

# BEN FRANKLIN'S WORLD

**Episode 438: Richard Bell, "The American Revolution & the Fate of the World"**

**[00:00:00] Announcer:** You're listening to an Airwave Media podcast.

**[00:00:04] Liz Covart:** *Ben Franklin's World* is a production of Clio Digital Media. And support for this episode comes from the Massachusetts Historical Society, the first historical society founded in the United States in 1791.

**[00:00:16] Richard Bell:** By the transitive properties of alliances, the Muslim ruler of Mysore Haidar Ali is basically George Washington's ally, or at least they all have the same enemy, Britain.

And Haidar Ali is trying to make a name for himself in the very competitive market of Indian politics. He's a young ruler with a military background. He sees himself as a would-be sort of strong man who's much to be feared. And he sees the chance to capture some British forts as the chance to not only expand Mysore's territory, but make his name as a fearsome ruler who will be able to cow other Indian rulers to submit to him.

He sends eighty thousand troops to try to invade British Madras. And just for comparison of how large a number that is, George Washington has fewer than 10% of that number at Yorktown.

**[00:01:16] Liz Covart:** Hello and welcome to episode 438 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.

What if I told you that the American Revolution didn't just create the United States, it created Australia too? That's not a thought experiment, it's history. And it's one of the most surprising threads in a story that most of us have only ever been told in pieces.

When it comes to the American Revolution, we learn about the thirteen colonies' pushback against King George III and Parliament. We learn about the Continental Army, Valley Forge, and Yorktown, but we barely hear about the Haudenosaunee diplomat who held together a fragile alliance from Mohawk country until the war forced her into exile in Canada.

Nor do we often hear about the Spanish governor who seized British Florida in a shock campaign that tied down thousands of British soldiers or about Haidar Ali, the Muslim ruler of Mysore in Southern India, whose alliance with the French made him by the network of wartime coalitions, the ally of George Washington.

And we almost never hear about the fifty thousand British convicts who were shipped to Maryland and Virginia prior to 1775, and how the cascading crisis of the revolution led Britain to found a new penal colony at Botany Bay.

The American Revolution was a world war. Its consequences reached every inhabited continent, reshaped empires, forced migrations, and planted the seeds for more than one

hundred declarations of independence that would follow over the next two and a half centuries.

So in this episode, my friend and colleague and co-founder of Clio Digital Media, Joseph Adelman, joins historian Richard Bell for a conversation about the revolution as a world war. Rick Bell is a Professor of History at the University of Maryland. He's the author of several books, including *Stolen: Five Free Boys Kidnapped Into Slavery and Their Astonishing Odyssey Home*, which was the finalist for the George Washington Book Prize and the Harriet Tubman Prize and his most recent book, *The American Revolution and the Fate of the World*, a book that asks us to see the American Revolution not as a contained colonial uprising, but as a genuinely global event with consequences that still have ripple effects today.

Now, during their conversation, Rick reveals why the Declaration of Independence was really a declaration of interdependence, and how the revolutionaries knew from the start that defeating the British would require building a global coalition; how Spain's campaign to recapture Florida and the alliance between France and the ruler of Mysore were essential pieces of the revolutionary strategy to defeat one of the world's most powerful military forces, and why the founding of Australia as a British penal colony is a direct consequence of American independence and what that chain of cause and effect tells us about how empires adapt when they lose.

But before Joe and Rick get into it, a quick word about the History Explorers Club. Do you fall down historical rabbit holes? Do you devour history podcasts and biographies like they're nothing? Do you have opinions about early America that your family is just tired of hearing about? If so, you need the History Explorers Club, a community of people who already get you.

The History Explorers Club is a historian led membership for curious adults who want to go deeper into early American history with guidance, context, and a community of like-minded people. Each month, members hear from guest historians in live conversations, join informal club calls, and attend workshops on how historians actually find and evaluate evidence.

There's no scholarly background required, and we record almost everything so you can participate on your own schedule. So find your people at the History Explorers Club. That's historyexplorers.club, historyexplorers.club. And now let's go join Joe and Rick.

**[00:05:22] Joseph Adelman:** Our guest is a scholar with wide ranging interests across early American history and he's a Professor of History at the University of Maryland. He's published several books, including *We Shall Be No More: Suicide and Self-Government in the Newly United States*, *Buried Lives: Incarcerated in Early America*, and *Stolen: Five Free Boys Kidnapped Into Slavery and Their Astonishing Odyssey Home*, which was a finalist for both the George Washington Prize and the Harriet Tubman Prize.

His most recent book is *The American Revolution and the Fate of the World*, which came out in the fall of 2025. Rick Bell, welcome to *Ben Franklin's World*.

**[00:06:03] Richard Bell:** Thanks. It's great to be here.

**[00:06:06] Joseph Adelman:** Let's start with your background and how you came to think about the American Revolution. You mentioned in the introduction to the book that you grew up in the UK in the 1980s and 1990s, and while there you learned very little about the American Revolution. But then, you attended graduate school in the United States and you've taught the US for twenty-five years, and your own kids are going through a US school system.

Based on all of those experiences. Rick, what can you tell us about the differences in the British perception of the revolution as opposed to what Americans tend to hear?

**[00:06:37] Richard Bell:** Yeah, Joe, I think you and I have probably known each other for most of that twenty-five years I've been in the US. So I've been here a while. My kids are growing up going through schools in this country. My kids have thick American accents. They can only do British accents when they're making fun of their dad—so quite regularly. And I have a sense of course from teaching American college students what students coming up through K-12 in this country, especially Maryland, where I live, are exposed to. And I think there's plenty of US history content in that curriculum.

That's quite different, I think, compared to what British kids got, at least when I was a nipper in the 1980s and 1990s. I'll give you one quick example of how I know that. I'm a big musical theater fan, as you probably know, Joe. And I remember when Hamilton transferred to the West End to London in about 2017, 2018, Lin-Manuel Miranda was giving interviews to the British press to promote the show, and he was publicly sort of chewing his fingernails, worrying about whether British audiences wedded to a heroic version of King George would respond favorably to his sort of demonic, psychopathic, "kill your friends and family to remind you of my love" version of King George.

And I could have told him then he needn't have worried. British audiences wouldn't know King George III if he punched them in the face. People of my generation at least, certainly did not study the British Empire, the Hanoverians, King George III, the American Revolution, slavery, or any of it actually in that long eighteenth-century context back in those days.

So we were blank slates. Blank slates for the Hamilton musical, completely ignorant of who that guy on the horse is in Trafalgar Square; turns out it's George III. And so when I was a boy, I learned next to nothing about any of the stuff I've now written a whole book about. So it's been quite the educational journey.

**[00:08:33] Joseph Adelman:** You know, it's funny now that I think about it, that as an American growing up, I only knew about a small slice of George III and his reign, but somehow I knew more than most British kids.

Let's turn now to the book in *The American Revolution and the Fate of the World*, you ask us to reframe the Declaration of Independence as a declaration of interdependence. Can you tell us what you mean by that term, and how it helps us to understand better what happened in 1776?

**[00:09:01] Richard Bell:** The phrase itself, declaration of interdependence, is one I borrow from the great Harvard scholar David Armitage, in his book about the Declaration of Independence. But the concept it's communicating, I think, is pretty common to many scholars of the Revolutionary War, which is the idea that what happens in Philadelphia on July 2nd, July 3rd, July 4th, 1776, is not a magic trick. You don't just snap your fingers in the Continental Congress in Philadelphia, and suddenly independence is occurring, right.

A vote in Congress doesn't actually enact meaningful change on the ground. There's still a war going on. The British are very much invested in winning that war and obstructing the course of American independence. So at best, it's a promise. It's an aspiration, it's a goal, it's a mission, a statement, but to make that promise of independence real will require winning the war.

And I argue in the book that the patriots are certain and clear from the get-go that the only way to beat back one of the most fearsome militaries the world has ever seen is to invite as many international allies into this conflict as possible to form a coalition who can together route King George's forces.

And so we see that very clearly in the context of the Declaration of Independence. And again, this is familiar ground to many historians, right? There's a debate about what other motions are necessary for a vote on independence to be meaningful. And that debate led by Richard Henry Lee of Virginia is built around the idea that securing foreign alliances should be the other side of the coin; declare independence, secure foreign alliances, secure foreign alliances, declare independence, two sides of the same coin.

And so those motions are also being debated and advanced at the same time. We know that roughly one hundred to two hundred printed copies of the Declaration of Independence will be dispatched by the Continental Congress far and wide. Some of them will stay in what becomes the United States and be read to the troops and stuff like that. Several others will be distributed much further afield, intentionally, to the courts of Europe and to the press across Europe with the thought of trying to cultivate foreign alliances.

So this formalizes or makes visible a long gestating campaign to draw foreign powers into the war. That begins before July 1776, and it only escalates afterwards. And it will ultimately culminate with the entrance of France into the war in February 1778, and Spain a year later. Two transformative events which really shift the military calculus and the likely outcome, I think significantly.

**[00:11:50] Joseph Adelman:** That's a good segue to the rest of the book. You've organized *The American Revolution and the Fate of the World* around a fascinating group of people, a large cast of characters. And in each chapter, you select one, sometimes two, who are representative of the place or the topic that you're discussing.

Can you tell us a little bit about how you went about the selection process? What made one person stand out more than another as you were thinking about writing?

**[00:12:18] Richard Bell:** I thought very hard about the organization of this book. And one thing it's not is a day-by-day slog from day one till day a thousand of the American Revolutionary War, pit stopping here, pit stopping there darting back and forth across the global canvas.

I don't have every paragraph begin, "meanwhile, in new place," I thought that would be very tedious for readers and it wouldn't allow readers to approach the subjects of the global reach and resonance the revolution with any, you know, depth and nuance. So I made the decision to break this up into a dozen or so major themes or theaters or people or imperatives.

So there's a chapter, for instance, about the loyalist diaspora. There's a chapter about the trans-Appalachian West. There's a chapter about what's happening in West Africa, for instance. And wherever I could Joe, I tried to pick one character to try to represent or embody the main thrust of what's happening in those theaters. In some places there's, there's too much going on for one character, so I picked a couple, but wherever I could, I tried to pick one.

I'll give you one example of that. One of the final chapters deals with the fallout of the war for American loyalists who choose not to stay in what's now about to become the independent United States. They choose to leave for lots of reasons, persecution, intimidation, securing jobs and livelihoods, and opportunities, reconnecting with families, you name it. And that creates what the scholar Maya Jasanoff called a "loyalist diaspora." And we see about sixty-thousand American loyalists scatter to other parts of the remnants of the British Empire.

And I chose to follow one family as they went to, or aspired to go, to several parts of that diasporic map. And I chose the family of Peggy Shippen. Peggy Shippen was a Philadelphia debutante with a penchant for like high fashion and fancy wigs. There's a great picture of her in the fanciest wig you've ever seen on a human being. It seems to be about four feet tall.

And she is from a loyalist-leaning family that becomes increasingly loyalist as persecutions against loyalists lead to hyper-partisanship in the war. And then she marries a patriot general, you know him, you love him, Benedict Arnold. And that really changes her life and his. She arguably is the one who suggests his treachery to him. And when that treachery is botched and they end up on the British side, they migrate to London, a place neither of them has ever been before, part of a small sort of American loyalist enclave in London of about six or eight thousand people who are treated like dirt—surprisingly, Joe—in London.

My students find this very difficult to understand, you know, why wouldn't American loyalists be welcomed with open arms by British people? And the answer is, British people see these arriving Americans and all they hear is the accent. And they paint with a broad brush, and they instinctively demonize these American loyalists as being closeted American patriots who didn't fight hard enough to hold onto the colonies.

So the Arnold family who have a double burden, of course, being a family associated with treachery, find it very difficult in London after the war. And they dream of relocating to India, but they can't get a job offer to go to India. So they go to Canada instead as British exiles.

And so this sort of migration from one place to another, to another, to another with dreams of going somewhere else, that's pretty common for these sixty-thousand American loyalists after the war.

But telling sixty-thousand stories in twenty pages seemed perhaps unlikely. And I also don't think that, you know, numbers and graphs and maps are always the way to go. If you want to tell a story that stays with people, you have to humanize it, I think, and that often means personify that story. So I chose one person who could not be more magnetic, the wife of the traitor Benedict Arnold, and made her the center of attention.

**[00:16:35] Joseph Adelman:** And if I remember correctly, Peggy Shippen was able to suggest the treachery to Benedict Arnold because she knew Major John André. Is that true?

**[00:16:44] Richard Bell:** That is true. She definitely knew Major John André. One of the first books I read when I was researching this chapter suggested, really gossiped, that John André had been one of her old boyfriends. I think subsequent reading has really poured cold water on that particular theory. Wouldn't it be great if it was true? But instead they were just friends, arguably he was interested in someone else.

But the point is, yes, they were friends. And then John Andre becomes the head of British intelligence in America during the war. What an unlikely turn of events. And then Peggy weaponizes that fact to put her increasingly disgruntled patriot husband in touch with this military handler.

**[00:17:23] Joseph Adelman:** I actually had picked out a few of the characters. I actually hadn't picked Peggy Shippen, but I picked a few of the characters for us to highlight and focus on some of the themes in the book. So if we can, let's turn to Molly Brant.

She was a Haudenosaunee woman and the wife of Sir William Johnson, the Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the northern part of British North America. When the war began in 1775, Molly Brant, like most Native Americans, turned towards the British when it was time to choose sides. Why did she make that decision?

**[00:17:56] Richard Bell:** I should say that I spent November of 2025 watching the Ken Burns road show, what was it, twelve hours? It moved a little slowly for me. I sometimes had to watch it on double speed time on the iPhone, which really helped.

But one of the things I really appreciated about that Ken Burns twelve hours TV show about the American Revolution was the insistent, insistent attention to Native people as central actors in the American Revolution. And that's a bold move, I think, by Ken Burns because the general public, I think, do not consider Native Americans to be central actors.

And yet we professional historians, we all know that Natives were central actors in the American Revolution. So Ken Burns did some good public service there by trying to close the gap between what historians know and what the public does not yet fully understand.

My chapter tries to do some of the same. And it reminds readers that Native peoples were not bystanders to the American Revolution. A significant portion of them, especially those east of the Mississippi, of course closest to the eastern seaboard, took active roles. And when they chose sides, they often chose sides as groups, as tribes, as nations. And those tribes and nations tended about four to one to choose the British side over the patriot side.

And folks might be asking themselves why that was. I can tell you it's not because they love King George. It's not because they think he's the greatest thing ever or they owe some great debt of allegiance to him. Many Native nations that ally with King George Poni been in any sort of alliance with the British king for ten, fifteen years, since the end of the Seven Years' War, the French and Indian War.

By the end of that war, Britain has cultivated some Native allies to try to beat back the French. And Britain's learned the hard way, the necessity, the value of having Native allies when you're engaged in geopolitical warfare in North America.

So Britain goes into the war hoping to cultivate Native allies or hold on to existing alliances it has. And Native nations in the trans-Appalachian West go into the American Revolutionary War, hoping that allying with the British king will be to their ultimate advantage against the tide of Western expansion, white migrants pushing beyond the Appalachians onto Native land.

Many of those white migrants embrace the patriot cause, they do so because they see Britain as an obstacle to westward settlement beyond the Proclamation Line of 1763, for instance. So Native peoples are gambling that Britain is going to win the war against the patriots, and if Native help proves determinant to the outcome, that there will be a debt of obligation that Britain will have to pay out in the form of significantly slowing westward migration into the trans-Appalachian West.

That's the gamble that Native peoples are making. And of course we know what they don't know, and couldn't know, which is that Britain isn't going to win the war, it's going to lose badly.

**[00:21:05] Joseph Adelman:** Thinking about Brant specifically, what was her role within the Mohawk nation? Did she have formal political or diplomatic power? Was her influence more from what we would call soft power? And from the British side, how did they navigate their own ideas of appropriate gender roles to interact with her as a Mohawk leader?

**[00:21:24] Richard Bell:** Yes, it's a great question. So I think Molly Brant makes herself into a central figure at the nexus of the Haudenosaunee, the Iroquois Confederation, and the British crown. She makes herself into a power broker. She could have kept her head down and stayed out of this, but in fact, she wades into the business of holding together an alliance between Britain and the Haudenosaunee that was being frayed and tested and tensed by the mounting war.

And she does so through I think, two channels of social and political authority. One is the one you mentioned. She was the common law wife of a British diplomat named Sir William

Johnson, who dies on the eve of the war. So she had the eighteenth-century equivalent of a Rolodex full of British officials and some familiarity and even perhaps some love and loyalty for some of those individuals and the British perspective on the crisis of empire.

But she's also her own person of course, she's making independent choices. She's not a stooge for anyone. And she's drawing upon her own connections on the Haudenosaunee side, particularly through her stepfather. Her stepfather was a sachem, a significant figure, a political leader within the Mohawk. And so his stepdaughter, therefore, has already some political and social capital.

I think many of your listeners know that the Haudenosaunee are, broadly speaking, matrilineal. They embrace the role of clan mothers in certain contexts here. So women enjoy elevated political influence, certainly compared to any British political system or American colonial political system.

So she leverages those networks, those connections, those platforms, and she speaks out again and again within the Haudenosaunee community to try to vest them to the British cause. She gathers military intelligence for one side and then the other. She persuades one of her children to take up arms against the patriots.

And I should say that her brother, Joseph, who many people may recognize as Joseph Brant, the famous Mohawk warrior, is the other half of the relationship here. Joseph Brant usually sucks up all the attention in historian's work on Native American's roles in the American Revolution. But it turns out that his sister, Molly, is just as important trying to hold that fragile alliance together for just long enough for them to beat the patriots back and stop the path of Western settlement.

That aim falls short, of course, and Molly herself will become actually an exile of war by war's end. And she'll be driven out of ancestral lands in the Mohawk country and end her days on the Canadian side of the new US-Canada border, and is buried today, I think in Kingston, Ontario.

**[00:24:12] Joseph Adelman:** We're jumping around a little bit. So let's talk next about Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben, known usually as the Baron von Steuben or "von Steuben," as Americans would sometimes say.

When we're talking about German participation in the Revolutionary War, most Americans think of the Hessians, the mercenaries that the British hired for their army. But Steuben fought for the US in the Continental Army and had a very particular role. Can you talk a little bit about what he did, Rick, and what the German calculation was in terms of him deciding to come fight for the Americans?

**[00:24:46] Richard Bell:** I think the best way to answer that question is to think about the word mercenary, especially in the context of German mercenaries. I think when we, in America use that phrase, mercenary, we're drawing to mind images of the Hessians, the thirty-thousand soldiers from six different German states who were rented by their princes to serve on King George's side.

But if you look up the word mercenary in a dictionary, what the Hessians do is not a good fit. They are rented by their rulers. They have no say. They are not making individual level choices. They are not soldiers of fortune. They are rental soldiers.

However, there are plenty of mercenaries in the American Revolution and some of the most prominent ones are actually on the patriot side. If a mercenary means an individual making a choice to take their military talents to one side, that defines the Marquis de Lafayette, it defines Casimir Pulaski, Tadeusz Kościuszko, excuse my pronunciations. And it defines Baron von Steuben, who is a Prussian captain, actually is an unemployed former Prussian, former captain, who's very much looking for work.

And his search for work for someone who will give him a paycheck to do military stuff leads him to a job interview in Paris with Benjamin Franklin and Silas Deane. Then after some extraordinary events involving some very inflated letters of recommendation, he ends up at Valley Forge as the newest European officer volunteer for George Washington to sort of size up, is this guy for real? Is he going to help me level up my army? Or is he another European fraud who's made up a bunch of lies about what he can do and will let me down?

So the Baron's a totally fascinating guy. He's also one of the most charismatic individuals we know of in the war. People around him flock to him and are bedazzled in one way or another by his personal charms and professional abilities. He certainly has a flare for the dramatic, for the theatrical.

Right before his job interview actually in York, Pennsylvania. This is his second-round, final round job interview. The first one's in Paris. The second one is in York, Pennsylvania. He buys a new uniform and sticks a giant like military looking cross on the side because he wants to look like he's straight out of central casting. So I love the theatrical element that the Baron brings to his embodiment of what a European military officer slash aristocrat should look like.

But he's also not a phony. He's not a fraud. He's got the goods. He's a highly skilled, highly talented, decently experienced European officer from the finest army in Europe. That's the Prussian army. And he lends his talents to the Continental Army. George Washington sees what's on offer here, seizes it with both hands, right? You know, one quality we look for in commanding officers is knowing talent when they see it and hiring it. And George Washington's decision to embrace the Baron at Valley Forge is a great example of that.

And then the story becomes more familiar, right? That's when Baron Steuben starts drilling the troops at Valley Forge and trying to inculcate to them some of the basic skills of the Prussian military, like how to march in good order, how to turn and lock and load, how to retreat under fire. Basic stuff that often is at odds with the very confused disorganized drilling practice they might have had in different colonial level companies.

It's hard for us to remember today that the Continental Army is not really one army. It's like thirteen armies glued together. So the Baron's job is really to create one, for lack of a better word, national army out of those constituent elements.

And we see the results of that at Monmouth, and we also see the results of that in the general cohesiveness and stick-to-itiveness and resilience of the Continental Army in the months that follow.

So a fascinating guy, and I put him at the center of my chapter on sort of European offices loaning themselves to the Continental Army.

**[00:28:50] Joseph Adelman:** Steuben is also an example of these myths of the revolution that you talk about at various points in the book; Steuben shows up and suddenly the Continental Army is well-trained like magic. You describe these as stories that stick to the American Revolution like glue.

So I guess my question is, what's wrong with these myths and how can we adjust these stories to think about the nuances of what's happening in the past to get a better understanding of the past, of what's a myth, of why and how those myths operate?

**[00:29:20] Richard Bell:** For the Baron, of course, the myth is that he whips the Continental Army into such amazing fighting shape that they vanquish everyone who comes before them after Valley Forge, right. Implying, for instance, that Monmouth is a great victory, which would be news to everyone there.

So instead, I think the Baron's contribution is not creating an invincible fighting force, but a fighting force that won't fall apart. And that's important too. So yeah, the history is always more nuanced and complicated. And myth and history are often at odds with one another.

And I think that's really true for the American Revolutionary War in particular. You know, all wars, all American wars or British wars create myths and war heroes and war stories and stuff like that. But the American Revolutionary Wars created that exponentially, because the American Revolutionary War isn't just any war, it's also this nation's origin story, this nation's creation story as well.

And every postcolonial nation, and the US is arguably the first postcolonial nation, has an imperative to create origin stories which are useful, right. To tell subsequent groups of citizens who they are, where they come from, why they're important, to give them a story about their nation's founding which helps them understand who they are in their modern worlds.

And we're seeing it happen in the American Revolution, and we're seeing it happen for the 250 years after the American Revolution. That process of mythologizing the founding fight starts right away. We can see some of the first historians of the war like Mercy Otis Warren and David Ramsay in the 1780s and 90s.

They're already mythologizing that war in ways that turn it into a series of iconic set pieces in which what was actually a sprawling global war becomes a narrow, arguably sort of nationalist set of myths, in which plucky homegrown heroes take on all the kings horses and all the kings man all whole their own. Which again, would be news to Washington and Franklin who spent the entire war trying to get other people to come and participate as well.

So what I can say is that having spent years working on this new book about the global reach and resonance of the American Revolution, I came away from learning all this stuff with the profound conviction that the American Revolutionary War is way more interesting than I thought it was. Because it's so much wilder, broader, more unpredictable, I find it more compelling as a result.

And I think, you know, all of us in the history business, like you and I, Joe, we have some degree of professional obligation to be the people who say, okay, myths are cool, myths have a purpose. But history does too. Facts do as well. Truth does. I think history's job sometimes is to challenge people's preconceptions to rub up awkwardly against the myths that pop culture might have circulated.

And that's why even Ken Burns's show has rubbed a few people the wrong way, right? Because it's sometimes ran up against what people thought they knew. And I think history is much more interesting as a result.

**[00:32:28] Joseph Adelman:** I can't speak for you, but my experience at least has been that most people are interested in the complexity, are interested in the ways in which the myths and reality are in conversation with one another.

**[00:32:38] Richard Bell:** And I think young people, most especially, right? You know, I teach college for a living. And I find young people incredibly open-minded, incredibly curious, incredibly interested in not taking what they've been told for granted. But like, show me the receipts, show me the evidence. Doesn't this change the story?

So I think that gives me a lot of confidence actually in our future citizens as they grow up to become voting-age voters, that they're not willing to just take what is being offered in pop culture and be satisfied with that. They're pushing for answers, asking tough questions, and demanding why haven't I been told this before?

**[00:33:13] Joseph Adelman:** Thanks for sharing those thoughts about the relationship between myth and history Rick. I do have to tell you one thing that is definitely a reality is that it's time for us to thank our episode sponsors, and then we'll come back and continue our conversation.

**[00:33:27] Liz Covart:** That question, why haven't I heard this before, is really at the heart of what we try to do here at *Ben Franklin's World*, and it's exactly the question that drives the work that historians like Rick Bell do.

Now, I'd like to take a moment to talk about what makes this podcast possible. As I mentioned at the start, support for this episode comes from the Massachusetts Historical Society, the first historical society founded in the United States in 1791. Our partnership with the MHS helps us bring you more resources and keeps our content freely available. But partnerships like this one are only part of the picture for keeping this podcast and our newsletters going.

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So thank you for your help and thank you for your consideration. And a sincere thank you to Nolan C., Jacqueline C., Jane C., Susan C., Nathaniel C., Frank C., and Jenny C. for your generous support. Thank you for making this work possible. Thank you for donating.

**[00:35:00] Dynamic Ad Break:** Audio varies and may shift timestamps in the second half of this episode by 1-2 minutes. Thank you for supporting *Ben Franklin's World*.

**[00:35:02] Joseph Adelman:** Rick, once we expand the field of vision for the Revolutionary War to think about it as an armed conflict, we go beyond thinking about it just as the thirteen states that become the United States, to include the Continental Army, the British Army, the French Army and Navy, and one more European power, and that would be Spain.

John Ferling talked with Liz about this topic a little bit in episode 432, but I'd like to ask you as well about Florida. As an American, growing up in the nineties, I can say with some confidence that we did not learn very much about the role of fighting in Florida. I grew up in New York. I'm not sure if in Florida they talked very much about Florida.

The way you describe it though, it's crucial to the outcome of the war through the person of Bernardo de Gálvez who led the Spanish forces in North America and led a campaign to capture the Gulf of Mexico port town of Pensacola. So Rick, can you tell us why Pensacola was so important to the Revolutionary War effort?

**[00:35:58] Richard Bell:** We are in the midst of a little boomlet of new scholarship about the Gulf Coast region of the United States in the Revolutionary era, and about the Spanish alliance as well. So I think not just of John Ferling's work, but also of Larrie Ferreiro's book, *Brothers at Arms* a couple years earlier, and a super important book by Kathleen Duval called *Independence Lost*. I'd recommend all of those to people listening who want to go deeper on this.

So what we've all been saying is that the Spanish role in the patriot strategy to win the American Revolution War is actually essential. At a push, you know, most folks know that France is involved somehow. We think of Rochambeau or Lafayette or Yorktown or something like that.

Spain is sort of the forgotten partner. And it's an essential partner because Spain, first of all has its own empire in the Americas, which gives it lots of bases to attack and defend. Spain has a massive navy, much of it concentrated in the Caribbean. Spain's also very rich as a result of all the gold and silver being extracted from Mexico and Peru.

And Spain is very angry at Britain, its longtime geopolitical rival in the eighteenth century for seizing former Spanish possessions in previous imperial wars that Spain would very much like to get back. I'll just mention two of them. One is Gibraltar, which is the rocky outcrop at Spain's front door, which controls access to the Mediterranean Sea. Britain's held it since the early 1700s, taking it from Spain. Spain would love to get it back.

The other one is the one you just mentioned, Florida. Florida had been a Spanish possession since what Ponce de León, I think, in the 1500s. And it had fallen into British hands as a result of the various treaty and territory swaps of the Seven Years' War, the French and Indian War.

So Florida is British in the 1760s and 1770s. And Florida is pretty big. It's divided into two British colonies, East Florida and West Florida. And West Florida has its capital at Pensacola. Bernardo de Gálvez is the Spanish appointed governor of Spanish Louisiana. And he is sent instructions by the Minister of the Indies who just happens to be his uncle—Joe, what are the chances—to take as much of British Florida back as he can.

As soon as the starting pistol of Spain officially joining the war is heard, and he races across the border between Spanish Louisiana and British West Florida in 1779. Basically trying a shock and awe campaign to grab as much territory as he can before Britain knows what the hell is happening. And it proves to be remarkably successful. And that will culminate in a long siege and successful, for the Spanish, siege of British Pensacola, couple of fighting seasons later.

So Spain is seeking to really recover, through force, territory lost to Britain in previous wars. And there may be some listeners who say, "well, what does this have to do with the American Revolution? Spain and Britain have been fighting each other for a long time, isn't that just more of the same?" And I think that's, on the one hand, completely correct. Spain and Britain have been fighting each other for a long time, just like Britain and France.

But it's also true that the American Revolution War is the opportunity and the permission structure for Spain to try to deliver those results. And every time Bernardo de Gálvez is on the offensive in one British colony, like British Florida, that means that the British Empire is having to divert not just mental energy, but money and material and soldiers and sailors and supplies and ships, to holding on to British colonies that were not rebelling.

British Florida was not rebelling. It was not one of the thirteen rebel colonies. It was pretty chill for the most part. Same for the Caribbean, by the way, think of Jamaica. Think of Barbados. But the entrance of France and Spain puts every British colony around the world in play and forces Britain to actively defend them.

So we see, Joe, that by the end of the war, Britain is directing the fortunes of, I think a hundred thousand troops, but only thirty percent of them. Only three in ten can be spared to try to route the insurgents in the thirteen rebel colonies, because the rest of them are trying to hold on to British possessions in places like Florida and Gibraltar and India, and actually the south coast of England itself, for that matter. So this is some global chess.

**[00:40:35] Joseph Adelman:** Indeed, it was. We know that the American and French militaries were sometimes in close coordination, or at least trying to be, between George Washington and Rochambeau or the Comte de Grasse, who was the admiral leading the naval forces. Was Gálvez in contact with the American army at all? Did the Spanish and American forces coordinate in any way?

**[00:40:57] Richard Bell:** So not as much as the Spanish would like. We know that Gálvez is often short on soldiers and sailors to achieve his ends, and he's putting out requests for military assistance. The first requests go to the military forces in Spanish Cuba. "Can you send us some of your Spanish soldiers and Spanish sailors to help reinforce my recent acquisition of British Mobile and help me with this siege of Pensacola? I've got plans for the next fighting season."

And the Spanish and Havana say, "no, we're going to hold on to Cuba instead, we're not going to waste any forces on so pedestrian a purpose as taking British West Florida. What do you want it for anyway? It's not that important."

And he makes the same request of the Continental Army. "Can you send me some military supplies and ships and soldiers and sailors, et cetera?"

And they say, "no, we are fully stretched up here. Thank you very much. We can't spare anyone."

So he is hoping, Joe, for more coordination with the Continental Army. So when the siege of Pensacola happens, there really aren't any patriot boots on the ground that I can think of. So it's not quite the coalition fighting the British at Pensacola as it is with the French and the patriots at Yorktown. But nonetheless, Washington knows where Gálvez is. Gálvez knows where Washington is.

So they are at least informing each other. And in that sense, they are coordinating right, and Gálvez knows that if he's pushing on Pensacola, it's making it hard for the British to relieve Cornwallis at Yorktown, for instance, in the same fighting season. So it's all connected, and every British, every French, every Spanish commander is well aware of those interconnections.

**[00:42:44] Joseph Adelman:** Speaking of interconnections, it's time Rick to deal with the enormity of your book title, *The American Revolution and the Fate of the World*.

**[00:42:55] Richard Bell**: [*musically*] du-du-duuuun

**[00:42:56] Joseph Adelman:** Yes. It's always nice to be modest, Rick. And as a reminder to our listeners and potential readers, the good news is that does not mean that the book is fifteen-thousand pages long, but let's go to the world.

Let's go far afield from the eastern half of North America, which is the traditional setting for the American Revolution, and go past Western Europe where we have some idea of things going on with Franklin and Adams and European military conflict, all the way to the Indian subcontinent.

You have a chapter on the impact that the American Revolution had on both British and South Asian leaders and how they made diplomatic decisions, military decisions, and you do that through a man named Haidar Ali. So Rick, would you give us a brief overview of how the American Revolution affected India?

**[00:42:38] Richard Bell:** Absolutely, yes. And that claim in the title that the American Revolution has a connection to the fate of the world, I should say, for the record that's a Jefferson quote. Jefferson's talking about the global impact of the Declaration of Independence for instance, he says "it's an instrument pregnant with the fate of the world." So I was, you know, channeling Thomas Jefferson.

India is completely fascinating and I think we in the United States really have not given nearly enough attention to the sort of Asian dimensions and Asian theaters of this global war, despite the fact we know that it starts as a result of the importation of Chinese tea via the British East India Company, which results at the Boston Tea Party.

And India remains a central theater of the conflict throughout the war. Particularly when France joins the American Revolution in 1778. Because France's American Empire, think of Canada and the Caribbean, has been contracting somewhat in recent years. Think of the loss of Canada in the 1760s.

Whereas France has been expanding its footprint in India at the same time Britain has been expanding its footprint in India. Both of them are competing for territory and market share with a series of Indian princes who control their own autonomous kingdoms there as well. And it's hotly contested ground. And so when France sides with George Washington in America, it also goes to war with Britain in India.

France is trying to seize British strongholds. There are three of them, Madras, Calcutta, and Bombay. And Britain is trying to seize the five French outposts around the Indian subcontinent's coast as well. And Indian rulers are seeing opportunity. If France and Britain are suddenly fighting each other, maybe we can expand our territorial footprints or push one or both of them back into the sea for good.

So there's all to play for in the American Revolution in India. And this will come to a head when the French, now allied with Washington, are able to persuade one prominent Indian ruler from a increasingly ambitious kingdom called Mysore, in southern India, to join them in a formal alliance. So Mysore in effect allies with France, which means that by the transitive

properties of alliances, the Muslim ruler of Mysore, Haidar Ali, is basically George Washington's ally, or at least they all have the same enemy, Britain.

And Haidar Ali is trying to make a name for himself in the very competitive market of Indian politics. He's a young ruler with a military background. He sees himself as a would-be sort-of strong man who's much to be feared. And he sees the chance to capture some British forts as the chance to not only expand Mysore's territory, but make his name as a fearsome ruler who will be able to cow other Indian rulers to submit to him.

He sends eighty-thousand troops to try to invade British Madras. And just for comparison of how large a number that is, George Washington has fewer than ten percent of that number at Yorktown.

So this is a big deal for this highly militarized kingdom of Mysore to wade into the war. And then I explain how far he gets in that attack on Madras. What happens when he unexpectedly dies, and what happens when his no less ambitious and militant son Tipu Sultan takes over.

It's quite the story and required me to, you know, wrap my arms around a massive body of reading by scholars of India. Many of them based in India itself, of course, many more of them based in Britain, which of course has strong ties to the Indian subcontinent. But we in America, I think, have forgotten this theater entirely.

**[00:47:34] Joseph Adelman:** Were Americans and Indians of the era aware of what was happening in each of these places? Is there news traveling and making it into the court and newspapers of either South Asia or North America?

**[00:47:45] Richard Bell:** You would assume not right, given the distances involved, right? You can't jump on an airplane and be there in twelve hours. There is no X or Bluesky or cables or telegraphs. So the distances involved, you would think, would preclude that sort of information sharing or mutual awareness.

And yet, and yet, and yet the eighteenth century is an amazing place. The eighteenth century is actually globally connected. It's connected by people, by ideas, by commerce, by ships, by messages. So we know that Indian commodities, think of fabrics woven in Bengal, are being offered for sale in Philadelphia as the latest fashions in the 1760s and 1770s.

We know that news from India during the Seven Years' War where India is a major theater, is all over the newspapers, not just of London, but also of New York and Charleston, et cetera, making a household name of folks like Robert Clive from the 1760s.

And we know that in India, British commanders are on the ground, oftentimes representatives of the East India Company have a constant stream of news arriving via London of how the American war is going on the other side of the world.

And so when Haidar Ali steps up as part of the French Alliance allies with Washington, that news gets back to Washington and gets back to Philadelphia and the Continental Congress.

And Benjamin Rush, a very prominent patriot doctor in Philadelphia says, "Haidar Ali is the toast of my table," right, "he's my new favorite guy. Thank God he's got his eighty-thousand troops and he is hurling them the British" because he knows what that's going to mean. And sort of the chess board of the American Revolutionary War.

And by the end of the war, Joe, the state of Pennsylvania, has even named a ship after Haidar Ali. Though in true Anglo-American form, they've managed to spell both his first name wrong and his last name wrong on the side of the ship.

**[00:49:49] Joseph Adelman:** Well, maybe they get half credit for being consistent. Rick, I want to turn the conversation to another geographic area that people don't usually associate with the American Revolution, because you managed to connect the American Revolution to Australia, which is literally as far away from the new United States as one can get.

Now, to the extent that Americans know anything about the early colonization of Australia, it's that the British sent people there as a punishment for crimes. I mean, no offense to any of our Australian listeners, that's simply the story we've been told.

So Rick, what can we learn about the American Revolution from Australia, and what can we learn about Australia by putting it into the context of the American Revolution?

**[00:50:29] Richard Bell:** This was one of my favorite chapters to write, and I wrote it relatively early, even though it comes quite late in the batting order in the book. And it was sort of proof of concept, really. If I can write a chapter showing the very strong connections between the American Revolution and the birth of Australia as a British colony, then if we can make that connection over, what is it, twelve thousand miles or something like that, then we can do lots of things.

This chapter is about a convict crisis, a crisis of public order that happens in Britain during the American Revolution as a result of the War with America. When the colonies rebel, preexisting, longstanding shipments of British convicts to the American colonies have to cease because there's a war on. There's an embargo. The navy's in the way. They won't accept those shipments anymore.

But prior to 1775, Britain had been in habit for decades and decades, Joe, of sending significant numbers, growing numbers, of its convicted felons to Maryland, which is where I'm sitting right now, and neighboring Virginia, and to some extent, Pennsylvania.

And this was big business. We think fifty thousand British conflicts were sent to Virginia and Maryland in the decades before the war. America is the dumping ground for Britain's colonies. And the war prevents that from continuing. The war puts a temporary halt to those shipments, which Britain assumes will be lifted as soon as Britain wins the war. And we can go back to dumping our convicts in Maryland.

So throughout the war, Britain is continuing to convict people of crimes, continuing to sentence them to penal transportation, but has nowhere to send them. So Britain has to come up with all sorts of creative slash barbaric stopgap measures, which involves creating

temporary floating prisons in de-masted cargo ships on the River Thames and other British rivers as temporary holding sites for the convicts it fully expects to send to Maryland as soon as Britain wins the war.

But Britain keeps not winning the war. For years and years Britain keeps on not winning the war. And eventually it loses. And when it loses, it's still got thousands of convicts in floating hulks who need to be sent somewhere from the perspective of the British justice system.

There are no purpose-built penitentiaries in Britain, and no one has money to build any, even if they could conceive of them at this time. So British officials, especially justice ministers, are scouring their atlases for other places they could send these convicts. Now, we know from the work of the terrific scholar, Emma Christopher, who wrote an excellent book called *A Merciless Place* about this transitional period that Britain tried everywhere.

It tried seven different destinations as new places to send those convicts. Many of them in West Africa and Southern Africa, others in the Americas, think of Honduras for instance. None of them succeed. They all have their own problems, which I won't go into.

So it is out of sheer desperation, a sheer lack of other ideas that someone in the British justice system will says, "What about that place Captain Cook surveyed like ten, fifteen years ago that Botany Bay Place? What if we dumped them there?" And that's literally how British policy is made. "What if we dumped them there?" Almost no one making that decision knew what the hell Botany Bay was, had never been there, never seen it with their own eyes. They knew almost nothing about the interior. They assumed wrongly that it was largely uninhabited.

And they send, I think seven hundred, eight hundred convicts on a one-way journey across the world as the first sort of foot soldiers of a new British colony, which will become the Australian colonies. And it's founded as a prison colony to ease the convict crisis in Britain, directly caused by the American assertion of independence.

And that pivots to one of the larger themes in the second half of the book, Joe, which is that while the British Empire is deeply challenged by the American war and by the independence of thirteen colonies and the loss of those thirteen colonies, the British Empire does not collapse in 1783. It will actually expand dramatically in the years after 1783 and Australia marks just one example of that strange pivot after the loss of the American colonies.

**[00:54:58] Joseph Adelman:** For any listeners who are not familiar with Australian geography, Rick, where is Botany Bay? Is there a modern reference point that we could use to think about where in Australia this is?

**[00:55:08] Richard Bell:** So Botany Bay is not too far from Sydney. Back then they were two distinct places. Sydney was known as Fort Jackson or Port Jackson. Botany Bay had a decent natural harbor, but Port Jackson had an even better one.

So once the first convicts in the first fleet in 1788 land at Botany Bay, much to the consternation of the Aboriginal people who actually live there, they quickly realized that Port

Jackson about, I think it's forty miles away, is a much better location. So they relocate to Port Jackson. So the Sydney Township is basically the first penal settlement, even though Botany Bay is the point of landing, if you see the difference there.

And there's a play on in New York City called *The Visitors*, and it's part of an off-Broadway season, and it imagines and dramatizes the thoughts and actions of the Aboriginal people on the cliffs watching that first ship arrive in 1788.

I also narrate that scene in my book, but Botany Bay certainly wasn't vacant, virgin land, uninhabited. It was a living community home to the Eora people. So it's a reminder that British colonialism still has a lot of dark days in front of it.

**[00:56:20] Joseph Adelman:** As you've just said, one of the themes you're drawing on across the book is the persistence and reshaping of the British Empire. We've spent most of our time talking about individual chapters and each chapter has its own deep well of scholarship that you're building on, to the point we could do a full hour about each of the individual chapters and the stories that you tell.

Before we conclude, Rick, I want to give you a chance to talk about a few of the themes that cut across all of the chapters that you draw throughout the book.

**[00:56:50] Richard Bell:** Yeah. Each of the chapters, I think when put together, add up to more than the sum of their parts. And they do speak to, I think, seven big themes: the importance of thinking about migration, of about contingency, about the role of trade, I think the human cost, the catastrophic human cost of this war, and then the geopolitical consequences for empires.

Empires double down on authoritarian rule to try to make sure that the contagion of liberty doesn't dismantle every empire. At the same time, the call to liberty certainly springs around the world as never before. If the American Declaration of Independence is the first Declaration of Independence, and David Armitage thinks in many ways it is, then today there are a hundred postcolonial nations in the world that have their own declarations of independence modeled in some ways on the American one. So there are real global consequences. The fate of the world, Joe, is indeed at stake.

But one thing I think that's really easy to grasp from a book like this, which should nonetheless seem new, is to recognize the role of naval power. When you look at the war in global terms, you are forced to break out of the I-95, Acela corridor from Washington to Boston, right. And oftentimes you find yourself at sea.

You might be in the Caribbean Sea struggling for control of Jamaica. You might be in the English Channel trying to invade southern Britain in 1779. You might be in the Gulf of Mexico trying to punch through the Isthmus of Panama to break the Spanish empire, and too you might be going round the Cape of Good Hope trying to get to the Indian Ocean intact, or floating outside the Botany Bay settlement.

And one obvious takeaway from a global look at the America Revolution is the importance of sea power as a key to military success in the Great Age of Sail. And I argue in the book that what happened at sea was often just as important as what happened on land

**[00:58:54] Joseph Adelman:** that gives us a chance to move into the "Time Warp." This is the 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.

And Rick, I want to come back one last time and take the fate of the world and put it back in your hands, and go to the big, big counterfactual of the American Revolution. What if the British had won?

Now I want to give you something concrete to work with. So let's say that the British were successful in defeating Washington in the Continental Army during the New York campaign in the summer and fall of 1776. At some point on Manhattan Island, the British catch the Continental Army. Washington doesn't get away. The revolution fails.

What might that have meant for people in the rest of the sphere of British influence, including the people in the book that you talk about in West Africa, in India, and in Australia?

**[00:59:48] Richard Bell:** So as hypotheticals go, it doesn't get much bigger than that. I don't how many episodes you guys have done by now. Have you ever asked a bigger hypothetical than that?

**[00:59:56] Joseph Adelman:** I don't know.

**[00:59:57] Richard Bell:** All right. So wow. We could say absolutely anything here and we can't rerun the experiment, right? History's not lab science, right? You can't change one variable, run it again and see what happens. So I could say absolutely anything here and no one can write in and say, how dare he?

So I will say yes, the revolution certainly is in great peril in the fall of 1776. And I agree that if British and Hessian forces, Germans were key here, could have actually cornered George Washington and forced him to capitulate and basically made the only five-thousand people left in the Continental Army neutral actors, then it would be very different.

It would remain to be seen whether the insurgency in New England, which was a hotbed of radicalism, would also have been quickly extinguished, or whether New England would somehow fight on for some number of fighting seasons.

But if we take the premise at face value that the war is over, Britain wins and the patriots lose, then the global consequences are unpredictable. One might think, and I think I probably am one of the people that would think this, that if the scare is not as deep and severe as the British losing the colonies is, if Britain does not have the near-death imperial experience, then its impulse to crack down on insurgents elsewhere in the empire might not be as severe and acute as actually was.

In Ireland, for instance, we know that Irish Presbyterians will test the limits of British authority during the war, and subsequently, and that when Britain loses the war, Britain will crack down on those insurgents in Ireland with everything they've got, trying to prevent Ireland from toppling the way the American colonies did.

But if the American colonies don't topple, maybe the impulse to crack down on Irish resistors is less. So things in Ireland may have come out differently. We could say the same in India perhaps. Britain sends a huge number of troops to India after the war for the purposes of holding on to Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta, having just lost thirteen colonies in North America.

Maybe it wouldn't feel quite that same impulse to fill its three British outposts in India with as many troops as it did if those thirteen American colonies were still under British control. And the consequence of that might be that Britain wouldn't have the manpower to expand in India as rapidly as it does after 1783, and that native Indian actors would have sufficient manpower to hold Britain at bay for longer, for instance. So the coming of the Raj, which is Britain's formalized control of India in the nineteenth century, may not happen on the same timeline. All of these things are possible.

Prison shipments could have resumed to Maryland. Maryland would continue to fill with Britain's convicted felons. And Australia as a British possession maybe would not have occurred in the same way. These are all hypotheticals, of course.

I could say one more thing, which is that despite all that, I think that empires are unstable, Joe. I think if independence didn't happen in the 1770s and 1780s because of the events you've suggested, that's not to say they wouldn't try again in the 1790s or the 1800s or the 1810s. And we do have some examples of that from the other side of the world.

In 1857, there is a major insurgency against British rule in India. The British call it the Indian Mutiny. Many Indian people call it the Indian War of Independence. It's unsuccessful. They crack down and think that they've put the genie back in the bottle, but you can't ever put the genie back in the bottle. Now, it will only, I think, polarize and radicalize people in India to demand independence again and again, and again and again until they get it under the era of Gandhi and Nehru in the 1930s and 1940s.

So I think empires are unstable. I think empires rest on a regime of coercion and extraction and oppression, and people don't like being treated like crap. And so eventually that's going to come back and bite those imperial powers in the, you know what.

**[01:03:59] Joseph Adelman:** Well, that's a very big note to end on. Thank you for taking such a big question and giving such a thorough answer. Before we let you go, would you tell us what aspect of history you're researching and writing about now?

**[01:04:10] Richard Bell:** I'm not going to take my next book project yet because I'm not sure what it is, though I do have some great ideas I'm excited to expand upon. But I will tell you that I've got a completed project, which is not yet public facing.

So as of May 2026, I will have a new series of video lectures on a platform called The Great Courses Plus. And that will be a deep dive into the Declaration of Independence. I've long been obsessed with the Declaration of Independence, like many professional historians. And instead of writing a book about it, I wrote twelve web lectures about it, which I'm really proud of.

And I tried to draw in all the latest research, including by our mutual friend, Emily Sneff and David Armitage, who I've mentioned today. So if people want to deep dive into the declaration just in time for the big July anniversary, check out that new course coming in May on the Great Courses Plus.

**[01:05:01] Joseph Adelman:** That sounds great. And if people want to get in touch with you, where is the best place to look for information about you, your work, and how to get in contact with you?

**[01:05:10] Richard Bell:** Yeah, I'm very Googleable, but I also have a website. It is www.richard-bell.com.

**[01:05:16] Joseph Adelman:** Well, Rick, as you mentioned at the outset, we've had a conversation going for about 25 years. I enjoyed this discussion and I look forward to more.

**[01:05:25] Richard Bell:** It's my pleasure.

**[01:05:26] Liz Covart:** Well, that was a fascinating conversation. You can really tell that Rick Bell has spent years following the American Revolution across every ocean, the different courts of European powers, into the Indian subcontinent, and all the way to Botany Bay, where the Eora people watched the first British ships arrive in 1788.

And what Rick found, and what I hope you found in this conversation, is that the American Revolution is far more interesting when you take a really high level view of it. Now, two aspects of this conversation really stayed with me.

First is Rick's framing of the Declaration of Independence as the declaration of interdependence. It's an idea that Rick borrowed from historian David Armitage and built on. Now, the vote for independence in Philadelphia on July 2, 1776 wasn't magic. It was actually a promise. And that promise could only be kept by persuading France, Spain, the Netherlands, and a coalition of Native Nations, and other international allies to help the revolutionaries survive the war long enough to win it. So independence was never a solo act. It was always an interdependent act.

Now, the second thing that sticks with me is the human cost that sat at the center of all of this global maneuvering. Molly Brant didn't just lose a war, she lost her ancestral homeland and died in exile across the border that hadn't even existed when she was born. An estimated sixty-thousand loyalists had to flee North America and resettled in what remained of the British Empire. Sometimes in places like England where they weren't even welcomed. And this is to say nothing of the twelve thousand miles of ocean that separated British convicts from their homeland.



BEN FRANKLIN'S WORLD

The human cost of the revolution isn't just a footnote in its history. The human cost really sets at the center of the American Revolution. So Rick's book is a reminder that history's job is not to confirm what we already think we know about famous events like the American Revolution. Its job is really to tell us the whole story, even when that whole story is wider, harder, and more consequential than the version of history that we grew up with.

Look for more information about Rick, his book, *The American Revolution and the Fate of the World*, plus notes, links, and a transcript for everything we talked about today on the show notes page, benfranklinsworld.com/438.

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Production assistants for this podcast comes from Joseph Adelman, Karin Wulf, 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 part of the Revolution's global reach surprised you most? Was it Spain's campaign in Florida, Haidar Ali's alliance with France, or the revolution's connection to the founding of Australia? I'd love to know what you think. So please tell me, liz@benfranklinsworld.com.

*Ben Franklin's World* is a production of Clio Digital Media. And support for this episode came from the Massachusetts Historical Society, the first historical society founded in the United States in 1791.