



## “There seems now to be a Pause in Politics.”

### Benjamin Franklin & Samuel Cooper, Correspondence

1770-1771, on the easing of British-American tensions after 1770

Why did fullscale rebellion not erupt in the colonies after the violent confrontations of early 1770? The main reason: one month after the Boston Massacre, Parliament repealed all of the Townshend duties except that on tea—not due to the violence, however. Coincidentally, Parliament had begun debating the move on March 5, the day of the Boston Massacre. After the repeal, colonial merchants abandoned the non-importation agreements and commerce with Britain returned to normal. In addition, the fairly conducted trial and resulting acquittal of most of the British soldiers involved in the Boston Massacre (two were convicted of manslaughter) appeased the British. Two letters between Benjamin Franklin, who was serving in London as the newly appointed colonial agent for Massachusetts (and other colonies), and his friend Samuel Cooper, a Boston clergyman, present the prevalent view of the time and of later historians of the Revolution.

#### ■ Benjamin Franklin to Samuel Cooper, 30 Dec. 1770.

EXCERPTS

*Dear Sir,*

I duly received your several Favors [letters] of July 12, Nov. 6 and 15, and am glad that my little Communications afforded you any Pleasure. I join with you most cordially in Wishes of a perfect happy Union between Great Britain and the Colonies: This is only to be expected from Principles of Justice and Equity on both sides, which we must endeavor to cultivate. I think there is now a Disposition here to treat us more equitably, and I hope it will increase and prevail.

I esteem the Appointment to the Agency of your Province [Massachusetts], unexpected and unsolicited by me, as one of the

greatest Honors, for which I must think myself indebted to your Friendship. I wish I may be able to do my Country effectual Service; nothing could make me more happy. I shall however use my most faithful Endeavors. I had, before I heard of this Appointment, openly oppos'd the Project of abridging our Charter Privileges,<sup>1</sup> which some of our Adversaries were extremely busy in, designing to do it by an Act of Parliament — a Bill for the purpose being, as I have heard, actually drawn ready to be brought in. I boldly and openly asserted that Parliament had no such Power, and that an Attempt of that kind would, by alarming all America, raise a new Flame there and tend more to loosen the Connections now subsisting than any Step that had yet been taken. I do not know that the Freedom I used in declaring and publishing these Sentiments had much Effect; I rather think the Apprehension of an approaching War inclin'd [the British] Government to milder Measures, and to hearken less to the mad Projects of our Adversaries [in Parliament and the king's cabinet]. So it is, however, that the Scheme has been laid aside and will, I think, hardly be resum'd, tho' the Expectation of War is much lessened. . . .

I hope your Health is restored and that your valuable Life will be long continued for the Benefit of your Friends, Family and Country. With sincere and great Esteem, I am, Dear Sir, Your affectionate and most obedient Servant

B Franklin

■ Samuel Cooper to Benjamin Franklin, 1 January 1771. EXCERPT

*Dear Sir,*

You will hear before this reaches you of the Acquittal of Capt. Preston and the soldiers concern'd in the Action of 5 March [Boston Massacre]. Instead of meeting with any unfair or harsh Treatment [they] had ev'ry Advantage that could possibly be given them in a Course of Justice— in the Disposition of Judges, in the Appointment of the Jury, in the Zeal and Ability of Lawyers<sup>2</sup> in the Examination of Witnesses and in the Length of the Trials, unexampled I believe both in Britain and the Colonies, in a capital Case, by which the accused had the fairest opportunity several days after the Evidence for the Crown had been given in of producing and arranging their own. These Trials must, one would think, wipe off the Imputation of our being so violent and bloodthirsty a People as not to permit Law and Justice to take place on the side of unpopular men, and I hope our Friends will make this kind Improvement of them tho they have not, as far as my Observation reaches, at all alter'd the Opinion of the People in General, of that tragical Scene.

There seems now to be a Pause in Politics. The [nonimportation] agreement of the Merchants is broken. [British] Administration has a fair Opportunity of adopting the mildest and most prudent Measures respecting the Colonies without the Appearance of being threatened or drove. The Circumstances of Europe lead to such measures and are sufficient to show the Propriety of securing the Affections as well as the Submission of the Colonies. I doubt not of your Ability and Readiness to improve these and many more Arguments than I can pretend to hint at in your Negotiations for us; and should Government be so temperate and just as to place us on the old Ground on which we stood before the Stamp Act, there is no Danger of our rising in our Demands.

I send this by the only Son of our Friend Mr. Bowdoin, a young Gentleman of a sweet Disposition, and whose good Qualities have rais'd the most agreeable Hopes in his Friends. He leaves the College and takes this Voyage [to Britain] chiefly on Account of his Health, and is follow'd with the warmest good Wishes of all who are acquainted with him. I am Sir, with the greatest Esteem and most faithful Attachment Your obedient Humble Servant

S Cooper

*“Administration has a fair Opportunity of adopting the mildest and most prudent Measures respecting the Colonies without the Appearance of being threatened or drove” [Cooper]*

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<sup>2</sup> Including John Adams.