



Treaty of Paris, 1783, signature page (detail)

## BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

### Negotiating Peace after the American Revolution

Letters from Paris, 1781-1784, Selections

Benjamin Franklin spent almost one third of his life in Europe serving as a diplomat for the American colonies (seventeen years in England) and for the United States (nine years in France). In 1776 he arrived in Paris as the first diplomat representing the newly declared United States of America, and he single-handedly (with a morale boost from the American victory in the Battle of Saratoga) achieved the 1778 alliance with France that turned the tide of the American Revolution. His final diplomatic mission was to negotiate, with a team of American commissioners, a peace treaty with Britain to solidify the goals of the revolution. To complicate the task, separate treaties had to be finalized with allies France and Spain. It was a daunting mission.

In these selections from Franklin's letters, we follow the intricate obstacle-ridden process of negotiating a peace treaty. Government leaders change, negotiators change, goals change. One side tries to divide and manipulate the others. Transatlantic correspondence is dreadfully slow—orders from Congress don't arrive and peace commissioners' reports are lost (and letters are opened by spies and re-sealed). A preliminary treaty must first be signed and ratified, then the final treaty must be signed and ratified. For Franklin—in his seventies and almost a stranger to his native country—the longing to return to America was deep. And to his close friends he revealed his contempt for war: "All war are follies . . . When will man be convinced of this . . . ?"

#### 19 Oct. 1781: Surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown, Virginia.

- **23 NOV. 1781.** To Sir Thomas Pownall, British statesman & former royal governor of Massachusetts.

I wish most heartily with you that this cursed War was at an End, but I despair of seeing it finish'd in my Time. Your thirsty Nation has not yet drank enough of our Blood. I am authoriz'd to treat of Peace whenever she is dispos'd to it, but I saw Inconveniences in Meeting & Discoursing with you on the Subject, or with anyone not avow'd by your Ministry,<sup>1</sup> having already experience'd such in several Instances.

- **2 APRIL 1782.** To General George Washington.

I received duly the Honor of your Letter accompanying the Capitulation [surrender] of Gen. Cornwallis. All the World agree that no Expedition was ever better plann'd or better executed. It has

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<sup>1</sup> Ministers of the British king's cabinet (not clergymen), including the Prime Minister.

made a great Addition to the military Reputation you had already acquired, and brightens the Glory that surrounds your Name and that must accompany it to our latest Posterity. No News could possibly make me more happy. The Infant Hercules has now strangled the two Serpents that attack'd him in his Cradle,<sup>2</sup> and I trust his future History will be answerable. . . .

The English seem not to know either how to continue the War or to make Peace with us. Instead of entering into a regular Treaty for putting an End to a Contest they are tired of, they have voted in Parliament that the Recovery of America by Force is impracticable, that an offensive War against us ought not to be continued, and that whoever advises it shall be deemed an Enemy to his Country.

Thus the Garrisons of New York and Charlestown, if continued there, must sit still, being only allowed to defend themselves. The Ministry not understanding or approving this making of Peaces by halves, have quitted [left] their Places, but we have no certain Account here who is to succeed them, so that the Measures likely to be taken are yet uncertain: probably we shall know something of them before the Marquis de la Fayette takes his Departure. There are Grounds for good Hopes however, but I think we should not therefore relax in our Preparations for a vigorous [military] Campaign, as that Nation [Britain] is subject to sudden Fluctuations, and tho' somewhat humiliated at present, a little Success in the West Indies<sup>3</sup> may dissipate their present Fears, recall their natural Insolence, and occasion [cause] the Interruption of Negotiation & a Continuance of the War.

■ **5 APRIL 1782.** To David Hartley, British M.P.<sup>4</sup> and longtime science correspondent with Franklin.

. . . God grant that there may be Wisdom enough assembled to make if possible a Peace that shall be perpetual, and that the Idea of any Nations being natural Enemies to each other may be abolished, for the honor of Human Nature.

With regard to those who may be commissioned from your Government, whatever personal Preferences I may conceive in my own Mind, it cannot become me to express them. I only wish for wise and honest Men. With such, a Peace may be speedily concluded. With contentious Wranglers the Negotiation may be drawn into length & finally frustrated.

I am pleased to see in the Votes & parliamentary Speeches, and in your public [news]Papers that in mentioning America, the Word *Reconciliation* is often used. It certainly means more than a mere Peace. It is a sweet Expression. Resolve in your Mind, my dear Friend, the means of bringing about this *Reconciliation*. When you consider the Injustice of your War with us, and the barbarous manner in which it has been carried on, the many suffering Families among us from your Burnings of Towns, Scalpings by Savages,<sup>5</sup> &c. &c., will it not appear to you that tho' a Cessation of the War may be a Peace, it may not be a Reconciliation? Will not some voluntary Acts of Justice and even of Kindness on your Part have excellent Effects towards producing such a Reconciliation? Can you not find means of repairing in some Degree those Injuries?

You have in England and Ireland twelve Hundred of our People Prisoners, who have for Years bravely suffered all the Hardships of that Confinement rather than enter into your Service to fight against their Country. Methinks you ought to glory in Descendants of such Virtue. What if you were to begin your Measures of Reconciliation by setting them at Liberty? I know it would procure for you the Liberty of an equal Number of your People, even without a previous Stipulation; and the Confidence in our Equity with the apparent Good Will in the Action would give very good Impressions of your Change of Disposition towards us. Perhaps you have no Knowledge of the Opinions lately conceived of your King and Country in America, the enclos'd Copy of a Letter may make you a little acquainted with them, & convince you how impossible must be every Project of Bringing us again under the Domination of such a Sovereign.

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<sup>2</sup> *Hercules*: Roman god (Greek: *Heraclēs*) who strangled two serpents sent to kill him as an infant.

<sup>3</sup> British and French naval forces were battling over their island possessions in the Caribbean. On April 12, the British defeated the French in the Battle of the Saintes and captured the French commander, the Comte de Grasse.

<sup>4</sup> M.P.: Member of Parliament.

<sup>5</sup> The British had encouraged attacks by their Indian allies on frontier settlements and occasionally joined with them in the assaults, the most notorious being the Cherry Valley Massacre in New York in 1778.

■ 20 APRIL 1782. To John Adams, American peace commissioner in the Netherlands [Holland].

. . . I wrote to you on the 13<sup>th</sup>, [the letter] to go by Capt. Smedly, and sent a Packet of Correspondence with Mr.[David] Hartley. Smedly did not leave Paris so soon as I expected, but you should have it by this time. With this I send a fresh Correspondence which I have been drawn into, viz [namely]:<sup>6</sup>

1. A Letter I sent to Lord Shelburne before he was [the new Prime] Minister.
2. His Answer since he was Minister, by Mr. Oswald [British peace commissioner].
3. A Letter from Mr. Laurens.<sup>7</sup>
4. My Letter to M. de Vergennes [French Foreign Minister].
5. My Answer to Lord Shelburne.
6. My Answer to Mr. Laurens.
7. Copy of Digges's Report.<sup>8</sup>

These Papers will inform you pretty well of what pass'd between me and Mr. Oswald, except that in a Conversation at parting I mention'd to him that I observed they spoke much in England of obtaining a *Reconciliation* with the Colonies:

- that this was more than a mere *Peace*
- that the latter [peace] might possibly be obtained without the former [reconciliation]
- that the cruel Injuries wantonly done us by burning our Towns &c. had made deep Impressions of Resentment which would long remain
- that much of the Advantage to the Commerce of England from a Peace would depend on a *Reconciliation*
- that the Peace without a Reconciliation would probably not be durable
- that after a Quarrel between Friends, nothing tended so much to *conciliate* as Offers made by the Aggressor of Reparation for Injuries done by him in his Passion.

And I hinted that if England should make us a *Voluntary Offer* of Canada expressly for that purpose [reparations], it might have a good Effect. Mr. Oswald liked much the Idea, said they were too much straiten'd for Money to make us pecuniary Reparation, but he should endeavor to persuade their doing it in this Way.<sup>9</sup> He is furnish'd with a Passport to go and return by Calais [France], and I expect him back in ten or twelve Days. I wish you and Mr. Laurens could be here when he arrives, for I shall much want your Advice, & cannot act without your Concurrence. If the present Crisis of your Affairs prevents your coming,<sup>10</sup> I hope at least Mr. Laurens will be here, and we must communicate with you by Expresses, for your Letters to me per Post are generally open'd [by government agents]. I shall write pr. next Post requesting Mr. [John] Jay to be here also as soon as possible.

■ 24 APRIL 1782. To John Jay, American peace commissioner, Madrid, Spain.

In consequence of a Proposition I sent over, the Parliament of Britain have just passed an Act for exchanging American Prisoners. They have near 1100 in the Goals [jails] of England & Ireland, all committed as charged with high Treason. The Act is to empower the King, notwithstanding such Commitments, to consider them as Prisoners of War according to the Law of Nations and exchange them as such. This seems to be giving up their Pretensions of considering us as rebellious Subjects, and is a kind of Acknowledgment of our Independence. Transports [ships] are now taking up to carry back to their Country the poor brave Fellows who have borne for Years their cruel Captivity rather than serve our Enemies; and an equal Number of English are to be deliver'd in Return.

<sup>6</sup> List formatting in this letter added.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Laurens of South Carolina had been captured at sea by the British in 1780 while travelling to Holland to serve as its American diplomat. While he was imprisoned in the Tower of London (for fifteen months until January 1782), he was appointed as a peace commissioner. Upon his release (in exchange for Lord Cornwallis), he joined the other peace commissioners, but due to his weakened condition soon returned to England to recuperate.

<sup>8</sup> Report of Thomas Digges, an American living in London, to Lord Shelburne on Digges' meeting with John Adams on 21 March 1782, which differed significantly with Adams' account of the event.

<sup>9</sup> I.e., Britain was too short of funds to provide monetary reparations for injuries done in the war and might instead offer Canada to the U.S. This did not occur.

<sup>10</sup> Perhaps referring to Adams's serious bout of influenza during a European epidemic.

■ 25 MAY 1782.

To Henry Laurens, American peace commissioner, Holland.

I have never yet known of a Peace made that did not occasion a great deal of popular Discontent, Clamor and Censure on both Sides. This is perhaps owing to the usual Management of the Ministers and Leaders of the contending Nations who, to keep up the Spirits of their People for continuing the War, generally represent the State of their own Affairs in a better Light and that of the Enemy in a worse than is consistent with the Truth. Hence the Populace on each Side expect better Terms than really can be obtained and are apt to ascribe their Disappointment to Treachery. Thus the Peace of Utrecht and that of Aix la Chapelle<sup>11</sup> were said in England to have been influenc'd by French Gold, and in France by English Guineas. Even the last Peace, the most advantageous and glorious for England that ever she made<sup>12</sup> was you may remember violently decry'd, and the makers as violently abus'd. So that the Blessing promis'd to Peace Makers,<sup>13</sup> I fancy, relates to the next World, for in this they seem to have a greater Chance of being cursed.

■ 25 JUNE 1782.

To Robert Livingston, U.S. Secretary for Foreign Affairs.

By the [British] Newspapers I have sent, you will see that the general Disposition of the British Nation towards us had been chang'd. Two Persons have been sent here by the new Ministers<sup>14</sup> to propose treating for Peace. They had at first some Hopes of getting the belligerent Powers to treat separately one after another; but finding that impracticable, they have after several Messengers sent to & fro, come to a Resolution of treating with all together for a general Peace, and have agreed that the Place shall be Paris. Mr. Grenville is now here with full Powers for that Purpose . . . tho' I still think they were at first sincere in their Desire of Peace, yet since their Success in the West Indies,<sup>15</sup> I imagine that I see Marks of their desiring rather to draw the Negotiations into length, that they may take the Chance of what the rest of the Campaign shall produce in their Favor: and as there are so many Interests to adjust, it will be prudent for us to suppose that even another [military] Campaign may pass before all can be agreed. Something too may happen to break off the Negotiations, and we should be prepared for the worst.

I hoped for the Assistance of Mr. John Adams and Mr. Laurens. The first is too much engag'd in Holland to come hither, and the other declines serving, but I have now the Satisfaction of being joined by Mr. [John] Jay, who happily arrived here from Madrid last Sunday. The Marquis de la Fayette is of



<sup>11</sup> Treaties ending the second and third of the four wars known in North America as the French and Indian Wars: 1713—treaty concluding the War of the Spanish Succession (Queen Anne's War in North America); 1748—treaty concluding the War of the Austrian Succession (King George's War in North America).

<sup>12</sup> 1763 Treaty of Paris ending the Seven Years' War (the French and Indian War in North America).

<sup>13</sup> "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." [Matthew 5:9, New Testament]

<sup>14</sup> With Cornwallis's defeat and Parliament's reluctance to continue the war, Prime Minister North resigned in March 1782 and was replaced by Lord Rockingham and, four months later, by Lord Shelburne.

<sup>15</sup> See footnote 3.

great Use in our Affairs here, and as the Campaign is not likely to be very active in N. America, I wish I may be able to prevail with him to stay a few Weeks longer.

■ **28 JUNE 1782.**

To Rev. Samuel Cooper, Congregational minister, Boston.

England having tried in vain to make a separate peace with each of the powers she is at war with,<sup>16</sup> has at length agreed to treat for a general peace with them altogether, and [to conduct negotiations] at Paris. If we all continue firm in the resolution not to separate, we shall command the terms. I have no doubt of this steadiness here; and though we are told that endeavors are making on your side [of] the water to induce America to a reunion on the terms now granting to Ireland,<sup>17</sup> and that powers are sent to General Carleton<sup>18</sup> for that purpose, I am persuaded the danger of this project will appear so evident that if offered it will be immediately rejected. We have no safety but in our independence. With that we shall be respected and soon become great and happy. Without it we shall be despised, lose all our friends, and then either be cruelly oppressed by the King who hates and is incapable of forgiving us, or having all that nation's enemies for ours, shall sink with it.

■ **9 SEPT. 1782.** To Sir Joseph Banks, British botanist & longtime science correspondent with Franklin.

I have just received the very kind friendly Letter you were so good as to write to me by Dr. Bonssonnet. Be assured that I long earnestly for a Return of those peaceful Times when I could sit down in sweet Society with my English philosophic Friends, communicating to each other new Discoveries, and proposing Improvements of old ones, all tending to extend the Power of Man over Matter, and avert or diminish the Evils he is subject to, or augment the Number of his Enjoyments. Much more happy should I be thus employ'd in your most desirable Company, tha[n] in that of all the Grandees of the Earth projecting Plans of Mischief, however necessary they may be supposed for obtaining greater Good.

**27 September 1782. Formal peace negotiations begin in Paris.**

■ **14 OCT. 1782.**

To Robert Livingston, U.S. Secretary of Foreign Affairs.

. . . We have now made several preliminary Propositions which the English Minister, Mr. Oswald, has approved and sent to his Court. He thinks they will be approved there, but I have some Doubts. In a few Days however the answer expected will determine. By the first of these articles the King of Great Britain renounces for himself and Successors all Claim and Pretension to Dominion or Territory within the thirteen United States, and the Boundaries are described as in our Instructions, except that the Line between Nova Scotia and New England is to be settled by Commissioners after the Peace. By another article the Fishery in the American Seas<sup>19</sup> is to be freely exercised by the Americans wherever they might formerly exercise it while united with Great Britain. By another, the Citizens and Subjects of each Nation are to enjoy the same Protection and Privileges in each others' Ports and Countries respecting Commerce, Duties, etc., that are enjoy'd by native Subjects. The Articles are drawn up very fully by Mr. Jay who I Suppose sends you a Copy. If not, it will go by the next Opportunity [mail transport]. If these Articles are agreed to, I apprehend little Difficulty in the rest. Something has been mention'd about the Refugees and English Debts but not insisted on, as we declar'd at once that whatever Confiscations [of Loyalist property] had been made in America, being in Virtue of the Laws of particular States, the Congress had no Authority to repeal those Laws and therefore could give us none to stipulate for such Repeal.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> The United States, France, Spain, and Holland/The Netherlands (Dutch Republic).

<sup>17</sup> Earlier in the year, Ireland had been granted a new constitution with more parliamentary autonomy within the empire, but not independence.

<sup>18</sup> Commander-in-Chief of British forces in North America.

<sup>19</sup> In the final treaty, the U.S. preserved fishing rights in the Grand Banks off Newfoundland and in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence.

<sup>20</sup> In the final treaty, the U.S. agreed to prevent confiscation of Loyalist property in the future, to release all imprisoned Loyalists, and to cease any prosecutions against them.



■ 5 DEC. 1782.

To Robert Livingston, U.S. Secretary of Foreign Affairs.

. . . I will nevertheless mention some of the Difficulties your Ministers meet with in keeping up a regular and punctual Correspondence. We are far from the Seaports, not well informed and often misinformed about the sailing of Vessels. Frequently we are told they are to sail in a Week or two, and often they lie in Port for Months after with our Letters on board, either waiting for Convoy or for other Reasons. The Post Office here is an unsafe Conveyance. Many of the Letters we receive by it have evidently been opened and doubtless the same happens to those we send. And at this Time particularly there is so violent a Curiosity in all trading People to know something relating to the Negotiations and whether Peace may be expected or a Continuation of the War, that there are few Private Hands or Travellers that we can Trust with carrying our Dispatches [letters] to the Sea Coast, and I imagine they may be sometimes opened and destroy'd because they cannot be well sealed again.

■ 26 DEC. 1782.

To Rev. Samuel Cooper, Congregational minister, Boston.

We have taken some good steps here towards a Peace. Our Independence is acknowledged, our Boundaries as good and extensive as we demanded, and our Fishery more so than the Congress expected. I hope the whole Preliminaries will be approved and with the Definitive Treaty, when made, give entire satisfaction to our country. But there are so many interests to be considered between five nations and so many claims to adjust, that I can hardly flatter myself to see the peace soon concluded, though I wish and pray for it and use my best endeavors to promote it.

I am extremely sorry to hear language from Americans on this side the water [of the ocean] and to hear of such language from your side, as tends to hurt the good understanding that has hitherto so happily subsisted between this court [French] and ours. There seems to be a party [faction] with you that wish to destroy it.<sup>21</sup> If they could succeed, they would do us irreparable injury. It is our firm connection with France that gives us weight with England and respect throughout Europe. If we were to break our faith with this nation, *on whatever pretense*, England would again trample on us and every other nation despise us. We cannot therefore be too much on our guard how we permit the *private resentments* of particular persons to enter into our public counsels. . . .

In my opinion the true political interest of America consists in observing and fulfilling with the greatest exactitude the engagements of our alliance with France, and behaving at the same time towards England so as not entirely to extinguish her hopes of a reconciliation.

■ 26 DEC. 1782.

To Richard Bache, U.S. Postmaster General and Franklin's son-in-law.

You will hear of the progress made towards a Peace from various quarters. It is not yet concluded and perhaps it may be some time first. But as soon as it is, I hope to be permitted to return home, there being nothing that I more desire than to spend my last days with my family and lay my bones to rest in America.

**20 January 1783. Preliminary peace treaty is signed by Britain, France, and Spain.**

■ 21 JAN. 1783.

To Robert Livingston, U.S. Secretary of Foreign Affairs.

. . . This is just to inform you, and to request you would inform the Congress that the Preliminaries of Peace between France, Spain, and England were yesterday signed, and a Cessation of Arms agreed to by the Ministers of those Powers and by us in Behalf of the United States. . . . Holland was not ready to sign, but their principal Points are settled. Mr. Laurens is absent at Bath [England] and Mr. Jay in Normandy [France] for their Healths, but will both be here to assist in forming the definitive Treaty. I congratulate you and our Country on the happy Prospects afforded us by the Finishing so speedily this glorious Revolution; . . .

<sup>21</sup> Including John Adams, according to Franklin, who called Adams's diatribes against France "the Ravings of a certain mischievous Madman" [Letter to Robert Morris, 7 March 1783]. See letter of 20 March 1783; next page. Adams trusted the British, not the French—the opposite of Franklin's stand.

■ 27 JAN. 1783.

To Mary Stevenson Hewson, Philadelphia.

At length we are in Peace, God be praised, and long, very long may it continue. All Wars are Follies, very expensive and very mischievous ones. When will Mankind be convinc'd of this and agree to settle their Differences by Arbitration? Were they to do it even by the Cast of a Die, it would be better than by Fighting and destroying each other.

■ 20 MAR. 1783.

To Henry Laurens, American peace commissioner, London.

I am glad you happen to be on the Spot to say what ought to be said respecting the pretended Loyalists. Setting them in their true Light must be of great Service. The World had never seen a more universally loyal People than the Americans who were *forc'd* by the mad Measures of the [British] Ministry to take up Arms in Defense of their Rights.<sup>22</sup> They did it with Reluctance. They were truly Loyalists. Very few if any of these Pretenders<sup>23</sup> had any such Principle, or any Principle but that of taking care of themselves by securing Safety with a Chance of Emolument and Plunder. They fancied the King's Side would prove the strongest. Could they have foreseen our Success, they would never have oppos'd us, nor would England have been dunn'd with their Claims of Recompense for their Loyalty!

The Bill for establishing Commerce is, I hear, to be now made law. I shall be glad to be inform'd of the Alterations as soon as possible. I do not like the Delay of the definitive Treaty by the Detention so long of Mr. Oswald nor the Delay of [the British] Evacuating New York. If these Delays are lengthen'd much more, I shall suspect an Intention of renewing the Quarrel. I hope you will not fail to come with Mr. Oswald if he returns hither [to France] or with whoever shall come in his Place.

Mr. [John] Adams has communicated nothing to me on the Subject of [ ] anonymous Letters. I hear frequently of his Ravings against M. de Vergennes<sup>25</sup> and me whom he suspects of Plots against him which have no Existence but in his own troubled Imaginations. I take no Notice, and we are civil when we meet. . . .



Benjamin West, *American Commissioners of the Preliminary Peace Agreement with Great Britain (The Treaty of Paris)*, oil on canvas, 1783.

Depicted are (left to right) John Jay, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Henry Laurens, and William Temple Franklin.<sup>17</sup> Because the British commissioners would not pose for the painting, it remained unfinished.

**15 April 1783. Congress ratifies the preliminary peace treaty.**

■ 15 APRIL 1783.

To Robert Livingston, U.S. Secretary for Foreign Affairs.

You complain sometimes of not hearing from us. It is now near three Months since any of us have heard from America. I think our last Letter came with General de Rochambeau. There is now a Project under Consideration for establishing Monthly Packet Boats between France and New York, which I hope will be carried into Execution. Our Correspondences may then be more regular and frequent. . . .

<sup>22</sup> I.e., the American Patriots.

<sup>23</sup> American supporters of the British cause: Tories/Loyalists.

<sup>24</sup> William Temple Franklin was Benjamin Franklin's illegitimate grandson who served as secretary to the American diplomatic mission in Paris during the Revolution.

<sup>25</sup> Monsieur de Vergennes: Charles Gravier, Comte de Vergennes, French Foreign Minister.

The Definitive [final] Treaties have met with great Delays, partly by the Tardiness of the Dutch but principally by the Distractions in the Court of England, where for six or seven Weeks there was properly no Ministry nor any Business effected. They have at last settled a Ministry but of such a Composition as does not promise to be lasting. The Papers will inform you who they are. It is now said that Mr. Oswald, who signed the Preliminaries, is not to return here, but that Mr. David Hartley comes in his stead to settle the definitive. . . . Mr. Hartley is an old Friend of mine and a strong Lover of Peace, so that I hope we shall not have much difficult Discussion with him, but I could have been content to have finished with Mr. Oswald whom we always found very reasonable. Mr. Laurens having left Bath, mended in his Health, is daily expected at Paris, where Messrs. Jay and Adams still continue. Mr. Jefferson is not yet arrived, nor the *Romulus* in which Ship I am told he was to have taken his Passage.<sup>26</sup> I have been the more impatient of this Delay from the Expectation given me of full Letters by him. . . .

The English Merchants have shown great Eagerness to reassume their Commerce with America, but apprehending [learning] that our Laws prohibiting that Commerce would not be repealed till England had set the Example by repealing theirs, the Number of Vessels they had loaded with Goods have been detained in Port while the Parliament have been debating on the Repealing Bill, which has been alter'd two or three times and is not yet agreed upon. It was at first propos'd to give us equal Privileges in Trade with their own Subjects (repealing thereby, with respect to us, so much of their Navigation Act as regards Foreign Nations). But that Plan seems to be laid aside, and what will finally be done in the Affair is yet uncertain.

■ **8 MAY 1783.** To David Hartley, newly appointed British peace commissioner.

. . . I should be happy if I could see before I die the proposed Improvement of the Law of Nations established. The Miseries of Mankind would be diminished by it and the Happiness of Millions secured and promoted.

If the Practice of Privateering<sup>27</sup> could be profitable to any civilized Nation, it might be so to us Americans since we are so situated upon the Globe as that the rich Commerce of Europe with the West Indies, consisting of Manufactures, Sugars, &c. is obliged to pass before our Doors, which enables us to make short and cheap Cruises, while our Commerce is in such bulky low-priced Articles as that ten of our Ships taken by you is not equal in Value to one of yours, and you must come far from home at a great expense to look for them. I hope therefore that this Proposition, if made by us, will appear in its true Light as having Humanity only for its Motive. I do not wish to see a New Barbary<sup>28</sup> rising in America and our long extended Coast occupied by Piratical States. I fear lest our Privateering Success in the two last Wars should already have given our People too strong a relish for that most mischievous Kind of Gaming mixed with Blood . . .

■ **27 JULY 1783.** To Sir Joseph Banks, British botanist & longtime science correspondent with Franklin.

I join with you most cordially in rejoicing at the Return of Peace. I hope it will be lasting and that Mankind will at Length, as they call themselves reasonable Creatures, have Reason and Sense enough to settle their Differences without cutting Throats: For in my Opinion *there never was a good War or a bad Peace*. What vast Additions to the Conveniences and Comforts of Living might Mankind have acquired if the Money spent in Wars had been employ'd in Works of public Utility. What an Extension of Agriculture even to the Tops of our Mountains, What Rivers render'd navigable or join'd by Canals, what Bridges, Aqueducts, new Roads and other public Works, Edifices and Improvements, rendering England a complete Paradise might not have been obtain'd by spending those Millions in doing Good which in the last War have been spent in doing Mischief! in bringing Misery into thousands of

<sup>26</sup> Because the French frigate *Romulus* was blocked by ice for months in Philadelphia, Jefferson was unable to make the Atlantic crossing. When news of the preliminary treaty arrived, he received congressional release from his appointment and returned to Virginia.

<sup>27</sup> I.e., sanctioned piracy. Privateers were private merchant ships licensed by a government to attack and take cargoes from foreign trading ships.

<sup>28</sup> The Barbary Coast of north Africa was ruled by pirating nations that extorted protection money from nations trading in the Mediterranean Sea.



Families, and destroying the Lives of so many Thousands of working People who might have perform'd the useful Labor.

- **28 JULY 1783.** To Capt. Nathaniel Falconer, Pennsylvania sea captain, then in London.

Everything goes well with respect to this [French] Court and the other Friendly Powers. What England is doing, or means to do, or why the Definitive Treaty is so long delay'd, I know perhaps less than you do as, being in that Country [Britain], you may have Opportunities of hearing more than I can. For myself, I am at present as hearty and well as I have been these many Years, and as happy as a Man can be where everybody strives to make him so. The French are an amiable People to live with. They love me, and I love them. Yet I do not feel my self at home, and I wish to die in my own Country.

**3 September 1783. Final peace treaty is signed by Britain, France, and the United States.**

- **16 OCT. 1783.** To David Hartley, British peace commissioner.

What would you think of a proposition, if I should make it, of a family compact between England, France, and America? America would be as happy as the Sabine Girls<sup>29</sup> if she could be the means of uniting in perpetual peace her father and her husband. What repeated follies are these repeated Wars. (You do not want to conquer and govern one another, why then should you continually be employed in injuring and destroying one another?) How many excellent things might have been done to promote the 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.

You are near neighbors and each have very respectable qualities. Learn to be quiet and to respect each other's rights. You are all Christians. One is the most Christian King, and the other defender of the faith. Manifest the propriety of these titles by your future conduct. By this says Christ shall all men know that ye are my Disciples if ye Love one another. Seek peace and ensu[r]e it.

- **12 MAY 1784.** To Rev. Samuel Mather, Congregational minister, Boston.

I long much to see again my native Place and once hoped to lay my Bones there. I left it in 1723; I visited it in 1733, 1743, 1753, and 1763. In 1773 I was in England. In 1775 I had a Sight of it but could not enter, it being in Possession of the Enemy. I did hope to have been there in 1783 but could not obtain my Dismission from this Employment here. And now I fear I shall never have that Happiness. My best Wishes however attend my dear Country, *Esto perpetua*.<sup>30</sup> It is now blessed with an excellent Constitution [Articles of Confederation]. May it last forever.

This powerful Monarchy [France] continues its Friendship for the United States. It is a Friendship of the utmost Importance to our Security and should be carefully cultivated. Britain has not yet well digested the Loss of its Dominion over us, and has still at times some flattering Hopes of recovering it. Accidents may increase those Hopes and encourage dangerous Attempts. A Breach between us and France would infallibly bring the English again upon our Backs. And yet we have some wild Heads among our Countrymen who are endeavoring to weaken that Connection! Let us preserve our Reputation by performing our Engagements, our Credit by fulfilling our Contracts, and our Friends by Gratitude and Kindness, for we know not how soon we may again have occasion for all of them.

In September 1785 Franklin finally returned to America, having finished his last diplomatic mission for his country. In 1787 he served as an active delegate to the Constitutional Convention. In 1790, at age 84, Benjamin Franklin died—in America as he had wished.

<sup>29</sup> *Sabine girls*: In Roman legend, the Sabine women, who had been abducted to become wives of Roman soldiers, intervened in a battle between the Romans and the Sabines and brought upon the reconciliation of "father and husband" in one nation.

<sup>30</sup> *Esto perpetua*: Let it be perpetual; let it last forever (Latin).