to Oswald informing him of resolutions passed by Congress and the state of Pennsylvania. Franklin reported that Congress directed him to obtain the “authentic returns of the slaves and other property” destroyed or confiscated during the

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<sup>114</sup> The American Commissioners to Richard Oswald, November 5, 1782, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> The American Commissioners to Henry Strachey, November 6, 1782, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>118</sup> Robert R. Livingston to Benjamin Franklin, November 21, 1782, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

war.<sup>121</sup> He also informed Oswald that Congress determined any lack of compensation from Britain would invalidate claims against Americans for similar offenses. Franklin reported failure to pay would prevent America from making restitution to any former property owners that was “forfeited to, or confiscated by any of the states.”<sup>122</sup>

Franklin also presented a second resolution from the Pennsylvania assembly titled “An act for procuring an estimate of the damages sustained by the inhabitants of Pennsylvania, from the troops and adherents of the King of Great Britain during the present war.”<sup>123</sup> The bill referred to the damages as “unwarranted by the practice of civilized nations” and called for an estimate of damages for use as advantage during the negotiations.<sup>124</sup> The resolution delegated the task to the Pennsylvania county assessors and designated lost slaves as property damage.<sup>125</sup> The resolution concluded with a directive of how to execute the project including costs and court appearances. Despite the apparent stalemate, Franklin continued to offer proposals to Oswald attempting to further the peace process.

On November 29, Franklin drafted a preliminary proposal for peace and sent it to Oswald. It immediately called for the British king to convince Parliament to approve swift compensation for American merchants and citizens who lost “tobacco, rice, indigo, and negroes etc.”<sup>126</sup> Franklin also insisted that the British king petition Parliament to offer additional

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<sup>121</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Richard Oswald November 26, 1782, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Benjamin Franklin, Proposed Article for Peace Treaty, November 29, 1782, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

compensation for “all the towns, villages and farms burnt and destroyed by his troops.”<sup>127</sup> The proposal also contested several debts claimed by Britain. Franklin noted that before the war free commerce based on “mutual faith” existed where Britain credited American merchants who sold goods and would make “accustomed remittances.”<sup>128</sup> Franklin contended that inflicted damages during hostilities nullified both this system and all debts claimed on existing merchandise. He compared the British to a draper who gave cloth to his neighbors on credit, followed him, seized the cloth and then sent a bailiff to arrest him for the debt.<sup>129</sup> Oswald was receptive to Franklin’s proposal in hopes that an agreeable response would resolve their ongoing stalemate. Franklin informed the Comte de Vergennes of their progress and stated he would forward a copy of the details the following day.<sup>130</sup>

The Comte de Vergennes expressed surprise over the agreement and was astounded when Oswald and the Americans signed the preliminary compact on November 30.<sup>131</sup> The document contained several articles that addressed certain post-war issues. In terms of territory, it defined the northern borders from Nova Scotia through Lakes Ontario, Erie, Huron, and Superior.<sup>132</sup> A subsequent article dictated that the United States retained fishing rights off Newfoundland, the Grand Banks, and the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The remaining articles expanded on the stipulations put forth in earlier peace proposals. They addressed the recovery of debts, compensation for

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Vergennes, November 29, 1782, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>131</sup> Schiff, *A Great Improvisation*, 320.

<sup>132</sup> Benjamin Franklin, Conditional Peace Treaty Between Great Britain and the United States, November 30, 1782, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

damages by both Britain and the U.S., a ban on future confiscation of property, granting freedom to prisoners, and open navigation of the Mississippi River.<sup>133</sup>

Despite the progress, Franklin expressed doubt over the terms and their overall prospects for success. On December 4, Franklin wrote Livingston detailing why he expected the agreement to fail. He noted that the French had not signed with Britain, and that both Spain and the Netherlands had failed to act impeding a “definite treaty.”<sup>134</sup> Franklin continued by questioning the terms of the compact. He noted that, “to secure our main points we may have yielded too much in favor of the royalists.”<sup>135</sup> Franklin also expressed concern that the quantity of compensation awarded remained undecided, commenting, “I suppose something depends on the event of the treaty.”<sup>136</sup>

As 1782 ended, Franklin expressed cautious optimism over the state of negotiations. He addressed Louis XVI directly to assure him of the Americans’ resolve in their fight for independence and commitment to the Franco-American alliance.<sup>137</sup> Franklin also wrote to Morris warning him that America should not consider itself at peace because the other powers had yet to sign an agreement.<sup>138</sup> He warned that the war might continue longer than expected, predicting that Parliament would meet the signed preliminary agreement with “great clamors.”<sup>139</sup> Franklin used this opportunity to express his agreement with Morris’ statement the previous September regarding America’s foreign dependence. He contended “our people certainly ought to do more

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Robert Livingston, December 4, 1782, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Louis XVI, 1782, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>138</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Robert Morris, December 23, 1782, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

for themselves, it is absurd the pretending to be lovers of liberty while they grudge paying for the defense of it.”<sup>140</sup>

On January 3, 1783, Jefferson wrote Franklin informing him of his pending departure from Philadelphia for France. Jefferson clearly stated that he understood “I can do no good to the commission; it shall be my endeavor to do it no injury.”<sup>141</sup> He continued by inferring that despite his place in the negotiations, his arrival would affect the commissioners. Jefferson explained that he was the bearer of “something new to you” but assured them it was “not of a nature to embarrass your operations.”<sup>142</sup> He concluded by informing Franklin to expect his arrival shortly after the letter arrived.

On January 6, Livingston wrote Franklin detailing the current state of affairs in America. He claimed he understood Franklin’s reluctance to solicit loans but reported that America’s treasury was empty and that “no adequate means of fulfilling it presents itself.”<sup>143</sup> Livingston also indicated that he agreed with the growing notion that the United States needed to be more self-reliant. He stated, “I do not pretend to justify the negligence of the States not providing greater supplies.”<sup>144</sup> Despite this, Livingston expressed his belief that there was no other way to continue the fight without solicitation of foreign loans. He stated he felt it was his duty to inform Franklin that if the war continued, it would be at the expense of the French.

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Franklin, January 3, 1782, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Robert R. Livingston to Benjamin Franklin, January 6, 1782, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 10, 2014).

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.



On January 18, Franklin received a dispatch from the Comte de Vergennes requesting to meet with him, Adams, and any other commissioners in Paris.<sup>145</sup> The Comte de Vergennes did not explain the urgent meeting but requested the presence of Franklin's grandson and secretary Temple Franklin because there would be a need to translate French to English.<sup>146</sup> Franklin responded to the Comte de Vergennes that he and Adams could attend, but Laurens and Jay could not because they had traveled to Britain and Normandy respectively.<sup>147</sup> Franklin informed Adams of the meeting and suggested they travel together so they could discuss business and ensure they arrived when expected.<sup>148</sup>

On January 20, Franklin and Adams arrived at Versailles to find that the Conde de Aranda, British plenipotentiary Alleyne Fitz-Herbert, and the Comte de Vergennes had successfully negotiated a treaty.<sup>149</sup> Immediately, the Americans signed a cessation of hostilities between Britain and the United States with Spain and France.<sup>150</sup> The declaration officially recognized the preliminary articles signed on November 30 and based continued peace on the agreed reciprocity among the three European monarchs and the United States.<sup>151</sup> This event was an achievement for Franklin and officially set in motion an evolution throughout the Atlantic bearing his fingerprint.

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<sup>145</sup> The Comte de Vergennes to Benjamin Franklin, January 18, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 10, 2014).

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Benjamin Franklin to the Comte de Vergennes, January 18, 1782, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 10, 2014).

<sup>148</sup> Benjamin Franklin to John Adams, January 19, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 10, 2014).

<sup>149</sup> Schiff, *A Great improvisation*, 326.

<sup>150</sup> Benjamin Franklin and John Adams, declaration, January 20, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

The following day Franklin wrote Livingston informing him of the news. He stated that he enclosed a copy of the declaration and wished for him to inform Congress.<sup>152</sup> Franklin explained to Livingston that he was not in possession of the preliminary agreement signed between the three crowns, commenting he believed they generally were advantageous to Spain and France. He also offered an assessment of the strength of the declaration. Franklin noted that although the Dutch had not participated, the agreement settled their stipulations, and he did not envision this to be an obstacle in forming the definitive treaty.<sup>153</sup>

On February 5, Franklin and diplomat Comte de Creutz negotiated a treaty between the United States and Sweden. This was the first treaty between the U.S. and a foreign power not active in the war.<sup>154</sup> The preliminary stipulations declared that neither side would arm a vessel that acted belligerently towards the other.<sup>155</sup> Other stipulations included commercial agreements over vessels and ports, maritime conduct between the two nations, and an official recognition of each other's "Consuls, Vice-Consuls, agents and commissioners."<sup>156</sup> These negotiations also produced an additional five stipulations separate from the initial agreement. The first declared that Sweden would use all resources to protect and defend the interests and citizens of the United States.<sup>157</sup> The remaining four articles addressed U.S. reciprocity in defense of mutual interests, issues of neutrality in international maritime conflicts, jurisdiction and contraband issues.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Robert R. Livingston, January 21, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 10, 2014).

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Schiff, *A Great Improvisation*, 332.

<sup>155</sup> Treaty between the United States and Sweden, February 5, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Separate Articles to Treaty between the United States and Sweden, February 5, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

Franklin and the Comte de Creutz signed an official treaty of amenity and commerce in early April.<sup>159</sup>

On February 25, Franklin and the Comte de Vergennes negotiated a financial agreement between the United States and France. The contract allocated a loan of six million livres to the United States followed by six articles addressing repayment of all previous aid and matters of interest.<sup>160</sup> The agreement outlined various payment schedules and varying interest rates until the projected final payment in 1802.<sup>161</sup> Despite the stringent repayment plan, Franklin managed to negotiate a minor concession from the French, who agreed to allow the United States to accelerate its payments to take advantage of the evolving interest rates previously agreed to.<sup>162</sup> Franklin expressed surprise at the success of the negotiations. He wrote Morris informing him of the deal explaining that because of the state of French finances, “I wonder I have obtained so much.”<sup>163</sup> Despite securing the latest loan, Franklin warned Morris to act as if it was the last of their resources. He stated, “I am absolutely assured that no further aid for this year is to be expected.”<sup>164</sup>

On March 12, Hartley wrote Franklin a congratulatory letter for the peace agreement and forwarded him a document of conciliatory proposals and a “sketch” for a treaty of commerce between the two nations.<sup>165</sup> The central premise of the conciliatory document was that there was

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<sup>159</sup> Schiff, *A Great Improvisation*, 332.

<sup>160</sup> Contract between Louis XVI and the United States February 25, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Robert Morris, March 7, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 10, 2014).

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> David Hartley to Benjamin Franklin, March 12, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 10, 2014).

no need for further delay in the conclusion of the treaty based on the previously agreed terms.<sup>166</sup> To facilitate this, Britain offered to evacuate its army before the conclusion of the treaty in exchange for the United States' not harassing any loyalists who remained in America for a period of one year.<sup>167</sup> The proposal concluded with a reassurance of Britain's commitment to releasing all prisoners of war. The commerce proposal intended to return Britain and the United States to the terms and conditions of trade before the war with "the new duties imposed during the war excepted."<sup>168</sup>

Livingston wrote the American commissioners on March 25 reporting that Congress received the preliminary articles of peace and reacted positively.<sup>169</sup> Congress also expressed approval of the commissioners' refusal to negotiate peace without British acknowledgement of their independence. Livingston recounted how Congress specifically reacted to certain points in the agreement. He noted the boundary decisions were expected, and they had no complaints regarding the fisheries. Livingston implored the commissioners to clarify one aspect. He asked for an explanation of the term "real British subjects" in the agreement.<sup>170</sup> Despite the lack of clarity, Livingston surmised that there was no deception between the Americans and British on the matter and dismissed any probability of consequences.

Despite their differences, the American commissioners continued to work cohesively towards creating and reshaping postwar relations between America and Britain. On April 28,

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<sup>166</sup> David Hartley, proposition, March 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> David Hartley, Sketch of a Provisional Treaty of Commerce, March 12, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>169</sup> Robert R. Livingston to Benjamin Franklin, March 25, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 10, 2014).

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

Adams and Jay invited Franklin to meet with them and Laurens the following day.<sup>171</sup> At the meeting, they produced a proposition for Hartley reiterating their dedication to free commerce between the two nations. They asserted that following the evacuation of the British army, all waterways controlled by the United States would be open to British vessels if the British reciprocated with U.S vessels in their respective waterways.<sup>172</sup> On May 5, the commissioners constructed a revised proposition to clarify the classification of certain islands within the province of Nova Scotia as stated in the agreement.<sup>173</sup> Also on May 5, the commissioners declared they had fully executed their authority regarding water boundaries in America and left all future negotiations in the hands of the individual states.<sup>174</sup>

As the peace process continued, Franklin again received poor financial news from America. On May 9, Livingston wrote that despite America's successes, "our finances are still greatly embarrassed."<sup>175</sup> Livingston also implied that America's financial problems would continue to deteriorate. He expressed hope that Franklin could procure more aid stating, "be assured that it is extremely necessary to set us down in peace."<sup>176</sup> Livingston continued by predicting that serious disorganization likely would impede America's ability to recover. He stated that Congress did not expect to procure any compensation for losses because only

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<sup>171</sup> John Adams and John Jay to Benjamin Franklin, April 28, 1782, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 10, 2014).

<sup>172</sup> The American Commissioners to David Hartley, April 29, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 10, 2014).

<sup>173</sup> The American commissioners to David Hartley, May 5, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 10, 2014).

<sup>174</sup> The American Commissioners to David Hartley, May 5, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 10, 2014).

<sup>175</sup> Robert R. Livingston to Benjamin Franklin, May 9, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 10, 2014).

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

Connecticut and Rhode Island had provided estimates of damages, and those were “extremely imperfect.”<sup>177</sup>

On May 12, Morris wrote Franklin detailing severe disorganization at the office of finance. He stated that the confusion rendered him unable to determine paid bills from unpaid ones and fear that several may have received “double payment.”<sup>178</sup> Morris informed Franklin that he had written Jay, Adams and American financial commissioner Thomas Barclay on the matter in hopes of bringing organization to his office.<sup>179</sup> On May 26, Morris wrote Franklin again informing him that he intended stay superintendent of finances as directed by Congress.<sup>180</sup> Despite this, Morris wrote candidly, about the financial problems within his department. Morris declared, “the distresses we experience arise from our own misconduct.”<sup>181</sup> Morris reiterated earlier sentiments communicated by the commissioners. He stated, “if the resources of this country were drawn forth they would be amply sufficient.”<sup>182</sup> Morris continued by asserting he never was intentionally dishonest and implored Franklin to solicit more aid for the cause.

The stagnant peace process continued into the middle of summer. Franklin wrote to Laurens on July 6 commenting, “our negotiations go on slowly, every proposition being sent to England, and answers not returning very speedily.”<sup>183</sup> The commissioners collectively expressed frustration over the slow process in a correspondence to Livingston on July 27. They stated that nothing of the treaties was completed and they consistently waited in expectation of answers that

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Robert Morris to Benjamin Franklin, May 12, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 10, 2014).

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Robert Morris to Benjamin Franklin, May 26, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 10, 2014).

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Henry Laurens, July 6, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 10, 2014).

did not arrive.<sup>184</sup> The commissioners also reported that the Dutch had yet to ratify their preliminaries and suggested they might not participate in the negotiations.<sup>185</sup>

The uncertainty continued until August 29 when the commissioners received a brief notice from Hartley stating he was prepared to sign the definite treaty “whenever it shall be convenient to you.”<sup>186</sup> Hartley informed the commissioners that his instructions specifically confined him to Paris and when they decided upon a date, he hoped to receive them at the Hotel de York.<sup>187</sup> The American commissioners responded on August 30 that despite a previously appointed place for the signing of the treaty, they would attend to the matter on Wednesday September 3 at eight o’clock in the morning.<sup>188</sup> Hartley agreed to their proposal hoping to achieve peace without any inconvenience for all participants.<sup>189</sup>

When Franklin, Adams, and Jay arrived that Wednesday morning, the commissioners certainly were aware of the historical significance of attaching their signatures to the Treaty of Paris. This document was the culmination of an almost seven-year effort and validated America’s right to exist. After the American commissioners and Hartley completed the document, the British minister and the Comte de Vergennes signed the Treaty of Versailles as agreed to in their negotiations. After these monumental acts were completed, all parties expressed relief and commitment to never allowing the global calamity they just endured to

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<sup>184</sup> The American Commissioners to Robert Livingston, July 27, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 10, 2014).

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> David Hartley to the American Commissioners, August 29, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 10, 2014).

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> American Commissioners to David Hartley, August 30, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 10, 2014).

<sup>189</sup> David Hartley to Benjamin Franklin, September 2, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 10, 2014).

repeat itself. With their official duties completed, the Comte de Vergennes and the Americans celebrated their achievements throughout the night, while Hartley retreated from the festive atmosphere.<sup>190</sup>

In the almost five years that Franklin served as America's minister plenipotentiary in France, he carefully constructed a diplomatic scheme in anticipation of concluding the American Revolution through a peace treaty. Franklin's strategy correctly predicted that the British would employ a divide and conquer game plan because France constituted America's source of strength and security. To avert this, Franklin carefully weaved American and French interests together and exploited all available means to reinforce their mutual dedication to preserving the Franco-American alliance. Franklin's pandering to the Versailles elite provoked strong conjecture from his American colleagues who feared such an entanglement. As the negotiations progressed, familiar problems including security threats and internal conflicts among the American delegates, disrupted their progress.

Once the peace process commenced, Franklin's genius shown through as Britain proposed negotiations without French inclusion and attacked the Franco-American alliance on all fronts. This maneuver included employing American agent Digges in an attempt to compromise the American ministers present at other European courts, the dispatch of British diplomat Grenville to Paris in an attempt to break the alliance from the French angle, and Oswald's endeavor to persuade Franklin directly. Despite this grand assault on the alliance, the American ministers and French crown remained committed to their alliance and eventually British desperation spawned favorable concessions. This evolved into an American and British consensus over preliminary stipulations that eventually served as the framework of the historic

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<sup>190</sup> Schiff, *A Great Improvisation*, 349-50.



Treaty of Paris signed on September 3, 1783. This monumental event was more than a validation of an independent United States; it was the completion of a dramatic social, economic and political transformation within the Atlantic world. The individuals who founded the colonies nearly two centuries earlier initially viewed themselves as English subjects, and this revolution effectively rejected this character in favor of an American identity. The treaty also legitimized an American government that extracted control over their commerce from an imposed mercantile economy and instituted a political system that repudiated European royalty in favor of republicanism and natural rights. When the dust settled from this shattering event, an American entity stood bearing the undeniable fingerprint of Benjamin Franklin.

## **Chapter Five:**

### **Franklin's Triumphant Return.**

With a stroke of his pen on September 3, 1783, Franklin validated American independence, dismantled the seemingly unbreakable British Empire, and reconfigured the Atlantic world. Following the signing of the definitive peace, celebrations erupted across America and Europe. Franklin and the other delegates relished in their victory and soon found themselves in a state of limbo as the treaty effectively dissolved their commission. Despite these celebrations, Franklin continued holding unofficial discussions with David Hartley about the future of British and American relations. Hartley championed a peaceful reconciliation and believed that an Anglo-American partnership best suited their mutual interests. Franklin agreed and expressed a strong desire to heal the wounds inflicted upon both countries from the war. After considering various solutions, Franklin developed an ambitious plan to unite the inhabitants of the Atlantic world. This plan consisted of a familial union between America, Britain, and France to prevent hostilities and strengthen their respective infrastructures. Despite his efforts, Franklin lacked authority to negotiate beyond a peace treaty. He thus increasingly directed his attention to other activities as the commissioners awaited further guidance from America. On January 14, 1784, Congress ratified the Treaty of Paris and dispatched the news and their compliments to the delegates in Europe. This brought closure to the lengthy peace process. Although Franklin declared his intention to return to America, he did not take his leave for a year and a half. On July 27, 1785, Franklin embarked on his final trip across the Atlantic Ocean. When he arrived in Philadelphia, his compatriots greeted him with adulation. Franklin was shocked over the dramatic growth of Philadelphia during his absence and immediately noticed that the general populace fully supported their new government and championed their independence. Realizing it would be difficult to convince the American citizenry to entangle

their newly independent country with European interests, he finally closed the door on his lofty goals for an Atlantic union.

The completion of the treaty dramatically redefined the position of Franklin and the other commissioners. On September 5, Franklin, Jay, and Adams informed Hartley that their commission was “terminated” and they no longer possessed authority from Congress to negotiate.<sup>1</sup> Despite this end to their official status, the commissioners continued to contemplate the future relations between Britain and the United States. They advised that they would propose that Congress send a new commission to Europe to handle future negotiations. The commissioners also used this opportunity to express their wish to promote “a liberal and satisfactory intercourse between the two countries.”<sup>2</sup> This was the beginning of an effort by Franklin and the other commissioners to heal the wounds inflicted during the decades long schism.

On September 6, Franklin wrote Hartley detailing his perception of the state of affairs in America. He advised Hartley against delaying a British evacuation of New York in “the vain hopes of a new revolution in your favor.”<sup>3</sup> Franklin surmised that such an event would exacerbate the fragile state of affairs. He noted that if the British expected the people of New York to pay their debts to British merchants as agreed they needed to consider the injustice of their continued presence. Franklin asserted that any hopes of a return to British rule resulting from America’s collapse was naïve. He noted, “the great body of intelligence among our people

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<sup>1</sup> The American Commissioners to David Hartley, September 5, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin Franklin to David Hartley, September 6, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

surround and overpowers our petty dissensions.”<sup>4</sup> Following his praise for America and dismissal of any possible American subjugation, Franklin expressed a desire to advance complimentary relations. He wrote, “there is no truth more clear to one than this, that the great interest of our two countries is a thorough reconciliation.”<sup>5</sup> Franklin continued by assuring Hartley of his commitment to healing the shattered relations between Britain and America. He concluded, “let you and I, my dear friend, do our best towards securing and advancing that reconciliation.”<sup>6</sup>

Despite the achievement of peace, suspicions about Franklin remained prevalent among the other American delegates. On September 10, he wrote Laurens acknowledging his receipt of reports about his conduct during the negotiations. The most damning accusation was that the French opposed America’s acquisition of the Atlantic fisheries, and that Franklin either favored their position or failed to “oppose this design.”<sup>7</sup> This was an apparent remnant of the suspicions championed by Adams and others that Franklin’s pandering to the French establishment came at the expense of the American cause. Franklin explicitly dismissed the credibility of these accusations. He cited his fifty years in public office and declared his ambition to carry his well-established “character of fidelity” to the grave.<sup>8</sup> Of the accusations, Franklin wrote, “I cannot allow that I was behind any of them” and referred to such actions as treason.<sup>9</sup> Following his denial, Franklin referenced Laurens’ knowledge of the events and their personal relationship.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Henry Laurens, September 10, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Franklin stated that Laurens had witnessed his conduct in the affair and implored him to “destroy” the accusations and “do a brother commissioner justice.”<sup>10</sup>

Jay offered his support to Franklin on September 11 by decidedly stating, “I have no reason whatever to believe that you was averse to our obtaining the full extent of boundary and fishery secured to us by the treaty.”<sup>11</sup> Jay backed his position with specific examples of Franklin’s behavior throughout their diplomatic mission. He cited a conversation from the “summer of 1782” in which Franklin effectively argued with Vergennes supporting America’s “full right to the fishery.”<sup>12</sup> Adams also expressed support for Franklin but did so in a more reserved fashion. On September 13, Adams wrote in support of Franklin, declaring that during the negotiations Franklin was “useful both by his sagacity and reputation.”<sup>13</sup>

As his colleagues came to the support of Franklin’s reputation, America’s most famous minister continued to focus on his continued banter with Hartley over reconciliation. On September 24, Hartley wrote Franklin, expressing a wish that the peace between their two countries improve their ongoing relations.<sup>14</sup> Hartley wrote again on October 4 expressing his thoughts about “restoring our ancient co-partnership generally.”<sup>15</sup> He described his goal as “endeavoring to arrange that system upon which the *China Vase*, lately shattered, may be cemented together.”<sup>16</sup> Hartley argued that rapprochement was the most desirable solution to America’s ills and declared his determination to achieve it peacefully. To validate his point,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> John Jay to Benjamin Franklin, September 11, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> David Hartley to Benjamin Franklin, September 24, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>15</sup> David Hartley to Benjamin Franklin, October 4, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Hartley cited a letter by General Washington that referenced the uncertainty of America's government from a weakened congressional authority.<sup>17</sup> On October 8, Franklin agreeably responded to Hartley's ideas, stating, "I join you most cordially."<sup>18</sup>

Franklin wrote Hartley again on October 16 expanding upon his conception of future relations between Europe and America. He also offered a proposal designed to create a multi-state federation of interconnected Atlantic nations. He asked, "what would you think of a proposition, if I should make it of a family compact between England, France and America?"<sup>19</sup> Franklin equated this arrangement as a means for America to unite in peace with "her father and her husband."<sup>20</sup> His argument for such an accord rested on his hopes of preventing future conflicts between the great colonial powers. Franklin commented, "what repeated follies are these repeated wars?"<sup>21</sup> To validate his point, Franklin wrote of the damages suffered from these altercations. He commented, "how many excellent things might have been done to promote internal welfare of each country; what bridges, roads, canals and other useful public works and institutions tending to the common felicity might have been made and established with the money and men foolishly spent during the last seven centuries by our mad wars in doing one another mischief?"<sup>22</sup> Franklin concluded his correspondence by appealing to a character aside from national identity. He wrote they should learn to respect each other's rights because they were "all Christians."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Benjamin Franklin to David Hartley, October 8, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> Benjamin Franklin to David Hartley, October 16, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 9, 2014).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

On December 5, Adams wrote Franklin from London saying that he had received a dispatch from Philadelphia containing newspapers, proclamations, a set of instructions for the commissioners and a separate packet addressed solely to Franklin.<sup>24</sup> Adams indicated that he would forward all the materials to Paris and take no actions himself until Franklin replied, because “there is no commission under cover to you in which I am named.”<sup>25</sup> On December 10, Franklin responded by informing Adams that the packet contained no mention of a further commission to the delegation and observed, “it seems to have been forgotten or dropped.”<sup>26</sup> For the time being, both Adams and Jay were ministers without portfolio. In a December 26 letter to Franklin, Jay affirmed the situation, declaring, “I decline to say anything about politics, for obvious reasons.”<sup>27</sup> In an apparent state of suspended animation, the American commissioners spent the New Year awaiting further directions from Congress.

Congress ratified the Treaty of Paris on January 14, 1784, proclaiming they “approve, ratify and confirm the same and every part and clause thereof.”<sup>28</sup> The nine states present at the time of the ratification vote also unanimously resolved to recommend to their legislatures “to provide for the restitution of all estates, rights, and properties which have been confiscated belonging to real British subjects.”<sup>29</sup> Congress’ resolution also called for the restoration of rights and property to residents of those districts controlled by the British at the time of ratification who

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<sup>24</sup> John Adams to Benjamin Franklin, December 5, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 12, 2014).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Benjamin Franklin to John Adams, December 10, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 12, 2014).

<sup>27</sup> John Jay to Benjamin Franklin, December 26, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 12, 2014).

<sup>28</sup> Continental Congress, proclamation, January 14, 1784, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 12, 2014).

<sup>29</sup> Continental Congress, resolution, January 14, 1784, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 12, 2014).

“have not borne arms against the said United States.”<sup>30</sup> The current president of Congress Thomas Mifflin, reported the unanimous vote and detailed his appointment of Col. Josiah Harmar to deliver copies of the proclamation and resolution to the commissioners.<sup>31</sup>

The achievement of peace was a solemn event for Franklin. His physical decline was increasingly noticeable, and word spread among his fellow commissioners about his health, causing them great concern. Franklin dismissed these concerns and predicted he could survive comfortably for the remainder of his life.<sup>32</sup> In one of his letters, he returned to the topic of his reputation and entered into a new defense of his course of action in France. He believed history would judge him favorably. While acknowledging his enemies, he also dismissed them stating, “there does not exist a human being who can justly say, Benjamin Franklin has wrong’d me.”<sup>33</sup> Despite this, Franklin asserted the value of such adversaries. Franklin surmised, “If you make a right use of them they will do you more good than harm.”<sup>34</sup>

During the last months of 1784, Franklin occupied himself in the arts and sciences of Paris while the commissioners awaited further official news from America. During this period, their main source of information was the European press, which continually reported that America was on the verge of a political and economic collapse.<sup>35</sup> This apparently failed to rattle the American delegates because false and misleading statements in a hostile press had saturated their entire mission. Without a clear further objective and amid growing health issues, Franklin

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Mifflin to the American Commissioners, January 14, 1784, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 12, 2014).

<sup>32</sup> Benjamin Franklin to John Jay, January 6, 1784, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 12, 2014).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Schiff, *A Great Improvisation*, 380.



began expressing his desire to return to America. Despite his decreasing stamina, Franklin maintained a strong face in the Paris community and often entertained dinner guests at his Passy lodgings. He was clearly basking in the attention that his personal celebrity afforded him. Franklin finally got his wish when he finally received word on May 2, 1785, that Congress had approved his recall. He responded with elation and exclaimed that he again felt like a free man.<sup>36</sup>

Franklin spent his remaining time in France composing letters and arranging his departure. He declared his determination to see America again but expressed great sorrow over leaving France. As his departure neared, the goodbyes turned tearful and caused Franklin great despair. Despite this, his desire to return to America never wavered. On the night of July 27, Franklin and his Paris entourage boarded the newly built London-based ship the *Packet* and enjoyed one final dinner reception. Early the following morning as Franklin slept, the ship set sail for America.<sup>37</sup>

News of Franklin's impending arrival in Philadelphia preceded him, and he arrived to a hero's welcome on September 15. It appeared that the entire city turned out to greet him with celebratory cannon fire and admiration. Four nearby British ships obliged the festivities and displayed their colors in recognition of his arrival. Franklin immediately announced his return and dispatched his gratitude for such a reception to the Pennsylvania General Assembly.<sup>38</sup> The University of Pennsylvania congratulated Franklin for "having accomplished the duties of your

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 390.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 396.

<sup>38</sup> Benjamin Franklin too the Pennsylvania General Assembly, September 15, 1785, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 12, 2014).

exalted character with dignity and success.”<sup>39</sup> As the congratulations continued, Franklin expressed bewilderment at what Philadelphia had become. It had grown and flourished dramatically in his absence with new neighborhoods, markets, and public buildings.<sup>40</sup> Franklin continued to embrace his welcome and designation as an American titan.

Once Franklin settled into Philadelphia, he attempted to bring a happy closure to his previous talks with Hartley by offering his former adversary a glowing description about American affairs. Franklin wrote Hartley on October 27 describing the state of America in detail and dismissed accounts in the British press that America was in disarray. He reported that property values had risen, crops were plentiful, unemployment was low, wages were high, and commerce was strong.<sup>41</sup> He also reported that the populace strongly approved of the government that he and his colleagues had created and noted their dedication to preserving their independence. To prove his observations, Franklin declared his intention to include several local newspapers with his correspondence. This marked the end of any serious discussions about reconciliation or an Atlantic union because Franklin immediately realized that it would be impossible to sell his compatriots on anything resembling a European entanglement. Franklin concluded by acknowledging his role in America’s transformation and declared, “you know the part I had in that change.”<sup>42</sup>

Franklin’s return to America was the end of a dramatic adventure abroad that became a defining moment in the history of humanity. This was not the end of Franklin’s public life, as he

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<sup>39</sup> The University of Pennsylvania to Benjamin Franklin, September 16, 1785, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 12, 2014).

<sup>40</sup> Schiff, *A Great Improvisation*, 396.

<sup>41</sup> Benjamin Franklin to David Hartley, October 27, 1785, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> (accessed April 12, 2014).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

soon found himself immersed in the Pennsylvania Abolition Society and was elected president of Pennsylvania in late 1785. Franklin also attended the Constitutional Convention in 1787.

Although his advancing age diminished his contributions, Franklin's presence at the creation of the U.S. Constitution afforded him an opportunity no other founder father could claim. When he affixed his signature to the Constitution he became the only person to have signed the Declaration of Independence, the Franco-American alliance, the Treaty of Paris, and the U.S. Constitution. Even this monumental achievement was not the end of Franklin's public contributions, as he continued his official service to Pennsylvania until late 1788 at the age of 82. With accolades still coming until his final days in 1790, he could observe in peace and satisfaction that he had taken a leading role, probably the crucial role that no other person in Europe or America could have played in reshaping a new Atlantic world that for the next century would contain four great empires, not three: Britain, France, Spain and the United States.

## **Conclusion.**

The events surrounding the achievement of the Treaty of Paris on September 3, 1783, dramatically redefined Benjamin Franklin's historical stature and the entire Atlantic world. Before to his dispatch to France, Franklin had already lived a prolific life as a successful capitalist, author, inventor, scientist, political theorist and public official. It was Franklin's activities as America's first foreign minister that provided him with the opportunity to apply his personal interpretation of international diplomacy to deconstruct the imperial Atlantic paradigm for the world and to emancipate America from European domination. This crowning achievement was not an overnight action for Franklin; it actually was the culmination of a decades-long process beginning with the loosest of creations. In 1754, Franklin proposed and unsuccessfully campaigned in favor of his Albany Plan of Union to unite the fragmented British colonies of North America in mutual defense against the hostilities engulfing America during the French and Indian War. This precursor to a United States as later detailed in the Declaration of Independence was an early demonstration of Franklin's understanding about the value of American unanimity and the complexity of Europe's ancient rivalries.

In the twenty-two years between Franklin's failed Albany Plan and the Declaration of Independence, American society rapidly evolved from a divided collection of individual interests into a citizenry of sufficiently common interests to sue for independence. Franklin himself expanded politically and intellectually as he spent a number of these years as a diplomat in Britain on two separate missions. These trips abroad exposed Franklin to the nature of Atlantic imperialism and Europe's political framework. When the newly created United States sent Franklin as its first minister abroad to France in 1776, his knowledge of international diplomacy became an asset as he embarked on a mission to achieve peace and gain recognition of an

independent United States from Britain. This endeavor would translate into Franklin's crowning achievement when the new Atlantic landscape that emerged from the 1783 treaty bore his fingerprint.

Franklin's activities in France have served as a benchmark and model for over two centuries of American foreign diplomacy. His success in securing the Franco-American alliance, gaining sufficient munitions to support a massive rebellion and negotiating the definitive peace are virtually unparalleled in American history. Franklin's persona of the wise, well-traveled, talented, and inventive dignitary has emerged as a desirable trait among all future ambassadors. The position held by Franklin in France eventually evolved into the U.S. Secretary of State through his successor to France, Thomas Jefferson. This resulted from the creation of the U. S. Department of State that can trace its roots back to legislation creating the Department of Foreign Affairs signed into law by President Washington on July 27, 1789. This department has rapidly expanded in size and responsibilities over the course of American history. The department's foundation lies with Franklin and his coonskin cap and is duly recognized in the creation of the Franklin diplomatic rooms at the Department of State.

The 1783 peace redrew the North American continent by rapidly expanding the land claims of the newly created United States through the Great Lakes to the North, west to the Mississippi and defined the southern border with Spanish Florida. Most of the territory gained by the U.S. at the end of the war came at the expense of those Indian nations along the colonial perimeter who had supported the British during the Revolution. The Treaty also granted both the United States and Britain unlimited access to the Mississippi River. This expanded admittance to the Mississippi River basin and the northern Great Lakes rapidly enhanced the commercial opportunities for the fledgling United States. Additionally, the treaty helped strengthen

America's self-sufficiency by securing fishing rights to the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the Grand Banks off the Newfoundland. This evolution of the geography, economy, and autonomy of North America was only one component of Franklin's impact on the Atlantic World.

The conclusion of the Treaty of Paris and the subsequent three separate accords between Britain and the other European belligerents officially marked the end of the first British Empire, which had incorporated the eastern half of North America (1583-1783). This loss of Britain's valuable North American possessions caused a redirection of the crown's imperial pursuits towards other territories in Africa, India, the Far East and the greater Pacific Rim of nations. In Britain's remaining Canadian possessions, the impact of the American Revolution was undeniable. The immediate result was a significant northern wave of immigration by tens of thousands of American loyalists who fled the United States following Britain's defeat. This noticeable population shift somewhat eased tensions in America but caused agitation in Canadian society. Although Britain retained its important Canadian provinces, its imperial ambitions in America never fully recovered from the loss of the thirteen colonies.

The success of the American Revolution and the fruits of Franklin's labors at Versailles created a domino effect of change throughout the entire Atlantic theatre. The French had incurred a significant debt from the funding of the American war and gained minimal spoils from the endeavor outside of humiliating their perennial British adversaries. This exacerbated France's existing financial difficulties dating back to the Seven-Year's War and inflated the growing indignation toward its aristocracy among the French populace. To compound this development, the success of the American Revolution and the establishment of a government modeled on republicanism and other principles of the enlightenment inspired the French masses. This is apparent by the nearly simultaneous creation of France's *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of*

*the Citizen* (August 1789) and the introduction of the U.S. Bill of Rights on September 26, 1789. Soon the French monarchy that financed the American insurrection and provided Franklin with the backbone needed to extract an American empire from Britain would fall victim to a revolt of its own citizenry.

As France descended into chaos, its ability to administer an Atlantic empire crumbled as well, and the revolutionary tide that began in America, traveled to Europe, and then returned to the Americas when a slave revolt in the French colony of St. Domingue erupted on August 21, 1791. Fighting against a heavily stratified society and championing enlightened ideas that flourished in the American and French revolutions, African born slaves successfully rebelled against the white planter class. This brought forth the establishment of the independent country of Haiti and the abolition of slavery within the state. This definitive event in the Caribbean was not the end of the revolutionary tide throughout the Atlantic. As the Napoleonic Wars (1803 – 1815) destabilized the European continent, a wave of struggles for independence began within Spanish America that raged well into the third decade of the nineteenth century. This demolition of Atlantic imperialism eventually rippled throughout the entire globe in a series of smaller and more localized insurrections.

Within five short decades, the Atlantic world underwent a dramatic social, political, intellectual, and economic evolution. The varied causes of this monumental transformation were convoluted and interconnected. Despite this, certain events of this period that created the mechanisms for this change stood as milestones above the others. The 1783 Treaty of Paris as achieved through the diplomatic talents of Benjamin Franklin that established the first independent nation to arise in a colonize America was certainly one of these.

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