

Preserving the Alliance:

The Artful Diplomacy of Benjamin Franklin

by John P. Kaminski

*Documentary editions are filled with stories—stories that often are rich with detail. One of many such stories is found in *The Emerging Nation*, a three-volume work edited by Mary A. Giunta and J. Dane Hartgrove and published by the NHPRC in 1996. I would hope that this short article might inspire editors and the users of these documentary editions to bring these kinds of stories to life.*

To achieve independence and restore peace, the Confederation Congress appointed five commissioners to negotiate with Great Britain. Geographically distributed, the celebrated American peace commissioners came from the five most prominent states—John Adams from Massachusetts, John Jay from New York, Benjamin Franklin from Pennsylvania, Thomas Jefferson from Virginia, and Henry Laurens from South Carolina. Jefferson never left America to participate in the negotiations; while Laurens, captured at sea, only participated briefly while paroled from the Tower of London. Jay carried on alone for a couple months while Adams finished diplomatic service in The Netherlands and while Franklin remained bedridden suffering from the gout and kidney stones. Eventually Jay, Adams, and Franklin signed a preliminary treaty that astonished both Americans and their allies with terms that were far more generous than had been anticipated.

As part of their instructions, the American negotiators were told not to act without the knowledge and advice of the French. By this time, Adams and Jay had become suspicious of the French, believing that American interests might be sacrificed or the war prolonged to afford France and Spain more time and opportunities to achieve their own wartime aspirations. Consequently, Adams and Jay convinced Franklin that they should ignore Congress' instructions and not keep the French fully informed of the details of their negotiations with the British peace commissioner. Franklin (thought by both Adams and Jay to be too sympathetic to French interests) reluctantly agreed.

Bilateral negotiations proceeded simultaneously between Britain and each of the four allied co-belligerents—France, Spain, The Netherlands, and the new United States of America. The co-belligerents had agreed among themselves that no country was to sign a peace treaty alone. Rather, all would wait until each country's negotiations with Britain had been completed.

French Foreign Minister the Comte de Vergennes was consequently shocked when he was informed on November 30, 1782, that the American negotiators had signed a preliminary treaty with the British and had accepted a British passport that would allow an American ship safe passage home with the glad tidings. Vergennes was equally

astonished the next day when he received a copy of the treaty specifying “the very extensive advantages which our allies the Americans will reap from the peace.” “A few days later,” Vergennes expressed his disapproval in a face-to-face meeting with Franklin and Laurens.

Vergennes had not interfered with the British-American negotiations. He had not even “wearied” the American negotiators with his “Curiosity.” They, on the other hand, had kept strangely aloof from him and his assistants. In fact, when John Adams returned from The Netherlands, he failed to present himself to Vergennes, until Vergennes himself took the occasion to arrange an official reception. Vergennes complained that “When I have had occasion to see one of them and to question them succinctly on the progress of the negotiations, they have always confined themselves to generalities, seeking to make me think that it was not advancing and that they had no confidence in the English ministers’ sincerity.” After being informed of the preliminary treaty, Vergennes believed that the reserve of the Americans was part of a scheme to break “the promise we had made each other only to sign conjointly.”

Vergennes also objected to the mutual exchange of passports so that both nations’ ships could carry the treaty home in safety. The Americans had explicitly promised Vergennes that they “would not press to obtain an English Passport.” The French opposed such passports as offering the “appearance of collusion with England . . . [that] might make the people of America think that peace had been consummated and embarrass Congress.” Despite the actions of the American negotiators, Vergennes told Franklin and Laurens that he had complete confidence in Congress’ willingness to continue to fight as long as its co-belligerents had not yet agreed to terms with Britain.

Vergennes wrote to the Chevalier de la Luzerne, France’s minister plenipotentiary to the United States, telling him to inform Congress “of the irregular Conduct of their delegates in our Regard.” Luzerne should not express his concerns in the form of a complaint nor should he blame any particular negotiator, although Vergennes felt that Franklin perhaps yielded “too easily to the impulses of his Colleagues.” Vergennes feared that the French “shall be ill-paid for what we have done for the United States of America and for assuring them their rights.” Vergennes expressed his personal dissatisfaction with Franklin writing to him on December 15, “You are wise and discreet, Sir; you understand the proprieties; you have fulfilled your duties all your life. Do you think you are satisfying those that connect you to the King? I do not wish to carry these reflections further; I commit them to your integrity.”

In this cold diplomatic climate, Franklin’s colleagues asked him to ease the tension by separately writing to Vergennes. In Franklin’s letter of December 17, he first addressed the issue of the British passport for the American packet ship *Washington*. Franklin had accepted the British passport because he had hoped that the French would agree to

another large loan that could then be safely carried to America with diplomatic safety provided by the passport. Franklin also hoped that the French could safely send dispatches to America in the *Washington*. The British provided the passport without an American request for it, and the British did not send letters that would suggest a premature peace. Franklin reminded Vergennes that he had informed the Americans that several French cutters were about to sail for America. It would be strange, Franklin suggested, if news of the preliminary treaty arrived at Congress second-hand.

Franklin then stated that nothing in the preliminary treaty jeopardized French interests “and no Peace is to take Place between us and England till you have concluded yours.” Yes, Franklin confessed, by not consulting ahead with the French before signing the preliminary treaty, the American negotiators were “guilty of neglecting a Point of *Bienséance*,” that is propriety. This omission “was not from Want of Respect for the King, whom we all love and honour.” Franklin hoped that their actions “may be excused; and that the great Work which has hitherto been so happily conducted; is so nearly brought to Perfection, and is so glorious to his Reign, will not be ruined by a single Indiscretion of ours.”

In making the case for a new loan, Franklin suggested that “the whole Edifice falls to the ground immediately, if you refuse on that Account to give us any farther Assistance.” The *Washington* would not be sent immediately, but would wait until Franklin could meet in person with Vergennes to obtain his approval.

Franklin then concluded with a personal touch. “It is not possible for any one to be more sensible than I am, of what I, and every American, owe to the King, for the many & great Benefits & Favours he has bestow’d upon us. All my Letters to America are Proofs of this; all tending to make the same Impressions on the Minds of my Countrymen, that I felt in my own. And I believe that no Prince was ever more belov’d and respected by his own Subjects, than the King is by the People of the United States. The English, I just now learn, flatter themselves they have already divided us. I hope this little Misunderstanding will therefore be kept a perfect Secret; and that they find themselves totally mistaken.”

Vergennes received Franklin’s letter “to vindicate himself” and agreed to meet with him. Vergennes informed Luzerne that the meeting “passed amiably for both of us.”

Franklin assured Vergennes that the American negotiators were committed to the French alliance and “the obligations they have to the King and the gratitude they owe to him . . . and that they would be inconsolable if their Conduct should have displeased the King and cooled his affection for the United States.” Franklin hoped that Vergennes would “consign the misunderstanding to silence and oblivion.” Vergennes agreed and instructed Luzerne to ignore his previous instructions. Through his personal relationship with Vergennes and his extraordinary diplomatic skills, Benjamin Franklin was able to preserve the alliance that was so necessary to the newly independent United States.

Despite Franklin's success, or rather because of it, John Adams became increasingly suspicious and envious. After five years of contact with Franklin in Europe, Adams pictured the old diplomat as not only incompetent and immoral, but also as his personal nemesis and as a traitor to his country under the control of the "vain, ambitious and despotic" French foreign minister. According to Adams, Franklin was "equally selfish and interested, equally vain and ambitious, more jealous and envious, and more false and deceitful" than Vergennes. Adams condemned Franklin for "Duplicity and Finesse . . . Hypocrisy and falsehood. . . . I can have no Dependence on his Word. I never know when he speaks the Truth, and when not." Yes, Adams could not deny, that Franklin "has had a great Genius," but that had been in the past and it was then totally exaggerated.

"A Reputation so imposing in a Man of Artifice and Duplicity, of Ambition and Vanity, of Jealousy and Envy, is as real a Tyranny as that of the Grand Seigneur. It is in vain to talk of Laws and Justice, of Right, of Truth, of Liberty, against the Authority of such a Reputation. It produces all the Servility of Adulation, all the Fear, all the Expectation and Dependence in Court and of Imperial Splendor. He had been very sensible of this, and has taken Advantage of it.

"As if he had been conscious of the Laziness, Inactivity and real Insignificance of his advanced Age, he has considered every American Minister, who has come to Europe, as his natural Enemy. He has been afraid that some one would serve his Country, acquire a reputation, and begin to be thought of by Congress to replace him." All of the secret, mean-spirited, back-stabbing accusations against other American diplomats (Arthur Lee, Ralph Izard, John Jay, Francis Dana, and Adams himself) had emanated from Franklin and his French cohorts--Vergennes and his "Satellites." Franklin had filled Vergennes' head "with so many Prejudices against others, and in favor of him, and [Vergennes] has found him so convenient a Minister, ready always to comply with every Desire, never asking anything but when ordered and obliged to ask for Money, never proposing anything, never advising anything, that he has adopted all his Passions, Prejudices and Jealousies, and has supported him, as if his own Office depended upon him. He and his Office of Interpreters have filled all the gazettes of Europe with the most senseless Flattery of him, and by means of the Police set every Spectacle, Society, and even private Club and Circle to clapping him with such Applause, as they give to Opera Girls. This being the unfortunate Situation of foreign Affairs."

In this situation, what should be done? Adams answered his own question. "Franklin has, as he gives out, asked Leave to resign. He does not mean to obtain it, but to save the Shame of being recalled. I wish with all my Soul he was out of public Service, and in Retirement, repenting of his past Life, and preparing, as he ought to be, for another World. But as the Peace is made, and he is old, and it will make a horrid Wonder in the World to remove him, and it would be impossible to publish the whole Truth in Justification of it to the People of America as well as of Europe, perhaps it may be as

well to let him alone. But at least Congress should firmly and steadily support their other Ministers against his insidious Manouvres. They should add no more Feathers to his Cap. French Influence will forever aid him, and both will be eternally attacking openly and secretly every other Minister. So that I am persuaded he will remain as long as he lives, the Demon of Discord among our Ministers, and the Curse and Scourge of our foreign Affairs.”

Vergennes obviously had a different opinion of Franklin. “The calmness and the prudence of Mr. Franklin” were traits that other American diplomats perceived as weaknesses. Vergennes, however, saw them as strengths. “It is by those qualities that this minister has inspired us with confidence.” Vergennes did “not believe that the superior services which this minister has rendered to his country will be requited.” He felt “that it will be very difficult for Congress to replace him.”

In 1785 Congress accepted Franklin’s resignation and allowed him to come home. Thomas Jefferson was appointed as the new American minister plenipotentiary to France. Years later, Jefferson remembered the effectiveness of Franklin. From “two years of my own service with him at Paris, daily visits, and the most friendly and confidential conversation,” Jefferson was convinced that the charges against Franklin “had not a shadow of foundation.” According to Jefferson, Franklin “possessed the confidence of” the French “government in the highest degree, insomuch, that it may truly be said, that they were more under his influence, than he under theirs. The fact is, that his temper was so amiable and conciliatory, his conduct so rational, never urging impossibilities, or even things unreasonably inconvenient to them, in short, so moderate and attentive to their difficulties, as well as our own, that what his enemies called subserviency, I saw was only that reasonable disposition, which, sensible that advantages are not all to be on one side, yielding what is just and liberal, is the more certain of obtaining liberality and justice. Mutual confidence produces, of course, mutual influence, and this was all which subsisted between Dr. Franklin and the government of France.”

Jefferson considered his succession of Franklin as “an excellent school of humility.” Whenever presented as the new minister to France, “the commonplace question” was always, “Are you the replacement for Doctor Franklin?” Jefferson always answered, “No one can replace him, Sir, I am only his successor.”

The Documents

*Comte de Vergennes to Benjamin Franklin
Versailles, December 15, 1782 (translation)*

I cannot but be surprised, Sir, after the explication that I had with you and the promise you gave me, that you would not press to obtain an English Passport for the dispatch of the Packet *Washington*, that you inform me that you have received such a passport, and

that at ten o'clock tomorrow morning your courier will set out to carry your Despatches. I am rather at a loss, Sir, to explain your conduct and that of your colleagues on our account. You have concluded your preliminary articles without informing us, although the instructions of Congress stipulate that you do nothing without the participation of the King. You are going to hold out a certain Hope of peace to America without even informing yourself of the State of our negotiation. You are wise and discreet, Sir; you understand the proprieties; you have fulfilled your duties all your life. Do you think you are satisfying those that connect you to the King? I do not wish to carry these reflections further; I commit them to your integrity. When you have been so good as to satisfy my doubts, I will entreat the King to enable me to respond to your requests.

*Benjamin Franklin to Comte de Vergennes
Passy, December 17. 1782*

Sir: I received the Letter your Excellency did me the Honour of writing to me on the 15th Instant. The Proposal of having a Passport from England was agreed to by me the more willingly, as I at that time had Hopes of obtaining some Money to send in the *Washington*, and the Passport would have made its Transportation safer, with that of our Dispatches, and of yours also if you had thought fit to make use of the Occasion. Your Excellency objected, as I understood it, that the English Ministers by their Letters sent in the same Ship might create inconvenient Expectations in America. It was therefore I propos'd not to press for the Passport till your Preliminaries were also agreed to. They have sent the Passport without being press'd to do it; and they have sent no Letters to go under it; and ours will prevent the Inconvenience apprehended. In a subsequent Conversation, your Excellency mention'd your Intention of sending some of the King's Cutters; from whence I imagin'd that Detaining the *Washington* was no longer necessary; And it was certainly very incumbent on us to give Congress as early an Account as possible of our Proceedings, who must think it extremely strange to hear of them by other means without a Line from us. I acquainted your Excellency however with our Intention of dispatching that Ship, supposing you might possibly have something to send by her.

Nothing has been agreed in the Preliminaries contrary to the Interests of France; and no Peace is to take Place between us and England till you have concluded yours. Your Observation is however apparently just, that in not consulting you before they were signed, we have been guilty of neglecting a Point of *Bienséance*. But as this was not from Want of Respect for the King, whom we all love and honour, we hope it may be excused; and that the great Work which has hitherto been so happily conducted; is so nearly brought to Perfection, and is so glorious to his Reign, will not be ruined by a single Indiscretion of ours. And certainly the whole Edifice falls to the ground immediately, if you refuse on that Account to give us any farther Assistance. I have not yet dispatch'd the Ship, and shall beg leave to wait upon you on Friday for your final Answer.--

It is not possible for any one to be more sensible than I am, of what I, and every American, owe to the King, for the many & great Benefits & Favours he has bestow'd upon us. All my Letters to America are Proofs of this; all tending to make the same Impressions on the Minds of my Countrymen, that I felt in my own. And I believe that no Prince was ever more belov'd and respected by his own Subjects, than the King is by the People of the United States. The English, I just now learn, flatter themselves they have already divided us. I hope this little Misunderstanding will therefore be kept a perfect Secret; and that they find themselves totally mistaken.

With great and sincere Respect, I am, Sir, Your Excellency's most obedient and most humble Servant

*Comte de Vergennes to Chevalier de la Luzerne
Versailles, December 19, 1782 (translation)*

I have the honor to send you, Sir, the translation of the preliminary articles that the American plenipotentiaries have settled, approved, and signed with that of Great Britain, to be drafted into treaties when the terms of Peace are stipulated between France and England.

You will surely applaud, Sir, as do I, the very extensive advantages which our allies the Americans will reap from the peace, but you will certainly be no less surprised than I have been at the conduct of the deputies. In following the instructions of Congress, they should have done nothing without our participation. I had apprised you, Sir, that the King would seek to influence the negotiations only so far as his offices should be necessary to his friends. The American deputies will not say that I have sought to intervene, still less that I have wearied them with my Curiosity. They have carefully kept themselves distant from me. One of them, Mr. Adams, come from Holland, where he had been graciously received and attended by our ambassador, was almost three weeks in Paris without fancying that he owed me a mark of attention, and probably I would still not have seen him if I had not contacted him. When I have had occasion to see one of them and to question them succinctly on the progress of the negotiations, they have always confined themselves to generalities, seeking to make me think that it was not advancing and that they had no confidence in the English ministers' sincerity.

Consider my surprise, Sir, when Mr. Franklin informed me on the 30th of November that the Articles had been signed. The reserve they have shown in our Regard does not pardon the breaking of the promise we had made each other only to sign conjointly. I owe Mr. Franklin the justice to say that the next day he sent me a copy of those same articles. He certainly will not complain that I did not receive it with demonstrations of sensibility. It was only a few days later that, the minister having come to see me, I allowed myself to make him understand that his conduct in hastening that Signing had been not very obliging to the King. He seemed to understand that, and made the best excuses he could

for himself and his colleagues. Our Conversation passed amiably. Mr. Franklin spoke to me of his desire to send the articles to Congress, and that to that end, he and his colleagues had agreed to an Exchange of passports with the English minister for the safety of the ships that will be sent. I observed to him that this usage appeared dangerous to me, since the articles were only provisional and subject to the result of our still very uncertain negotiations. I thought that this appearance of collusion with England, following the signing of the articles, might make the people of America think that peace had been consummated and embarrass Congress, of whose loyalty I was quite confident. I added several other arguments, of which Mr. Franklin and Mr. Laurens, who accompanied him, seemed to feel the force. They spared nothing to convince me of the Confidence we should have in the fidelity of the United States, and they left me with assurances that they would lend themselves to what I desired.

Consider my surprise, Sir, when on the evening of the 15th, I received from Mr. Franklin the note of which you will find a Copy enclosed. The tone of it seemed to me so singular that I thought I should make him the reply which I likewise transmit to you. I am unaware of the effect it has produced; I have not heard anything since from the American Commissioners. Their Courier has not come to pick up my despatches, and I have no knowledge whether they are indeed being sent out. It would be singular, after the rebuke I administered to them, that they would not have had the Curiosity to inform themselves of the Status of our negotiation in order to apprise their masters. It is still not so advanced as it concerns us, Sir, as is that of the United States. This is not to say that His Majesty, if he had shown no more delicacy in his conduct than the American delegates, could not have signed articles with England long before them; there is no very essential difficulty today between France and England, but the King wishes all his allies to be fully satisfied, and has quite determined to continue the war, despite any particular advantage that might be offered him, if Great Britain wishes to wrong anyone.

It still remains to conciliate the interests of Spain and those of Holland. I have reason to hope that we shall soon have agreement with regard to the first; the fundamental bases have been laid down, and it is only a question of agreeing on the forms. I think that the United States would do well to reflect upon Spain and treat her with respect. She will have them for neighbors. As for Holland, I fear that its affairs will cause us delays and embarrassments. The dispositions of the English ministry toward that republic seem to me something less than favorable.

So, Sir, that is the present State of things. I hope it improves, and soon, but no matter what may transpire, I think that it is appropriate that the most influential members of Congress be informed of the irregular Conduct of their delegates in our Regard. You will restrain yourself in speaking of it, not attaching to your words the Character of a complaint. I do not accuse anyone, I do not even blame Mr. Franklin. Perhaps he yields too easily to the impulses of his Colleagues, who pretend to know nothing of any Regard.

All their attentions are for the English whom they meet in Paris. If we may judge the future from what is now passing before our eyes, we shall be ill-paid for what we have done for the United States of America and for assuring them their rights.

I say nothing to you, Sir, concerning the requests for money that are made to us. You may well understand that the present conduct does not encourage us to show ourselves forthcoming.

*Comte de Vergennes to Chevalier de la Luzerne
Versailles, December 21, 1782 (translation)*

My letter N^o. 45, Sir, was already enciphered when Mr. Franklin, perceiving the irregularity of the conduct for which I had reproached him, wrote to me to vindicate himself and asked me for an interview, which took place yesterday. It passed very amiably for both of us. He assured me that the Intention of his principals was not to take the least action at any time that might detract from the fidelity which they owed to their Engagements and which, in spite of the necessity and the Expediency of peace, they would renounce rather than neglect the obligations they have to the King and the gratitude they owe him. Mr. Franklin added that he and his Colleagues did not think differently and that they would be inconsolable if their Conduct should have displeased the King and cooled his affection for the United States. Mr. Franklin justified as best as he could the attempted precipitate Dispatch of the packet *Washington*, the departure of which was delayed, and concluded by entreating me to consign the misunderstanding to silence and oblivion.

As I so promised him, you would do well, Sir, not to make use of my letter N^o. 45, inasmuch as the American plenipotentiaries will have informed Congress of that to which it relates.

*John Adams to James Warren
Paris, April 13, 1783*

I have in some late Letters opened to You in Confidence the Dangers, which our most important Interests have been in, as well as the Opposition and Jealousy and Slanders, which your Ministers have met with, from the vain, ambitious and despotic Character of one Minister, I mean the C. de Vergennes. But You will form but an imperfect Idea after all of the Difficulties We have had to encounter, without taking into Consideration another Character equally selfish and interested, equally vain and ambitious, more jealous and envious, and more false and deceitful, I mean Dr. Franklin.

It is a saying of Algernon Sidney concerning Sir Walter Raleigh, that “his Morals were not sufficiently exact for a great Man.” And the Observation can never be applied with more propriety than to Dr. Franklin. His whole Life has been one continued Insult to good Manners and to Decency. . . .

A sacred regard to Truth is among the first and most essential Virtues of a public Man. How many Kings have involved themselves and their Kingdoms in Misfortunes, by a Laxness in this particular? How much Mischief has been done in all Ages by Ministers of State, who have indulged themselves in a Duplicity and Finesse, or in other Words, in an Hypocrisy and falsehood, which some are even abandoned enough to recommend and prescribe to Politicians, but which never yet did anything but Harm and Mischief. I am sorry to say, but strict and impartial Justice obliges me to say, that from five complete Years of Experience of Dr. Franklin, which I have now had in Europe, I can have no Dependence on his Word. I never know when he speaks the Truth, and when not. If he talked as much as other Men, and deviated from the Truth as often in proportion as he does now, he would have been the Scorn of the Universe long ago. But his perpetual Taciturnity has saved him.

It would be Folly to deny that he has had a great Genius, and that he had written several things in Philosophy and in Politics, profoundly. But his Philosophy and his Politics have been infinitely exaggerated, by the studied Arts of Empiricism, until his Reputation has become one of the grossest Impostures, that has ever been practiced upon Mankind since the Days of Mahomet.

A Reputation so imposing in a Man of Artifice and Duplicity, of Ambition and Vanity, of Jealousy and Envy, is as real a Tyranny as that of the Grand Seigneur. It is in vain to talk of Laws and Justice, of Right, of Truth, of Liberty, against the Authority of such a Reputation. It produces all the Servility of Adulation, all the Fear, all the Expectation and Dependence in Court and of Imperial Splendor. He had been very sensible of this, and has taken Advantage of it.

As if he had been conscious of the Laziness, Inactivity and real Insignificance of his advanced Age, he has considered every American Minister, who has come to Europe, as his natural Enemy. He has been afraid that some one would serve his Country, acquire a reputation, and begin to be thought of by Congress to replace him.

Sensible that his Character has not been so much respected in America as in Europe, he has sought as Alliance to support him with Mr. de Sartine and the Comte de Vergennes and their "Autours"—Satellites. It is impossible to prove, but from what I know of him, I have no doubt, that he is the Man, who, by means of the Emissaries or Satellites just alluded to, made to those Ministers all the malicious Insinuations against Mr. Lee and Mr. Izard, which, although absolutely false and groundless, have made as much Noise in the World, and had almost the same Effects, as if they had been true. From the same detestable Source came the Insinuations and Prejudices against me, and the shameless abandoned Attack upon me, the History of which You know better than I. Hence too the Prejudices against Mr. Dana, Mr. Jay and every other. These are my Opinions, though I cannot prove them, otherwise than by what I have seen and heard myself, what results

from a long Series of Letters and Transactions, and what I know of the Characters of Men. The C. has had his Head filled with so many Prejudices against others, and in favor of him, and has found him so convenient a Minister, ready always to comply with every Desire, never asking anything but when ordered and obliged to ask for Money, never proposing anything, never advising anything, that he has adopted all his Passions, Prejudices and Jealousies, and has supported him, as if his own Office depended upon him. He and his Office of Interpreters have filled all the gazettes of Europe with the most senseless Flattery of him, and by means of the Police set every Spectacle, Society, and even private Club and Circle to clapping him with such Applause, as they give to Opera Girls. This being the unfortunate Situation of foreign Affairs, what is to be done?

Franklin has, as he gives out, asked Leave to resign. He does not mean to obtain it, but to save the Shame of being recalled. I wish with all my Soul he was out of public Service, and in Retirement, repenting of his past Life, and preparing, as he ought to be, for another World. But as the Peace is made, and he is old, and it will make a horrid Wonder in the World to remove him, and it would be impossible to publish the whole Truth in Justification of it to the People of America as well as of Europe, perhaps it may be as well to let him alone. But at least Congress should firmly and steadily support their other Ministers against his insidious Manouvres. They should add no more Feathers to his Cap. French Influence will forever aid him, and both will be eternally attacking openly and secretly every other Minister. So that I am persuaded he will remain as long as he lives, the Demon of Discord among our Ministers, and the Curse and Scourge of our foreign Affairs.

*Comte de Vergennes to Chevalier de la Luzerne
Versailles, February 15, 1784*

We think that Congress has acted wisely in recalling most of its agents in Europe; their character is too little conciliatory, and their head too much excited, to admit of their being useful to their country. The calmness and the prudence of Mr. Franklin are certainly grave faults in their eyes; but it is by those qualities that this minister has inspired us with confidence. I do not believe that the superior services which this minister has rendered to his country will be requited; I can say that it will be very difficult for Congress to replace him.

*Thomas Jefferson to Robert Walsh
Monticello, December 4, 1818*

As to the charge of subservience to France, besides the evidence of his friendly colleagues before named [Arthur Lee and John Adams], two years of my own service with him at Paris, daily visits, and the most friendly and confidential conversation, convince me it had not a shadow of foundation. He possessed the confidence of that government in the highest degree, insomuch, that it may truly be said, that they were

more under his influence, than he under theirs. The fact is, that his temper was so amiable and conciliatory, his conduct so rational, never urging impossibilities, or even things unreasonably inconvenient to them, in short, so moderate and attentive to their difficulties, as well as our own, that what his enemies called subserviency, I saw was only that reasonable disposition, which, sensible that advantages are not all to be on one side, yielding what is just and liberal, is the more certain of obtaining liberality and justice. Mutual confidence produces, of course, mutual influence, and this was all which subsisted between Dr. Franklin and the government of France.