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Jennifer Clark

**Poisoned Pens: The Anglo-
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Poisoned Pens: The Anglo-American Relationship and the Paper War

“The English pencil has saddened the portrait of America”
North American Review, July 1821.

“Cromwell said that a *Government* was weak that could not stand paper shot. Who then shall write down a *nation*?”
Richard Rush, *Memoranda of a Residence at the Court of London*, 1818.

“That nation hates us,” wrote Thomas Jefferson in 1786 after visiting England, and if this was not damning enough, he added, “their ministers hate us, and their king more than all other men.”¹ Jefferson’s observation was not an isolated one. After the Revolution Americans were repeatedly shocked and dismayed that the English could not harbour a more generous attitude towards the new United States. They believed English travellers in America wrote insensitive and myopic records for an ignorant market; the British government endorsed those views and resented or ignored the progress and refinement of American nationhood, and the powerful British periodicals fuelled a campaign against a young American culture. This apparent antagonism wounded Americans who were in the process of adjusting to their new nationality and for whom a fading Englishness flavoured an idealised perception of the Anglo-American relationship. Some were prepared to hit back, figuratively at least, in what became known as the Paper War.

1. Thomas Jefferson to John Page, May 4, 1786. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Vol. 9, ed. Julian P. Boyd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 446.