

Benjamin Franklin publishes 'An Open Letter to Lord North' April 5, 1774

On April 5, 1774, Benjamin Franklin writes an open letter to Great Britain's Prime Minister, Frederick, Lord North, from the Smyrna Coffee House in London. It was published in *The Public Advertiser*, a British newspaper, on April 15, 1774.

Franklin's tongue-in-cheek letter suggested that the British impose martial law upon the colonies and appoint a "King's Viceroy of all North America." Franklin satirically went on to suggest that such centralized power over "Yankee Doodles," who had "degenerated to such a Degree" from their British ancestors, "that one born in Britain is equal to twenty Americans," would allow the crown to collect its taxes, then sell their impoverished colonies and colonists to Spain.

Smyrna Coffee House on St. James Street in London had been a meeting place of Whigs, or political liberals, since the 17th century. For Franklin to sign a letter drafted at Smyrna's "A Friend of Military Government" was an obvious use of irony. The details of his purported plan for a military government, including the exclusive use of military courts in colonies known for their commitment to trial by jury, and "One Hundred to a Thousand Lashes in a frosty Morning" for offenders made Franklin's disdain for Lord North and his heavy-handed tactics clear.

In fact, Franklin's letter proved prophetic when Lord North imposed martial law on Massachusetts the next month with the passage of the Massachusetts Government Act. General Thomas Gage received the appointment to institute the military government as the colony's royal governor. Franklin had snidely suggested in his treatise, "that great Commander General Gage" could take but a few men and "so intimidate the Americans that the General might march through the

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whole Continent of North America, and would have little else to do but to accept of the Submission of several Towns as he passed."

Franklin, of course, found his own suggestions laughable. North, however, seemed to find such a scheme practicable, and pursued it at the cost of many lives and, eventually, Britain's 13 colonies.