

## **Tom Paine and Benedict Arnold**

**Richard Bell, University of Maryland**

**Thursday September 28, 2023, 9.30am-11am PST**

**Thursday October 5, 2023, 9.30am-11am PST**

Join us for two lively lectures about a pair of the most infamous figures from the American Revolution—Thomas Paine and Benedict Arnold.

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When Tom Paine died in June 1809 only a dozen people came to his funeral. The burial service was held in Westchester County near the 250-acre farm gifted to Paine by the people of the state of New York in gratitude for his role in stirring the American Revolution. The site of Paine's funeral wasn't hard to find or difficult to travel to, yet still not a single political leader attended.

In this lively lecture on September 28, Richard Bell, a professor of history at the University of Maryland, examines Paine's meteoric rise to celebrity status during the American Revolution and his equally dramatic fall from grace in the decades afterwards. Bell illuminates the humble origins of this impoverished immigrant corset-maker and unpacks his extraordinary gifts for political argument. He explains why Paine's *Common Sense* (1776) sold so many copies, and why so many people have since credited that little 46-page pamphlet with catalyzing a mass movement focused keenly on the cause of independence.

Bell also explores the surprisingly bitter backlash Paine experienced when he later published the *Rights of Man* (his 1791 manifesto in support of the social and political extremism of the French Revolution) and the *Age of Reason* (his 1794 defense of deism, reason, and free thought). Once lionized as our most relatable and revolutionary founding father, Bell argues, Tom Paine died a pariah, too radical and uncompromising for the cautious new country he had called into being.

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Benedict Arnold is the most famous turncoat in American history. He was a skilled officer in George Washington's Continental Army, a general who led patriot forces to several important victories over the British, including the capture of Fort Ticonderoga. But while in command at West Point in 1780, Arnold began secretly communicating with British intelligence agents, giving them insider information, not just about the fort and its defenses, but about American strategy for the war.

When patriot militia captured a British spy named John André, they discovered Arnold's treachery—Alexander Hamilton said it was "the blackest treason" he could imagine. A manhunt ensued, but Arnold made it to the safety of a British ship (the

aptly named *Vulture*). In the aftermath, George Washington had John André, the British spy tried. A board of Continental soldiers found him guilty and sentenced him to death by hanging. In the meantime, Arnold returned to the field of battle. Now wearing a British uniform, he led brutal attacks on patriot civilian communities in Virginia and Connecticut throughout 1781.

In this fascinating lecture on October 5, historian Richard Bell reconstructs the life and times of Benedict Arnold, the reasons for this treason, and the larger problems of betrayal and desertion that dogged the Continental Army throughout the war.