

The Fate of the World: The American Revolution Beyond the British Empire

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This course is comprised of eight lectures that together investigate the geopolitical forces that shaped the American Revolution and the international consequences of the US break with Britain. It asks how the familiar story of the American Revolution—its causes, course, and consequences—changes when we think about the American Revolution as part and parcel of a titanic struggle among European empires and peoples for control of a vast, resource-rich world? Each lecture tackles a different group of actors—Germans, Frenchmen, Spaniards, South Asians, Prussians, etc—and situates their experiences at the center of dramatic narratives about the loss of the British Empire’s thirteen golden geese and the birth of the United States.

Lecture #1: The Hessians are Coming: German Soldiers and the American Revolution

In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson tells readers that King George III has dispatched “foreign troops” from the German states to “to enable him the more effectually to destroy his people.” This class examines the experiences of these 20,000 arriving German soldiers and their changing reputation among ordinary Americans. After Washington captured 1,000 Hessians at Trenton, they soon lost their reputation as thugs capable of “ungovernable brutality” and when the war finally ended, almost 6,000 German veterans chose to stay in America to put down roots.

Lecture #2: Baron von Steuben and the Valley Forge Winter

The hard winter of 1777, when the Continental Army was camped at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, was a turning point in the American Revolution, the moment when new drills and regimental regulations finally turned a ragtag collection of ill-supplied and often embittered enlistees into a more disciplined and professional fighting force capable of winning a war. This class tells this important story from the perspective of Baron Friedrich von Steuben, the Prussian immigrant with the unusual home life whom Washington tasked with achieving that critical transformation.

Lecture #3: Molly Brant and the Native American Revolution

The American Revolution was, in many important ways, an Indian War. It was a war in which ordinary Natives fought and died in great numbers; a war that would reshape the balance of power between Europeans and Native Americans on this continent drastically and permanently. This class surveys the American Revolution in Indian Country, paying particular attention to the life and times of Molly Brant, an Iroquois woman who emerged during this long, bitter war as the most important military and cultural broker in Native America.

Lecture #4: The French Alliance & The Road to Yorktown

The Siege of Yorktown in October 1781 was a decisive win for George Washington’s Continental Army. Yet it was also a triumph for the unlikely wartime alliance forged between patriot revolutionaries and the French King Louis XVI. University of Maryland

historian Dr. Richard Bell explores the inside story of this essential alliance as it evolved from small-scale privateering and gun-running into a military partnership that achieved a stunning joint victory at the Yorktown, the climactic battle of the American Revolution.

Lecture #5: Guns, Ships, and Cows: The Spanish in the American Revolution

Between 1779 and 1782, Spanish rangers from Texas herded 10,000 cows over 500 miles to Louisiana to help feed Spanish soldiers fighting the British in the American Revolutionary War. Spain had joined the war on the patriots' side in 1779 and would spend the next four years contributing a deluge of fresh soldiers, sailors, ships, and cows to the war effort. University of Maryland historian Dr. Richard Bell explores this hidden history of Spain's participation in the American Revolution.

Lecture #6: Harry Washington and the Revolution's African Diaspora

For enslaved African Americans, the Revolution was a freedom war—a once-in-a-century opportunity to try to declare their own independence and escape from slavery during the chaos of war. This class explores the phenomenon of Black insurgency during the war years via the life of Harry, the former enslaved stable hand of George Washington. Harry ran away from Washington in 1776, joined the British Army, and ultimately resettled in Sierra Leone in West Africa. There he led his own independence movement to establish a free Black government beyond British control.

Lecture #7: Independent Lost: The American Revolution and the Battle for India

The Indian subcontinent had long been the target of British land grabs, and Indian rulers tried to use the distraction of American secession to push Britain out of Asia entirely. Consider Haidar Ali, the ruler of Mysore. By war's end, Ali and his son Tipu Sultan had put Britain firmly on the backfoot, forcing King George to order an all-or-nothing troop surge to India—a dramatic Swing to the East in which the independence of the entire subcontinent hung in the balance.

Lecture #8: The 1783 Treaty of Paris: America's Future on the Brink

Signed in 1783, the Treaty of Paris was the formal agreement that ended the War for Independence and created the United States of America. In this class we explore how the Treaty of Paris was a triumph for US diplomacy that reset relations with Britain and set a new border with Spanish North America. Notably, however, the treaty also damaged the US-French alliance irreparably and left Natives, loyalists, and fugitives from American slavery to fend for themselves.