



BEN FRANKLIN'S WORLD

Episode 397: Kathleen DuVal, “Native Nations: A Millennium of North America”

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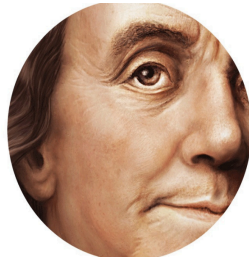
[00:00:04] Liz Covart: *Ben Franklin’s World* is a production of Colonial Williamsburg Innovation Studios.

[00:00:09] Kathleen DuVal: Native nations have always been and still are diverse and different from each other. But one of the things I really stress about that period a thousand or so years ago is the presence of very large-scale civilizations; large-scale, agriculture-based cities feeding large numbers of people with pretty prominent religious and political leaders quite comparable to other parts of the world at the same time, including Western Europe.

[00:00:46] Liz Covart: Hello and welcome to Episode 397 of *Ben Franklin’s World*, the podcast dedicated to helping you learn more about how the people and events of our early American past have shaped the present-day world we live in. And I’m your host, Liz Covart. The North American continent is approximately 160 million years old, and yet we Americans tend to focus on what amounts to 3,300 millionths of that history, which is roughly the period between 1492 and the present.

Now in her new book, *Native Nations: A Millennium in North America*, Kathleen DuVal, a professor of history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, asks us to widen our view of early North American history to at least one thousand years. Because long before European colonists and enslaved Africans arrived on the eastern shores of North America, Indigenous Americans had built vibrant cities and civilizations, and they adapted to a world that was changing even before colonists arrived.

Kathleen believes that we can learn a lot by adding and centering Indigenous peoples and histories into our understanding of early North America. So in today’s episode, we’re going to do just that. We’re going to look at a thousand years of North American history. Now during our investigation of one thousand years of North American history, Kathleen reveals what Indigenous North America looked like one thousand years ago, how and why large Indigenous cities like Cahokia experienced depopulation and abandonment prior to the sixteenth century, and what the history of colonial North America looks like when we view it through Native American eyes.



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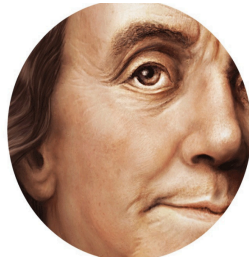
But first, *Ben Franklin's World* has a listener community and you should join it! The *Ben Franklin's World* Facebook group is a place where you can connect and interact with fellow listeners, stay up to date on some of the latest history news and resources, and post your episode requests and interview questions for our guests. There are even some listeners who have formed a book club that you can join if you'd like to consider the books we discuss on this show more deeply and read other books about early American history. The group is free to join. Just visit benfranklinworld.com/facebook. That's benfranklinworld.com/facebook. And I look forward to seeing and speaking with you there. All right, are you ready to travel back in time one thousand years ago? Let's go meet our guest historian.

Our guest is a professor of history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her research expertise is in how Native Americans, Europeans, Africans, and African Americans interacted in early America. She has authored and coauthored many books, including *Independence Lost: Lives on the Edge of the American Revolution*, which you may recall from episode 37, and, most recently, *Native Nations: A Millennium in North America*. Welcome back to *Ben Franklin's World*, Kathleen Duval.

[00:03:54] Kathleen DuVal: Thank you, Liz. I'm so excited to be back on *Ben Franklin's World*.

[00:03:57] Liz Covart: And we're really excited to have you back and to talk about one thousand years of Native American history. So speaking of this thousand years, Kathleen, your latest book, *Native Nations*, offers us a history of Indigenous America over what historians call the *longue durée*, which is the fancy French term for a very long period of time. In the case of *Native Nations*, your history looks at over one thousand years of Indigenous history. What made you want to explore Indigenous history over one thousand years and over the entire breadth of the North American continent?

[00:04:30] Kathleen DuVal: Well, I'm an early Americanist, as you know, and my previous work was centered on the sort of sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. But I teach a class called Native North America that begins tens of thousands of years ago and goes to the present. And one of the things I've always loved about that class, about teaching that class is that for most students, what they know about Native American history is something bad. It is usually the Trail of Tears, right? It's something in that century or two that is the hardest on Native nations, that is the hardest for them to survive.



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And what I love about teaching that class is students get to see Native nations, Native Americans, before there were any Europeans or others in their continent. And they go into the late twentieth century to the present, and they learn vividly that Native nations survived all those worst decades. And that there are almost six hundred federally recognized tribes today just in the United States, not counting state recognized tribes, not counting tribes that still exist in Mexico and in Canada.

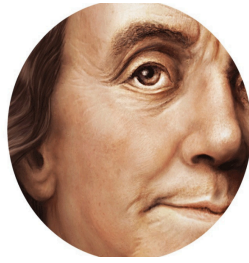
And so they see that *longue durée* history and those worst decades of European colonizers, and particularly the United States, really, you know, trying to destroy Native nations, that that's just, it's a pretty short period in the long, long history of Native nations. And it didn't work, right? The Native nations are still around today.

And so I love students getting, you know, both ends of that history. And I thought, maybe I can do that in the book, which the book doesn't start ten thousand years ago, but I settled on just a thousand years. But I feel like it achieves that same purpose of here's a longer version of something you might know just a little bit about that might skew your impression of Native American history.

[00:06:24] Liz Covart: Your book *Native Nations* also seems to be part of this emerging trend over the last couple of years to offer these big summary or synthesis books about Native American history. And you might have seen Pekka Hämäläinen's book *Indigenous Continent: The Epic Contest for North America*, or a book that came out last year by historian Ned Blackhawk and won the National Book Award, *The Rediscovery of America: Native Peoples and the Unmaking of U.S. History*. And now, of course, we have your book, *Native Nations*. So, Kathleen, would you tell us about this emerging trend where scholars like yourself are trying to synthesize this very long history of Indigenous North America? And whether you purposely set out to be part of this trend?

[00:07:06] Kathleen DuVal: So it's not a surprise that we're seeing these synthesis books right now. Because, you know, what has happened in the last—it's really kind of two generations if you're just looking at early American history—a couple of generations of historians writing Native Americans into the story. So writing Native American history, but also writing American history that takes Native history as a central part of it.

And I think that's been a tremendously important part of early American historiography for a couple of generations. And then also, there's been a generation or so of scholars now looking at



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later in the nineteenth century and the twentieth century. And so really only now could this kind of synthesis book be written. And I think it's so needed. All three books that you mentioned, including mine, really seek not only to tell Native history on its own terms, but also to show how important Native American history is in US history and the sort of long history of this continent. And all of those synthesis books are building on these generations of scholarship.

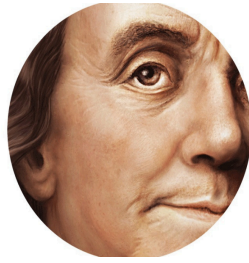
And then for my book particularly, I'm also relying on probably a generation now or so of tribal historians. People, actually for the most part, working for their own tribes on their own histories. And this is a movement that—I mean, there have always been historians within tribes telling and passing on history within the tribe—but this is a generation of scholars in many cases made possible by tribal economic development. In some cases casinos, money that tribes have been able to put back into researching and writing about their own histories, making those histories available to outsiders as well as insiders. And so I really rely on that too. So that's another way in which my book couldn't have been written in an earlier era without the sort of access to really quite publicly available information from tribes about their own long histories.

[00:09:06] Liz Covart: So it sounds like all of these books that give us these histories of Indigenous peoples over very long periods of time and really center Indigenous peoples into these accounts of early North America, it sounds like these works have only been possible to research and write recently because of all of the previous work that historians and tribal historians have been doing for so many decades?

[00:09:28] Kathleen DuVal: Right. And, you know, that's what a synthesis is, right? It builds on scholarship that's already out there. And I think these syntheses books now are also then pushing forward from that and forwarding new interpretations that bring together smaller scale scholarship—scholarship that's on smaller time periods, smaller numbers of peoples—and really shows the central driving argument in Native history, including particularly just the survival of Native nations, of Native peoples through all of this.

[00:09:57] Liz Covart: Well, let's dig into your book, *Native Nations*. Now, we should probably begin our long and vast history of Indigenous and Native America by having you tell us what North America looked like one thousand years ago.

[00:10:10] Kathleen DuVal: It looks different in different places, right? Native nations have always been and still are diverse and different from each other. But one of the things I really stress about that period a thousand or so years ago is the presence of very large-scale



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civilizations; large-scale, agriculture-based cities feeding large numbers of people with pretty prominent religious and political leaders quite comparable to other parts of the world at the same time, including Western Europe.

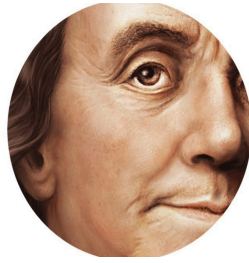
So, for example, to take sort of the biggest example, Cahokia was a city that was right across the Mississippi River from where St. Louis is today. And at its height, around 1100, its main city had more than ten thousand people in it, putting it sort of in a similar scale to Western European cities at the time.

Its central plaza was, people say, the size of thirty football fields. And surrounding that central plaza were many pyramids or flat top pyramids. Their purpose was to have buildings on top of them. So they're to raise temples and palaces and council halls and such above ground level. And so in some cases far above ground level. The central pyramid of Cahokia was ten stories high. And then, you know, all these buildings are on top of that.

And then all around in the central city, there are neighborhoods of houses, places where people live, there are farms where people are farming corn and other products. And then there are many, many satellite cities and suburbs around Cahokia. So it's a much larger civilization than even just those ten thousand people that lived in Cahokia. So large, for example, that St. Louis, in the nineteenth century, you know, when it was part of the United States, its nickname was the Mound City, because there were still so many of those pyramids left before the people of St. Louis razed them to build St. Louis.

So, there are cities like that in many parts of North America a thousand years ago, including all across the Southwest and all over the Mississippi Valley on both sides of the Mississippi River. Cahokia is the biggest, probably, but there are countless others across much of North America and especially the parts of North America that agriculture had spread to during the medieval warm period. So agriculture came north from central Mexico into what's now northern Mexico and across much of what's now the United States and made this kind of large civilization, agriculture based cities possible.

[00:12:41] Liz Covart: It is so interesting that there were these huge Indigenous cities because so much of the history that we're taught about Native Americans is that they were hunters and gatherers who lived out on the Great Plains hunting bison or in the Eastern Woodlands regions trapping furs. Whereas if you have a chance to visit the Southwest or places in Mexico and South America, you can see some of these cities like Mesa Verde or the civilization at Montezuma's



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Castle and very old Pueblo settlements. And because of the weather and the environment of such, you can see remnants of these large Native cities and urban centers. And this just isn't the picture of Indigenous America that we're taught about in school.

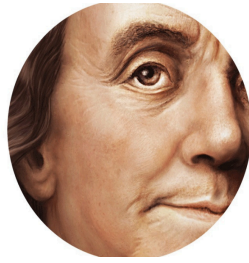
[00:13:23] Kathleen DuVal: Yeah, that's right. And one of the reasons you can see them in the Southwest and can't see them in the Southeast these days is because they were built out of different things. So there were great cities in the southeast and up into the heavy corn growing areas of the northern United States as well. But what they've left behind are these mounds, what became called mounds, these flat top pyramids. And not all of the buildings that were on and around them. So the city itself is not there anymore to look at and say, "Oh, look, there was an ancient city." It's much harder to look at what sort of looks like a hill, basically. I mean, there was once there was an ancient city there, but it doesn't look like ruins in the same way that things in the Southwest and other places where things were built out of stone and even adobe, adobe, which lasts much longer than the kinds of wooden buildings that were built in other parts of the continent.

[00:14:15] Liz Covart: Do we have a sense of how these large Indigenous cities operated? And I know this is a rather large question because as you pointed out, there's a great diversity of Native peoples and you're saying these big cities were spread out all throughout North America. But I do wonder if there are any generalizations we can make about these ancient cities and how people lived in them?

For example, we know in ancient Europe that cities usually had codes of laws or ordinances that were meant to keep people in line with the rule of order and the city in order. And we also know that there are different community gatherings, different places for people in these cities, in these European cities to intermix and socialize, like in marketplaces.

So, have historians and archaeologists found similar structures or places and codes would have allowed these Indigenous cities to operate?

[00:15:04] Kathleen DuVal: So one of the purposes of this book is to put Native North America in global history. And really these cities of this era are really quite comparable with cities in other parts of the world. The same kinds of things that you just said, a central marketplace, a place where goods were exchanged. There are some people whose job, whose work, is producing food and there are other people whose job that isn't, right? That's one of the things that cities can



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do. It allows some people to not spend all their time producing food. So there are marketplaces where people exchange those things.

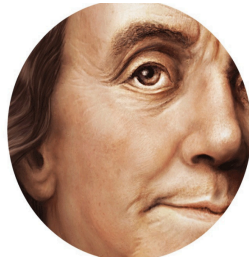
These mounds are—and there are parallel pyramids in the southwest as well—they, at least over time, became in most places where they existed the purview of the elite. So there was clearly, as clear as can be possible with the kind of evidence we have which is both oral history and archaeology, there were leaders that had quite a large amount of power and had the power to run and construct these civilizations.

And it seems like in most places, a perhaps hereditary elite class that lived more prosperously maybe than the common people, certainly than some kinds of peoples like around Cahokia. It appears that maybe some peoples have been forced to come move there and farm for the elite of Cahokia. And it's hard to get exactly what was going on, but certainly oral history talks about the rise over time—these are multiple oral histories from different places—the rise over time of leaders who, as their descendants tell it, took too much power and became authoritarian leaders.

[00:16:42] Liz Covart: Would you tell us more about the oral histories you encountered and used? Because one of the things that we talk about in early American history and on this podcast is that if you want to research and understand the histories of people of color and Indigenous nations, then you need to use oral histories because a lot of these cultures did not have a tradition of writing down histories and stories and then keeping those stories for the future. Instead, they used oral traditions to do that work. So Kathleen, how do historians like yourself know what you know about Cahokia and these other cities?

[00:17:16] Kathleen DuVal: There's lots and lots that we don't know, right? But one of the things that I saw common across a pretty large number of cultures, oral histories, who descended from large cities of this era, was that they talked about this era as a time of really sort of not the way I expected to hear about them, but it's maybe a misguided time, a time of inequality, right, where leaders combined religious power and political power and really, to put it simply, too much power. And hoarded, took the profits, you know, the extra of society, the surplus of a society to themselves rather than sharing it with the people.

And so some of the oral histories, for example, among the O'odham and among the Cherokees, tell of this older period as a time when their ancestors took the wrong path. Or perhaps a time when somebody took advantage of them and became their leaders, became the elite and had to be



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overthrown. So not necessarily a time of greatness that was lost later, but of something that was maybe corrected later.

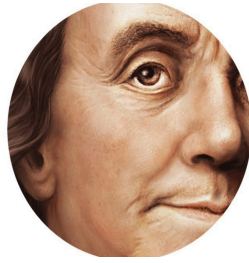
[00:18:25] Liz Covart: Was it because of these social hierarchies and what we would now term as an overaccumulation of wealth among elites, was this why we see these Indigenous cities fall out of favor and depopulate, as people went their own separate ways and formed their own distinct tribes? Because by the time European settler colonists arrive, many of these cities seem to largely be abandoned.

[00:18:47] Kathleen DuVal: Yeah, that's exactly right. I should say, when the Spanish explorers go across, there are some late stages of this that they do see. And then some of our information comes from that. But I think that's exactly right. It's very easy to see this era of cities as a golden era of something that was lost when the cities fell. And that's exactly the opposite of what the oral histories tell.

So one of the factors was the coming of the Little Ice Age. So I mentioned the medieval warm period as being ideal time for farming in what's now the United States. That begins to end in the 1200s. And the 1200s, sort of in the late stages of the medieval warm period, weather becomes less predictable than it had been. There are a series of terrible droughts that hit the Southwest especially hard. And then the climate falls into the Little Ice Age where growing seasons are shorter, temperatures are colder. It's just harder, in some cases impossible, to sustain the numbers of population on the kind of centralized agriculture they had had in the earlier period we were just discussing.

And so there are sort of climate related reasons why these cities fall, but those choices I think that, you know, under what must have been a terrible time and a traumatic time, the kinds of human choices that were made in that period. What you were just saying is sort of people went their own way, they moved out of these cities, they formed smaller-scale societies where a smaller number of people were reliant on agriculture.

In almost all cases, still they farmed. Women of these societies continued to farm, but on a smaller scale. And they diversified their economies. They added in more hunting than their immediate ancestors had done, more gathering than their immediate ancestors had done. And there had been continent wide trade before this, but there's a sort of deeper reliance on trading relationships as part of how you just make sure that if one year your crops fail, you have multiple



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other sources of sustenance. And all of those changes involved a spreading out, a decentralizing across the land, across river valleys, all across North America.

[00:21:13] Liz Covart: When you were looking at the transcripts and listening to oral histories and reading all of the different research that you read to write *Native Nations*, did you see a process at play by which these big Indigenous urban centers disbanded and Native peoples went their own way and formed their own tribes, political bodies, and cultures? Do we know how these urban centers disbanded? Was it just friends and families coming together and saying, “you know what, this isn’t working out, so we’re leaving?”

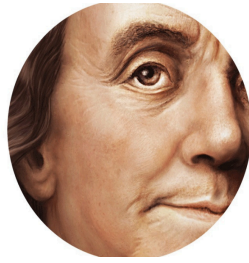
[00:21:40] Kathleen DuVal: One of the things we can’t know is the conversation, right, and how much duress it was under. But the archaeology absolutely shows that people spread out. And in some cases, I think went back to where they’d lived before and maybe went back to ways a little closer to the way their older ancestors had lived.

But oral histories have a variety of ways of talking about it. In some cases, it’s really what we would call a revolution. O’odham oral history talks about literally bringing down the cities, tearing them down, take out the rulers, and destroying their power. They talk about sort of destroying particular sources of their supernatural power to make sure nobody ever gets that kind of power again.

In other places, oral histories just talk about a group of people leaving. And so I think it probably was a little bit more like what you just described, like a you know, maybe a group of families get together and say, “tomorrow night, we are leaving.” And the oral history doesn’t quite give those kinds of specifics, but they do say, you know, “we decided to leave and try living differently and living somewhere else.”

[00:22:43] Liz Covart: You mentioned the O’odham, and I do wonder if we could talk about specific examples of Native peoples who decided to live separately and live a life that wasn’t possible in these really big Indigenous urban centers. So one of the people you discuss in *Native Nations* is the Arizona based O’odham people, and these people are descendants of the Hohokam. So would you tell us about the O’odham himdag, their way of life, and how their society formed outside of these big Indigenous urban centers?

[00:23:13] Kathleen DuVal: Yeah. So the O’odham oral history talks about the Hohokam, the people of the time of the great cities, and of turning away from that style of living into a smaller



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scale style of living, but particularly of developing different groups of O'odham, having different himdag, having a different way of life that then is reciprocal.

So let me explain. There are river O'odham who live in river valleys and farming in the Sonoran Desert using elaborate irrigation systems, but not on the scale of the Hohokam ancestors. So not giant cities with as large irrigation projects as they had had before, just a little smaller scale than that. And then combining into their own economies, their own way of life: hunting, gathering.

And sometimes, you know, when people picture gathering, they think, you know, women just go out and look for things that are edible, right. But gathering, when it's a central part of your economy involves considerable cultivation. Seasonal knowing exactly where to go to collect different kinds of plants for eating and medicine and such at different times of year. And then making sure that no other plants are growing around those that will crowd them out and all the kinds of things that involve cultivating things that you go seasonally to gather. So that's the way the river O'odham, that's the himdag they were living in.

But then part of that is a relationship with other groups of O'odham who don't live on rivers. So desert O'odham live farther out in the desert. They don't farm, or if they farm, they farm only a certain time of year when the rains come during the rainy season, but they don't live permanently near farms. That's just part of that time of farming as part of their seasonal migrations, most of the year of which is gathering in different places. And part of the year for the desert O'odham, one of their seasonal migrations is to the rivers. And they go to the rivers at times of planting and certainly at harvest time to help the river O'odham with their harvest and in turn, of course, get some of that harvest. That pumps into their economy. And they trade to the river O'odham things that they have gotten deeper out in the desert that the river O'odham haven't gotten themselves.

And so they have this, sort of, I call symbiotic, they would call reciprocal relationships of—again, getting back to that idea of not relying on one source of sustenance, having people as well as other kinds of foods that you can rely on if things go badly in one sector, one year. And you can just think about it, how that relates to the earlier era for them of the Hohokam. Of a time of much more centralized dependence on centralized agriculture. It's a development of a way of life that is purposely different and safer and more secure.

[00:26:15] Liz Covart: When we look at the entire scope of Indigenous North America, how long was the urban period? Because it's striking to me that as we talk about the O'odham as one example of one group of people who left a major city, in this case, Hohokam, it seems like the



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O'odham people still had this knowledge of what it was like to live on the land outside of a city and to know what plants were going to make them healthy and what times of year they should grow different plants or visit a different area to gather plants that they needed. So it seems like there was this great knowledge of life before cities that became of use again as the cities declined. And it sounds like the cities declined many generations later. So I'm just curious how this knowledge was maintained over such a long period of time.

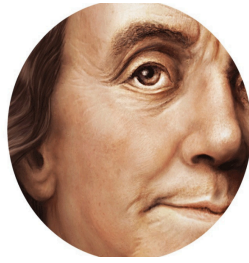
[00:27:03] Kathleen DuVal: Yeah, that's a really good point, Liz. And I think that's right, because it is multiple, multiple generations. It's many generations of people living in these centralized cities. And so you have to think there were, you know, in the cases of plants, or there were women still going out and gathering things, as maybe to make sure their own families weren't as dependent on the great leaders as we sort of might think they all were if we take those sort of wider scope. And yeah, just passing that information on to their kids.

And maybe some things had to be relearned over the generations after the fall of cities, too. Certainly the, the sort of patterns of where you go at different times of year for the people who are more mobile, who didn't live in just one place all year. And I should say, even in the era of cities, there are some peoples who are not living in cities and who are not part of these large civilizations, and they could have, you know, continued the way that they lived before and just incorporated more of these sort of neighbors living in new ways into their economies and maybe taught them quite a bit along the way.

[00:28:14] Liz Covart: Did you ever get a sense in the research that you did of how knowledge was kept and transferred between generations? Because today, if we want to know how our ancestors established a city, there are plenty of history books that our colleagues have researched and written over the years that we can use to find that knowledge. But as we've discussed, a lot of African and Indigenous cultures did not keep written histories.

So what kinds of traditions did the O'odham and other Indigenous cultures use to make sure that their knowledge continued to exist for future generations?

[00:28:45] Kathleen DuVal: You know, the way Native people talk about it today I think is probably the way it has always been—and, you know, has been in many societies—which is just that mothers teach their daughters and fathers teach their sons. These are mostly pretty gendered societies, and gets passed along that way. And then histories are kept by, you know, official historians who tell histories over and over. Many, many societies have sort of mnemonic devices,



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hides or calendar sticks, things like that to keep track of history. So you have people who know the history and tell it to the sort of next generation of historians, but they also have things they can look at and say, “Oh yeah, remember this year, this was the year of such and such.”

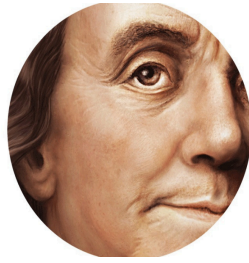
And your question also makes me realize I have not come across any oral histories that say how to build a city. I think they probably thought that is useless knowledge, we don't want to pass that along. What we want to pass along is this lesson of how to unbuild a city and make sure you never build one again.

[00:29:41] Liz Covart: I take a lot of comfort in the fact that there are historians in different eras and different cultures who just keep track of knowledge. I find that very comforting. Now, I'd like to turn back to something you mentioned a little earlier, which is this idea of reciprocity. But before we really dig in and investigate reciprocity, let's first take a moment to thank our episode sponsor.

Kathleen, I'd like to turn back to reciprocity because this is something that we see in a lot of different Native American cultures and in our historical records and history books. Because we see a lot of Indigenous nations who traded with Europeans or American partners, and these settler colonists never seem to really understand Indigenous ideas of reciprocity, which Native American nations count on and that seems to be central to their societies. So I wonder if you would tell us about reciprocity and how it worked in the O'odham culture.

[00:31:17] Kathleen DuVal: Yeah, this is a great example of a couple of generations of early American historians really figuring out some things that then help us not only to understand those centuries of early America, but also put it all in a longer context.

So, you might think of any sort of trade as reciprocal, right, in sort of classical economics, both sides should benefit from trade. But what's different about reciprocity is that each side is sort of, think of it as each side is required to make sure the other side benefits. And in order to do that, this trade, whatever it is that's being exchanged, is part of a longer relationship than just the one exchange. And that means that in this particular exchange, maybe one side benefits a little bit more, but it'll either get evened out over time, over the course of this long relationship, or it's a relationship in which one side always has a little bit less and always will bring a little bit less to the table. And that's okay, because there's generosity that's being given by one side and sort of gratitude and whatever they can provide in return by the other side.



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And so this is something I've come to understand as I worked on this book. This is something that is very, very, very old in Native America and either comes out of this post-cities period as a value that people sort of impose upon themselves to try to keep the mistakes of the past from happening again. Or at least something that reciprocity maybe was a value in earlier eras, maybe there's a historical memory of that and some continuity of that in the era of cities, that gets renewed and sort of restated and re-emphasized in the centuries after the fall of cities.

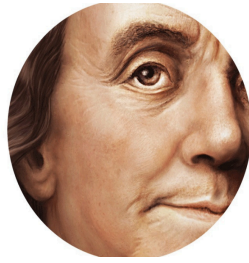
Reciprocity is something that it governs relationships between allies between trading partners, but also within a society of sort of leaders to their people, one gender to the other. You know, I like to use the word value. We all have values. Sometimes we live up to them, sometimes we don't, right? But reciprocity is something that people were supposed to live by.

[00:33:29] Liz Covart: This is really fascinating, because again in *Native Nations* you are covering one thousand years of North American Indigenous history. And you cover so many different Indigenous peoples and cultures in your book because there is such a great diversity of Indigenous peoples and nations in North America. And while we can't say that there is universal among all of these different peoples, it is amazing to me how widespread the value of reciprocity was and is among different Indigenous peoples.

And yet, I can also tell from the language you use, you were very careful, that we don't really know where this ideal or value came from or when it really started to take hold in Indigenous communities and cultures. It's just, it seems like reciprocity is something that has always been in these cultures.

[00:34:15] Kathleen DuVal: Right, but I really do think it has something to do with making sure powerful, extractive leaders don't come again, right, don't take power again. Because reciprocity is so key to understanding how leadership works across so many different Native nations that if you were a leader, that means you give more, right? You may be the conduit through which, say, external trade goods, whether they're Native or European trade goods, come into your society. And so you're sort of a diplomat and trader who has some power over that relationship.

But then your obligation within your society is to distribute those goods wisely, and to know who needs more, who needs more when. And it is never to keep it for yourself, you acquire power and prestige by giving away and giving away wisely, providing wisely. So it's not that there's no sort of power differentials or leadership within Native societies, but it's that the purpose of it is different.



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And these reciprocal relations are not always equal. It's not that each side is supposed to provide exactly the same thing. But that if you are in an unequal reciprocal relationship in which you are, say, a leader who's providing more, that's a good thing. You're not being cheated. You are building your own, maybe even your family's prestige and power by being more generous, by giving more away, by respecting reciprocity.

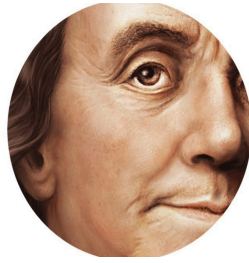
[00:35:48] Liz Covart: Well, now that we've had this general discussion about reciprocity, is there an example of reciprocity at work within an Indigenous community that we could talk about?

[00:35:57] Kathleen DuVal: So when the French first came to the Quapaws in the eighteenth century. So the Quapaw lived in what's now Arkansas, near the confluence of the Arkansas River and the Mississippi River. They are a fairly small people at the time compared to some much larger Native neighbors such as the Osage.

The Quapaws had to sort of teach them, this happens over and over by Native nations, had to teach the French how to obey reciprocity. So The French came in to trade, right? But the Quapaws say, "wait a second, this has to be part of a longer relationship. You have to become somebody that we trust. That we sort of understand what our different obligations are to each other." The Frenchmen would complain about having to sit through these long, long ceremonies and speeches that to the French had nothing to do with trade, but to the Quapaws were part of establishing this relationship. And frankly were sort of lectures, like lectures to the French of like, this is the way reciprocity works.

Sometimes we sort of imagine Europeans going in and the way the French did, having a fort on Native land. And we think the French just sort of forced their way onto that and established a military post and made it French, right? But the Quapaws explained to the French, this is a reciprocal relationship. We are letting you put basically a trading post here, because then we know you will come back. This will be a yearly relationship where you come back with a large number of goods. The French think of it as sort of paying rent to be there. So there's trade, like, we give you this and you give me that. But then there's this huge payment they have to make.

And the French, they excuse it to themselves as being rent. But to the Quapaws, they're like, you have a lot of metal goods. Therefore, you are supposed to provide a lot of those to us, your best allies. We in return will feed you while you're here. We have extra food. So, to the Quapaws, and



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gradually to the French there as well, this is a long-term relationship, one in which each side has obligations to the other.

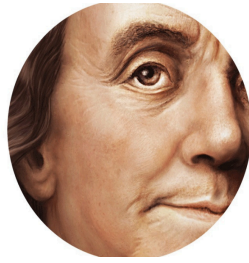
[00:38:01] Liz Covart: What I really like about this example is that we can see both the Quapaw and the French trying to make sense out of this relationship using their own cultural traditions. For example, the French saying, “oh, reciprocity, it’s just like paying rent.”

[00:38:15] Kathleen DuVal: Right. I think the Quapaw’s are like, “okay, you can think of it that way if you want. That’s fine. Just keep doing it.” But they do. I mean, Boy, it’s one of the wonderful things about colonial documents is Europeans get so many lectures, they get lectured to so often and you get the feeling that there are these, sort of, Native diplomats who feel like, “okay, I’m going to explain it one more time.”

And the wonderful thing for historians is we get to read these accounts that these Europeans write down of, okay, so and so said this and this and described it this way. Oh, okay, this is like the third time this guy has explained it to the French guy. And so I think I’m starting to get it too as a historian that this is a different kind of relationship from what even the Frenchman understands it to be.

[00:38:58] Liz Covart: Now, one of the things that I really enjoyed about *Native Nations* is that when you center Indigenous peoples in the story, you really start to understand that the Quapaw have to lecture the French on reciprocity a lot before the French even sort of get it. And if we take this example apart, we can see that the Quapaw had a lot of power in this relationship. It was really the Quapaw who held most of the power in this uneven relationship, because the French, like many Europeans, claim these huge swaths of geographic territory on maps, they never had enough people to actually claim and hold the territory that they said they claimed on the map. And the Quapaw and other Indigenous peoples, they were the powerful peoples in North America during this early colonial period and even into the late colonial period, they held the most power.

[00:39:48] Kathleen DuVal: Yeah, that’s right. And you can see very parallel things in a completely different part of the continent between, say, the Mohawks and the Dutch. The Mohawks will just say over and over to the Dutch, “this is the way you’re supposed to act. This is what you’re supposed to do. And you can see the Dutch doing that.” The Dutch have horrible wars against other Native people, but the Mohawks are so powerful that in Mohawk country, the Dutch do what the Mohawks say.



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[00:40:14] Liz Covart: So we've investigated reciprocity and what that looked like in different Indigenous cultures. And another shared value that we should investigate, because it was so widespread among different Indigenous cultures, and really all of human civilizations, is this idea of gender roles.

Kathleen, would you tell us about the gender roles that you saw at work in different Indigenous cultures and maybe you could focus on what the historical records have to say between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries so that we can view this before Europeans really start to arrive in North America.

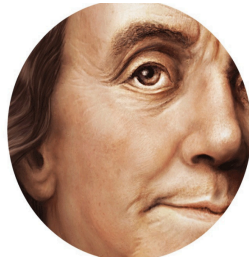
[00:40:47] Kathleen DuVal: Gender roles are a really key part of both reciprocity and this sort of post-urban diversification of the economy. So, Native nations in this era, for the most part, are pretty gendered, work is pretty gendered. Women tend to be the farmers and the gatherers and often are in charge of the towns. They build the houses for the most part. Often it's, you know, to generalize it, women's councils might be in charge, not only of farming and decisions that have to do with farming, but also many of the decisions that happen in the town, like sort of relationships between different families and space and where houses can be.

And then men are in charge of hunting and fishing and often seem to be the most public diplomats. Women have a role in diplomacy, but at least with Europeans, and it's hard to know how much of this has changed because of interactions with European diplomats who are all men, but at least by the time they're dealing with lots of Europeans, external diplomats, sort of outward facing diplomats are mostly men in Native society. And then trade, it depends on the product, like whether it's a men's product or a women's product in charge of trading that.

And certainly see in Native nations, people who cross over genders, who may be born into one and end up in the other because it fits them better. But for the most part, people do male roles, do male work or do female work and what they define as female work.

But these are equal and reciprocal, right, different but seen as equally important. It's not a gender hierarchy of work, or in most cases of politics. I think Europeans tend to see only male politics. And for example, not notice a women's council that might be in charge of things that are a little more local, a little more domestic, maybe, and not just seen by Europeans. Not as important to Europeans who are not insiders to that society, they're outsiders.

[00:42:45] Liz Covart: We're trying to cover one thousand years of history in our conversation. So once again, we need to move a bit forward in time. Because I think we should talk about the



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change in population centers. And I think we're all familiar with this story of how a lot of Englishmen and Britons crossed the Atlantic Ocean and settled on Indigenous lands along the North American East Coast.

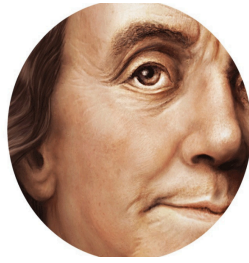
But around the time of the American Revolution, these British colonists began making a concerted effort to push inland beyond the Appalachian Mountains. Which, as of 1763, was a no-go zone. There was a formal treaty line that the British proposed that was trying to keep British settlement east of the Appalachian Mountains, because the British government recognized that Indigenous peoples needed their own land, and that the colonists, if they were to move beyond the Appalachian Mountains, they would be really hard to govern and control.

But the colonists had different ideas. And they continued to push beyond the Appalachian Mountains and further encroached on Native lands, including the lands of peoples who had already had to move from the North American East Coast because of English and British encroachment on their lands and because of their dispossession from their lands to accommodate English colonists.

So Kathleen, would you tell us about this story of English, British encroachment and movement westward, and what this story looks like if we investigate it, not through a British lens, but through the lens of Indigenous history? What does this early westward movement of white colonists look like if we look at it through Indigenous eyes?

[00:44:14] Kathleen DuVal: So there are people who face English colonization very early, right, as you say, right on the coast. So some of the peoples I follow in the book are the descendants of North Carolina coast who end up surrounded by English settlers quite early on. And they have to figure out how do you live with English settlers very early, long before there's a United States. But for peoples like the Shawnees and the Cherokees who don't live on the coast, who are a little farther west, they have known about and been trading with and had diplomatic relationships with Europeans for centuries by the time that white colonists really start to invade their lands in and across the Appalachian Mountains.

And as you say, it's the time of the revolution where that really starts to change. These combined factors of one, the British colonial population is growing like nobody has grown before, probably on the continent. The population of the British colonies is doubling every generation. And from the beginning of English colonization and then sort of doubled down on by the American Revolution these are colonies that depend on farming and particularly on individuals owning



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their own farms. And so there are generations and generations of British settlers-cum-Americans, who believe their future, their own family independence, rests on owning their own farm.

And by the time of the American Revolution, most arable land has been taken up by colonists. And so young men who want to own their own farms see their future west of the Appalachian Mountains. So they start to cross illegally when they're colonists and then legally according to the United States; for the most part into lands of the Shawnees and Cherokees and others west of the Appalachian Mountains, and really shift the balance of power in that part of the continent between the Appalachians and the Mississippi River.

[00:46:27] Liz Covart: I have a related question. When we look at our textbooks, the books we use in school to learn about history, we find that they state that the end of the colonial American period came in 1783 with the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1783, wherein Great Britain recognized the independence of the United States. And from there, we have the start of the early American Republic period. So Kathleen, what happens when we center Indigenous perspectives to this aspect of history? When do Indigenous peoples think the colonial period of North American history ended, or do they think it ended?

[00:47:01] Kathleen DuVal: Yeah, well, I think many Native Americans today would say we're still in the colonial period. And it's very geographically dependent. For Shawnees and Cherokees, it's in some ways just beginning in the late eighteenth century. For the Kiowas who live on the Plains, it won't really begin in earnest until after the Civil War.

[00:47:22] Liz Covart: Kathleen, your book *Native Nations* is a wonderful resource that we can use to rethink the history of North America so that we include and make central to this history the many Indigenous peoples who lived and live on this continent. And a few listeners have some questions for you about how we might teach US history to better center Indigenous peoples into our tellings of this story.

First, Beth would like to know how historians, museums, and historic sites can honor Native American history as we think about the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 2026?

[00:47:57] Kathleen DuVal: That's a great question. And I would say, you know, one place to start are the many, many places where Native nations are telling their own histories these days. And those are a resource, no matter what your sort of purposes are, from individuals who want to



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learn, those of us who want to incorporate it into the way we're telling histories. Go see how they're telling their histories, you know, have partners within the tribes who can help with that.

But another thing I think maybe just on the simplest level is never to give the impression that Native American history, Native Americans, are something of just the past. Even if you're talking about events of the American Revolution that happened 250 years ago, just sort of almost looking at verb tense even. I would say if you go to almost any Native American cultural center museum these days, their central thesis, maybe, at least the one that's to outsiders, is we are still here. They just say it over and over and over.

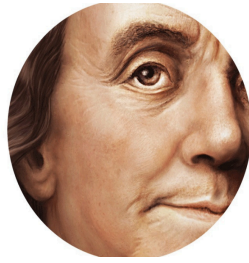
And I think if that's a message you can incorporate into how you are portraying Native American history in whatever era. Just making sure that nobody leaves your museum, leaves an exhibit without realizing that these are peoples who still are here today in nation. You know, not just Native Americans, but Native nations are still around today and will be here in the future. I think that's the really important message to give anybody who's learning about Native history.

[00:49:18] Liz Covart: You mentioned that one way we can better understand Indigenous history is for us to go to Indigenous history and cultural centers. For those of us who are not keyed into where those centers of knowledge are, can you tell us a little bit about where we should go if we want to seek out more information directly from Indigenous tribes and peoples?

[00:49:38] Kathleen DuVal: So if you happen to be in or near Washington DC or New York City, the National Museum of the American Indian, you know, it has branches in both places and it's a terrific place to see the Native past and present told by Native peoples themselves.

But there are also countless smaller ones. So wherever you live, you sort of Google "Native cultural center near me," you might be able to find something. There are just so many, and also many, many of them have good websites. So wherever you live, you can look at, say, one of the Shawnee Nation's website to see a little bit about the kind of learning that you would do if you were in person in their cultural center. And in fact, just doing it through websites, you can get even more because you can get ones from all across the continent.

And I just think they're a terrific way to see, okay, when Native people tell their own history, how do they tell it? What do they choose to emphasize? How does it connect to today and the distant past?



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[00:50:29] Liz Covart: Rosemary wonders how you think schoolteachers can incorporate more Indigenous histories about pre-colonial, colonial, and the US history periods into their lesson plans and classrooms?

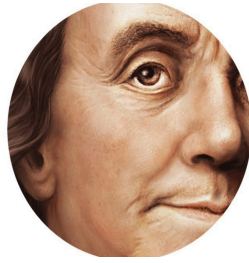
[00:50:40] Kathleen DuVal: Well, I think first I would just say I know K-12 teachers have so much pressure to do everything, the last thing I would want is to put on them a whole new thing they have to incorporate. But, you know, I think maybe one of the easiest ways might just be to do a little bit of learning about the peoples right near where you teach. And just sort of trying to get that into how you talk about the past.

So say you're teaching about the American Revolution here in North Carolina, for example, it's pretty easy to figure out what Native nations that were here were doing in the American Revolution and fit that into a few sentences into how you're teaching about the American Revolution. Of course, if you can get somebody from the local tribe to come talk to a group of students, that's amazing, but they have so many requests to do these things. I also wouldn't want to add to their work.

But if it's with older students—this is going to seem counterintuitive and different from sort of putting information into how you teach history, which I think is really, really important—but pulling up the website of a tribe. You'll find history there, but one of the things students will notice very quickly is that most of what the website does is tell people about social services and childcare and the health clinic, right? And it's such a powerful reminder that Native nations are functioning governments today.

It's just one way to get, I think, students or anybody to just sort of make that little shift into realizing Native Americans aren't just a minority group, they aren't just people of the past, they are people living in sovereign nations within the United States today. And that that might almost turn just a little bit the way you understand even the past, so then when you're talking about relationships between, say, the Mohawks and the Dutch or the English, like, "oh, right, they're a government, they're a country, this is why this is like this."

[00:52:26] Liz Covart: One of the really refreshing aspects of Kathleen's book, *Native Nations*, is that it really makes clear to readers what history can look like when we center Indigenous Americans into our understandings of early North America and even present-day North America. And if we read enough history books, we do get the idea that historians are trained to look at past people, places, and events from multiple angles and voices.



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So Kathleen, now that you've written *Native Nations*, and you have the lessons that you've gleaned from your work on it, why do you think we Americans should recenter our retelling of United States history, and in particular the origins of the United States, with histories of Indigenous peoples? How do you think Indigenous histories can help us better understand early American history and the history of the early United States?

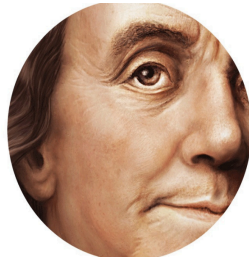
[00:53:13] Kathleen DuVal: I think that looking at this longer period helps us put the United States in perspective. The United States is a pretty small part of the history on this continent, and Native nations have been here a long, long time. They survived through those worst eras of colonialism and they're still around today.

And I think if that sort of stepping back to a longer period, not only is it deeply important to integrate Native Americans into history because they're here, right. But also, it puts the present, you know, our present struggles in the United States into a longer perspective. People in the past have changed, have made decisions, have reacted to dramatic changes from the inside and the outside in a variety of ways. And that most of the times those have been Native Americans because that's who has been here most of the time. And so if the past has something to do with the kinds of decisions we make in the present, then I think it's this long, long, mostly Native past that should be something that we're looking to.

[00:54:20] Liz Covart: And now we should move into the "Time Warp." This is a fun segment of the show where we ask you a hypothetical history question about what might have happened if something had occurred differently or if someone had acted differently.

Now during the colonial period of North American history and into the early days of the early American Republic, Indigenous nations were often more powerful than European and American colonists. But something seemed to shift and subvert that power after the American Revolution. So, Kathleen, in your opinion, what would Indigenous nations across North America look like today if the American revolutionaries had lost the American Revolution?

[00:55:18] Kathleen DuVal: I think it's more likely that we would have a continent that's split into more countries than it is today. I think it's quite possible there would be some Native nations that are completely their own countries, that have their own land, their own complete sovereignty today. There also might have been parts that are Spanish speaking, parts of what's now the United States that were Spanish for longer or that remained a part of Mexico.



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But I do think that the sort of population numbers of the British colonies were going to make some kind of difference. I think histories for Native nations between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River might still have been quite similar. The British crown was for pragmatic reasons protecting Native nations from British settlers, but there's no reason to think they would have done that in the long run.

I would say that the history for far Western peoples, including for the O'odham and the Kiowas, who are both in my book, I think those are likely to have been quite different. And then I think how things played out in the East would have a lot to do with what actually happens with slavery in the absence of the United States and other things when we go into a nineteenth century without a United States or a US Civil War. But yeah, I would say that the Western almost certainly have remained more a place of Native sovereignty.

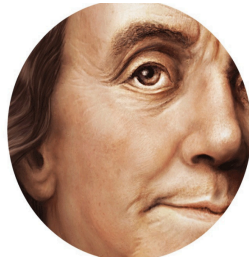
[00:56:39] Liz Covart: Sometimes, changing just the smallest details of the past can have such ripple effects.

[00:56:45] Kathleen DuVal: I started to worry about that as I was talking, like, oh no, I don't know how to write.

[00:56:50] Liz Covart: Well, Kathleen, your last book took us into a different area of the American Revolution than we normally study, the Gulf Coast. And now you've supplied us with this continental Indigenous history over a thousand years. So what can we look forward to next from you?

[00:57:03] Kathleen DuVal: I hope this doesn't sound counterintuitive. I hope it sounds like it makes sense with those two projects, but I'm going to write a history of Yorktown during the American Revolution. So not just the siege of Yorktown, but through the whole revolution. And I want to tell it in a multi-perspectival way, in the same way that I did in *Independence Lost* and talk about Native nations that are right close to Yorktown in Eastern Virginia, women and men, and large numbers of enslaved people who escaped during the revolution and ended up around Yorktown. And look at what happens when warfare is in a place with a large number of different peoples; just fought right nearby them, on their homeland, and in the waterways near them. But yeah, back to the American Revolution in time for the 250th anniversaries.

[00:57:51] Liz Covart: Yeah, I was just thinking that this project is probably going to come to us in 2031 for the 250th anniversary of Yorktown.



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[00:57:59] Kathleen DuVal: That's right. That's right. My editor would like to have it a little bit before that just to give herself some cushion. But yes, it will be out by 2031, I promise.

[00:58:07] Liz Covart: If we have more questions about *Native Nations* or this long history of Indigenous North America, where can we reach you to ask them?

[00:58:16] Kathleen DuVal: I'm super easy to find. You can Google me. My email address, if you can remember it, is just duval@unc.edu. I have a couple of websites you can look at. And I especially encourage you—you asked a couple teaching questions—if there are any teachers out there who would like any primary documents to use, I can send those or translations of those if they would be useful.

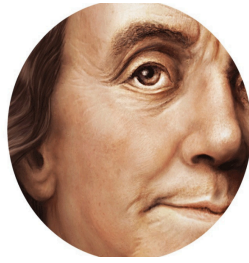
[00:58:37] Liz Covart: Kathleen DuVal, thank you for visiting with us again and for helping us better understand the long history of Indigenous North America.

[00:58:44] Kathleen DuVal: Thank you, Liz. It's a great pleasure to be on again. You do such great work for history and for the public. It's a great joy to talk to you.

[00:58:54] Liz Covart: When we read, study, and teach United States history we're really looking at one of the smallest blips of time in the history of the North American continent. Even our study of early America represents only 3,300 millionths of the total history of the North American continent. And this is in part why Kathleen has asked us to adopt a *longue durée* view when it comes to our study of early North America.

Long before the United States became an independent nation, Native Americans occupied and thrived on the continent. They built Native nations that were larger and often more cosmopolitan and complex than the small colonial cities and settlements Europeans established between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.

Investigating the history of Native America and expanding our view of the early American past to incorporate it allows us to see how peoples living in North America handled similar issues to the ones that we face today, like a growing wealth gap between rich and poor or religious strife or periods of climate change, such as when the medieval warm period gave way to the Little Ice Age. Plus, expanding our view also helps us see the early American period, which we historians date to somewhere between the late fifteenth and early nineteenth centuries.



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Expanding our view also helps us see how Indigenous peoples have contributed and do contribute to our shared history as North Americans. Without Native American assistance, many European colonies and settlements would have faltered. As Kathleen related, Indigenous peoples like the O'dham knew Native American plants, soil, and growing patterns better than Europeans did. Without Wampanoag, Haudenosaunee, or Cherokee corn and growing techniques, many early colonial settlers would have starved to death. Without Native American knowledge of North American geography and bravery as warriors, the English, French, Dutch, and Spanish would have lost valuable allies and the wars that they waged.

As Kathleen stated, Native peoples and nations have been in North America for a very long time. They're resilient peoples who survived the worst eras of colonialism and who have actively contributed to the history and development of the United States. They also have histories that impart wisdom and lessons for how we might face our own dramatic changes in climate, politics, and religion.

We can't truly understand the early American past if we omit Native peoples and nations. They were here long before Europeans arrived, and they're still here making active contributions to our communities. Look for more information about Kathleen, her book, *Native Nations*, plus notes, links, and a transcript for everything we talked about today, all in the show notes page, benfranklinworld.com/397.

Word of mouth recommendations are the best way for podcasts to find new listeners. So be a good friend and tell your friends about *Ben Franklin's World*. Production assistance for this podcast comes from my colleagues at Colonial Williamsburg Innovation Studios, Jordan Hammon and Morgan McCullough. Breakmaster Cylinder composed our custom theme music. This podcast is part of the Airwave Media Podcast Network. To discover and listen to their other podcasts, visit airwavemedia.com.

Finally, I'm curious, what do you think of the idea of placing United States history within the *longue durée* of the history of North America? I also wonder if there are any particular Native nations or cultures that you'd like to investigate in a future episode. So let me know what you think, liz@benfranklinworld.com. *Ben Franklin's World* is a production of Colonial Williamsburg Innovation Studios.

Discussion Questions Based on "Native Nations: A Millennium of North America"

Remembering:

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- What is the central argument of Kathleen DuVal's book "Native Nations"?
- What are some examples of large-scale Indigenous civilizations that existed in North America before European contact?
- What is the concept of "longue durée" and how does it apply to the study of Indigenous history?

Understanding:

- How did the climate change during the Little Ice Age impact Indigenous communities and their ways of life?
- What is the significance of oral histories in understanding Indigenous history and culture?
- How does the concept of reciprocity differ from traditional economic exchange?

Applying:

- How can the concept of reciprocity be applied to contemporary social and political issues?
- How can we incorporate Indigenous perspectives and histories into the teaching of U.S. history?
- What are some ways that museums and historic sites can better represent and honor Native American history?

Analyzing:

- How did the rise and fall of large Indigenous cities shape the development of diverse Native American cultures and societies?
- How did European colonization impact the power dynamics between different Indigenous nations?
- What are some of the challenges and opportunities in using oral histories alongside archaeological evidence?

Evaluating:

- How does Kathleen DuVal's book challenge traditional narratives of American history?
- What are the ethical considerations in studying and representing Indigenous histories and cultures?
- How can we ensure that Indigenous voices are centered in discussions about the future of North America?

Creating:

- Develop a lesson plan that incorporates Indigenous perspectives into a unit on U.S. history.



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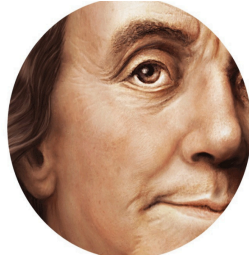
- Design a museum exhibit that showcases the diversity and complexity of Native American cultures over time.
- Write a persuasive essay arguing for the importance of including Indigenous histories in the American historical narrative.

Here are a couple of questions that connect the themes of the transcript with the concepts of freedom and self-governance:

- **Analyzing:** How did Indigenous concepts of self-governance and freedom, as exemplified by the value of reciprocity and decentralized leadership structures, differ from European models of governance and individual liberty?
- **Evaluating:** To what extent did the imposition of European models of governance and land ownership undermine Indigenous systems of self-governance and freedom? How did Indigenous nations resist these impositions and assert their own political autonomy?

These questions encourage deeper analysis and evaluation of the historical and contemporary struggles of Indigenous peoples for self-determination and freedom within the context of colonization and its ongoing impact.

Here are the two questions with simplified wording: ● Analyzing: How did Indigenous ideas of freedom and self-governance differ from European ones? ● Evaluating: How did colonization impact Indigenous self-governance and freedom? How did Indigenous people resist?	Analyzing: How did Indigenous ideas of freedom and self-governance differ from European ones? ● Indigenous: ○ Emphasized collective well-being and consensus-based decision-making. ○ Leadership based on service and reciprocity, not accumulation of power. ○ Strong connection to land and place, with a focus on stewardship rather than ownership. ● European: ○ Focused on individual rights and liberties.
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	○ Hierarchical systems of governance with centralized authority. ○ Emphasis on private property and resource extraction. Evaluating: How did colonization impact Indigenous self-governance and freedom? How did Indigenous people resist? ● Impact of Colonization: ○ Undermined Indigenous systems of governance by imposing European laws and institutions. ○ Disrupted traditional economies and social structures. ○ Displaced communities from their ancestral lands. ● Indigenous Resistance: ○ Formed alliances and confederacies to resist encroachment. ○ Engaged in diplomacy and negotiation. ○ Practiced cultural and spiritual resilience. ○ Continued to assert sovereignty and self-determination.