

### [Transcript] The Rest Is History / 349: The Birth of the United States (Part 3)

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The sun never shone on the cause of Greater Worth.

It is not the affair of a city, a county, a province, or a kingdom, but of a continent.

Of at least one eighth part of the habitable globe.

It is not the concern of a day, a year, or an age.

Posterity are virtually involved in the contest, and will be more or less affected even to the end of time, by the proceedings now.

Oh ye that love mankind, ye that dare oppose not only the tyranny but the tyrant, stand forth.

Every spot of the old world is overrun with oppression.

Freedom has been hunted round the globe.

Asia and Africa have long expelled her.

Europe regards her like a stranger, and England has given her warning to depart.

Oh, receive the fugitive, and prepare in time an asylum for all mankind.

So that, at Dominic, was son of East Anglia, Tom Paine, radical, enthusiast for revolution, and specifically in this context, author of Pamphlet Common Sense, which came out in January 1776.

And we've got Adam Smith with us.

Adam, am I right in saying that this is really the first kind of mass market pamphlet that argues for removing America's links with the British monarchy?

It was genuinely a bestseller, genuinely a bestseller, and it was subsidized and it was circulated across all of the 13 colonies.

And it was, as you say, the first pamphlet to explicitly and clearly make the case, not only for independence, but a positive case for republicanism.

So hello, everybody. Just to give you a bit of context, if you're just tuning in, this is the third in our series on the American Revolution.

We have had the Boston Tea Party, we've had the Battle of Bunker Hill, the colonies have been declared by George III as being an open revolt.

And we are now in January 1776, the publication of this extraordinary pamphlet.

Half a million copies, and Adam, I think, is sold by the end of the year.

And Tom Paine is actually the irony is he's not actually American.

So he's gone to America, but he is, as Tom's exquisite impression suggests, he's from Thetford in Norfolk.

And he used to make corsets, I think.

I think that was in Sussex. He moved to Lewis.

To make the courses in Lewis.

I believe so, yes.

OK, well, and he'd been twice been sacked as a customs officer, ironically, for incompetence and corruption, I think.

So are you a big Tom's Paine fan, Adam?

I'm not really, I have to say, Dominic.

I do admire the muscularity of his prose and common sense is you can see why it was so effective.

It doesn't have all the Latin tags and all the learned references that most of the pamphlets of the

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American Revolution did.

Whatever I think of Tom's Paine, though, I think about what happened to his body after he died.

Do you know this story?

He was, you know, he died in obscurity.

And of course, he was very unpopular by the end of his life, including in America.

But his great British admirer, the radical William Cobbett, went to America and brought back his body to England,

hoping too that his admirers in England would create some kind of great tomb around it.

He couldn't raise the money to do so.

So kind of very Lenin behaviour.

So he kept the bones of Tom's Paine in a box in his house.

And when he died, they were sold with his effects.

And nobody knows what happened to them.

And some of them, some bones have turned up in Australia quite recently and there's bits of Tom's Paine all over the world.

So poor old Tom's Paine ended badly even beyond his life.

But you probably didn't want me to quite go there.

No, that's great.

To go back to common sense, I mean, this has a massive impact, right?

Yes, it really does.

And he is the author of these resonant phrases.

And you read some of them out just then, Tom.

The cause of America is the cause of all mankind.

I mean, that's not only is that a great phrase.

That is, in many ways, it seems to me the key to understanding American political culture.

That what happens in America, the cause of this revolution, everything we do in America, our purpose is transcendental meaning.

We are providentially blessed in some important way.

The cause of America is the cause of mankind.

What happens here has universal significance.

But when it comes out, is there a sense in which, as well as enthusing the revolution, inspiring kind of an upsurge of backing for republicanism,

are there also conservatives among the revolutionaries who become a bit nervous about this, who kind of pull back from...

John Adams, for example, doesn't like common sense at all.

He thinks he's badly argued based on abstractions.

You know, John Adams is a serious man who thinks that the business of government and constitution writing, which he loves,

I mean, he likes the business of constitution writing, but he thinks it's a serious business of balancing interests.

It's not about all these kind of blue skies thinking, these grand abstractions.

And he thinks it's very dangerous, the direction that Thomas Paine is going, including the practical suggestions that Paine is making about

how a republic, once you've overthrown the king and the British Empire, should look.

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And John Adams doesn't want the debtors and the poor farmers and the western parts of the states to be running these new independent states.

Should it come to that?

So there's a lot of nervousness, as well as enthusiasm.

And before we get into Adams and what happens next, to go back to that thing, the cause of America is the cause of all mankind.

At this point, does the rest of mankind care?

I mean, are people watching?

I mean, there's always that sort of sense in America, isn't there, that the world is watching.

I mean, it's been chanted so many times by protesters, demonstrators through American history.

The eyes of the world are on us, the shot heard around the world.

But is the world watching at the beginning of 1776?

That's a good question.

And I think often the answer is that a lot of the world anyway is watching.

And that's why they're often right to say that the eyes of the world are upon us.

It's just the John Winthrop phrase from the 17th century, which was being revived at a right about this time or a little bit later that what happens here matters.

And there were always at this time and later and earlier, plenty of people outside of America, people who'd never been there, people who dreamed of America, who projected onto America a kind of vision of the good society, who wanted America to be the future.

And what Payne was saying in common sense were the sorts of things that radicals in Britain had been saying for years.

And the attacks on the king, which were quite crude and extreme, but which were the sorts of things that you would hear in radical circles in Britain in the 17th century.

So the royal brute calling him that kind of, yeah.

And to go back now to the sort of military strategic picture.

The British had, they'd been in Boston, but they basically realized they can't, they're trapped in Boston, they have to get out.

So a couple of months after Payne publishes that pamphlet, General Howe, William Howe, who is the commander in Boston, says, OK, out.

And they evacuate the city completely.

I mean, the city that's been the cockpit of revolution.

They take some of the loyal, several thousand loyalists with them, who they dump in Halifax in Canada, and then they come down and establish themselves in New York.

New York, which we haven't mentioned really at all, actually in the preceding two episodes.

But New York, which has a, I mean, I don't know anything about this period at all, but is New York a more loyal city than Boston?

Yes.

Yes, it definitely is.

And there are certainly, there's a stronghold of loyalism in New York.

It's not as straight, but there had been some conflicts with the New York legislature earlier on over the quartering act and things.

So it's not quite as straightforward as that.

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But certainly the British had reason to believe that if they wanted to create a beachhead, then New York was a good place to do it.

Also, because it, of course, is at one end of the Hudson River Valley.

So the idea was, if you can send a force down from Canada, from Quebec City, and up from New York, and control the Hudson Valley, then you cut off New England.

And there's still this notion that New England is the problem.

So if you cut them off from the rest of the colonies, that would be a good strategic move to make.

So that's another reason why New York is the focus at that point in 1776.

But while the British are sort of working out what their strategic plan is going to be, their authority is pretty much collapsed across the colonies.

People aren't listening to their officials.

People have set up their own town committees of safety or whatever.

And the Second Continental Congress is still going.

That's right, isn't it?

And they are where?

They are in Philadelphia now?

Yes.

And they are busy with the business of government.

They have no formal authority to do so, but they are communicating with the colonies who are often now already being referred to as states and saying, you've got to get your house in order, set up a government, clearly things the external authority has collapsed.

They in the end, of course, do turn their attention to formal things like, well, are we declaring independence or not?

But most of the business of the Second Continental Congress up until this point is just preparing for war and trying to keep the business of government going.

But that's the key thing, isn't it?

Which I hadn't properly appreciated is that with the collapse of British rule and without the announcement of a kind of new state to replace it, everything is in limbo, tax collection, the entire functioning of government.

And John Adams, who I keep on invoking, I don't quite like John Adams really, and he's fundamental in some ways quite a conservative figure.

And his view at the beginning of 1776 is basically,

thank goodness that independence has been, our independence has in practice been declared by the British government,

referring to the Prohibitory Act at the end of 1775, which prohibited all trade, the whole of the 13 colonies,

that isolated all the 30, extending the coercive acts from Massachusetts to the whole of the colonies.

I mean, for Adams, that was effectively the British government saying, you are now on your own and we are at war with you.

It was them, the British government, that took that initiative.

So everything thereafter from John Adams' point of view was merely reactive on the part of the rebels.

Because he's conservative and he doesn't want to do anything so subversive as to declare

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independence himself.

Yes. I mean, by this stage, he thinks a formal declaration of independence is certainly going to happen eventually,

and he's keen to think of what a constitution will look like in that new state.

But he is pleased that, as it were, not just the first shot,

but the declaration of war has come as he understands it from London and not from the colonies.

And he's not wrong to think that because declaring a blockade is an act of war.

And that is what the British government does at the end of 1775.

But there are more radical figures, I mean, we've talked about pain,

but there are more radical figures who are actually American.

And I guess the most celebrated of these is Thomas Jefferson,

who is the man who will write the first draft of the Declaration of Independence.

So what has he been up to in the build-up to the war?

And then what is he doing in the summer of 1776?

Jefferson is a very interesting figure.

The closest the American Revolution comes to kind of Robespierrean figure, although in a way that's rather flattering too.

Jefferson makes him more of a man of action than he probably was.

I mean, he was a very privileged Virginia planter, slaveholder, who thought of himself as an intellectual, a man of the Enlightenment, a cosmopolitan figure, steeped in the new ideas.

And convinced that he and his generation,

and he certainly felt himself to be at the head of his generation,

had an opportunity which had rarely, if ever, in human history come before,

an opportunity to, in a pain-eyed way, begin the world anew,

to start a new page and reinvent what it meant to be human.

And he loved talking in these kinds of ways,

and many people found that very inspiring.

He was a great wordsmith.

And we see that in the preamble to the Declaration of Independence,

which is obviously a beautifully written sublime document,

rightly famous and revered over the last 250 years.

The quality of his prose was exceptional.

And why is it, Jefferson, so first of all,

well, why did Congress decide they need a Declaration of Independence?

I mean, because there are some people aren't there.

I think New York, maybe Delaware,

some of the colonies are a little bit more dragging their heels about it.

Don't think it's the right thing to do?

Well, because I was amazed that by the 1st of July,

only nine of the 13 states have basically signed up to the separation from Britain.

I think it was the 2nd of July that the motion was passed

to formally constitute these news.

Well, because there's a brilliant comment in Holton's book

where he describes how John Adams, again, writes about this decision on the 2nd of July to declare independence and how it will be celebrated with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations from one end of this continent to the other.

Whereas, in fact, it's the Declaration of Independence, of course, on the 4th of July that is celebrated.

He says Americans celebrate the press release rather than the act itself.

Yes. I mean, it's a very good question.

Why did they need a Declaration of Independence?

You know, Declaration de facto already existed in Thomas Jefferson's minds.

That had been the status quo ante anyway, as we've talked about in previous episodes.

Well, you need all the states together, though, don't you?

I mean, you need all the states to agree, because otherwise they can be picked off much more readily if they haven't signed up to a kind of central declaration.

And the press release, as you call it, or as Woody Holton calls it, is important because it's a manifesto.

It's a statement of principle, and it's a justification for what they're doing, aimed in no small part at Paris, at this point that the Americans knew that if they were going to engage in what they imagined would be a difficult and potentially long military engagement with the British, they were going to need support from France.

So it was a kind of justification, which was necessary for diplomatic purposes, but internally within the United States.

And the key thing about the Declaration of Independence and what makes it new is that it is the king that's the target of the grievances.

It's not Parliament.

And it had to be the king.

It had to be the king because by this point, they were attempting to secede from the British Empire.

Up until this point, they had been saying, we can be effectively a self-government dominion within the British Empire, and therefore we will still owe loyalty to the king.

In July 1776, they were saying, no, no, no, we are going to create our own empire, and that was often the word that was used, and that was always the word that was used in London,

creating their own empire, American empire.  
So therefore they had to throw off allegiance to the king,  
and therefore it was necessary for them to turn  
King George III into this tyrannical figure,  
necessary in order to justify to the world  
as well as to themselves what they were doing,  
just as in the same way it had been necessary in the 1640s  
for the parliamentary side to focus on the king in the end  
and why it was necessary for the king to die in the 1640s  
in order to justify what they were doing.  
And in propagandistic terms, isn't the effect of that  
of proclaiming itself a republic as opposed to a monarchy?  
It's backward-looking because they can then invoke  
the Roman example, the Roman Republic that expelled its king,  
and it can draw on all that kind of classical language,  
elevating freedom and liberty and virtue.  
But it's also, I think you could use the word progressive  
without too much risk of anachronism,  
it's signing itself up to the more progressive element,  
the more radical element of the Enlightenment,  
and identifying America, the New World,  
as a kind of, you know, the best hope for humanity,  
that it has cast off the chains,  
that once again it's a city on a hill,  
offer an example to the old world.  
Exactly, and that liberty has fled from its...  
Yeah, so back to the pain comments.  
Has fled from England and has taken up refuge  
in the New World, exactly.  
I mean, historians have different takes on this,  
so for example, Gordon Wood,  
he's written lots about how the language of the Declaration,  
the language of the Revolution, in fact,  
is rooted in what he sees as the...  
What lots of historians see as the kind of country,  
oppositional tradition, which is a kind of itself,  
an attempt to preserve what people see as the good old cause  
of 17th century England.  
So there's that, but there's also the Enlightenment,  
and let's say the French Enlightenment,  
Voltaire, Montesquieu, these characters,  
and there's John Locke, and so on and so forth.  
So which of these traditions do you think is...  
Can we say which is the more important?

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Well, I mean, there's also absolutely the biblical traditions that are deriving from the Puritan and the Quaker inheritance as well.

Tom, absolutely.

I mean, but the rights of man, the fact that the creator endows...

Yeah.

...human beings with rights...

Even though a lot of them are deists, aren't they?

Yeah, but it's still...

But that idea is being framed in a way that can appeal to both Quakers in Philadelphia and Puritans in New England, but it's clearly very biblical.

So Adam, untangle some of those strands for us.

I mean, the Declaration of Independence itself is clearly Lockean.

It's making a Lockean argument about the social contract that it has been broken, and that's the core justification for setting up a new government.

And this is not accidental.

I mean, not just Jefferson, but these other elite figures gathered together in Philadelphia had read these tracks or at least knew enough about them to be able to speak competently about them.

They could do a podcast about them, for example.

They could definitely do a podcast about them.

Yes.

They knew how to fake it.

And so, I mean, yeah, I don't know how...

I mean, if you're just asking about that document itself, it's easy to root it in those Enlightenment thinkers, Dominic.

And the broader pamphlet literature, and this is where Gordon Wood and his mentor Bernard Bailyn is making this argument about the Whig country tradition and the good old cause of the 17th century.

They're looking at the...

Not just at the Declaration of Independence, but all of the pamphlets published in the preceding 15 years, and they're looking at all and they're seeing...

What they're seeing in that language is the 17th century and very early 18th century English language of liberty,



Whigish language of liberty.

So what that does is to give to the Revolution in state, I mean, even if very still in Coate, but also a kind of ideology that people can now increasingly sign up to and which gives a kind of motivational justification for what they're doing.

Yes.

And we hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal.

That line from the preamble to the Declaration of Independence has, of course, frequently been cited as effectively the ideological underpinning of the United States and that is what makes it possible, among other things, but that's the core of it, to think of the American project as an ideological project, a project that is dedicated, and this is actually an Abraham Lincoln usage, right, at Lincoln and Gettysburg in 1863, turned the Declaration of Independence, it wasn't the only person to do it, but he turned the Declaration of Independence into this baptismal document for the nation, not the Articles of Confederation or the Constitution or the Treaty of Paris or any of these other things in international law, but the Declaration of Independence because of that rousing preamble.

And of course, Martin Luther King in 1963 will also invoke it to talk about equality.

A promissory note, as King calls it.

We've come to cash the check, as he says in the March of Washington in 1963, but Adam, I mean, that goes to the point, doesn't it?

That claim we hold that all men are created equal.

Some of them don't mean it.

I mean, Jefferson himself has 600 slaves in his lifetime, and during his lifetime, I think he freed two.

So Washington has a mouth full of other people's teeth.

I mean, these are, I mean, this is the criticism that is made of them in the 21st century by, you know, we talked last time about the 1619 projects and so on, that the Declaration of Independence is a conservative document, some people would say. But Dominic, it's also a criticism being made at the time.

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I mean, we talked about Dr. Johnson in the previous episode. So Adam, they had a section on slavery which they cut out. Is that right? The Jefferson himself wrote and then cut out? And I think it was by far, in Jefferson's original draft, it was by far the longest of the list of grievances, some of which are slightly tendentious and all of which are slightly hyperbolic. That was the longest one, the one condemning the king for imposing slavery on the colonies. And that was cut out by the convention. Right. So this is, I mean, the Declaration of Independence is really in a way, I mean, it's the most significant, single most significant text, Part J Woody Holton, you know, in the history of America. So I think it's worth looking at it in detail that we have done. But we must remember that there is simultaneously a war going on which we've barely touched on. So why don't we take a break now and when we come back, let's look at the course of the war and what is going on. Welcome back to the Restless History. So we've been talking about the Declaration of Independence, which Congress votes in favour of independence on the 2nd of July. Two days later, it's the press release, as we were saying, and there are bells ringing in cannon going off in Philadelphia. A few days later, George Washington reads the Declaration to his troops in New York and they pull down the statue of George III. But of course, I mean, that's a reminder that there is, as Thomas said just before the break, a war going on. Because they melt it down, don't they, and turn the statue into bullets. They do indeed, exactly, yes. And even as they do that, the 30,000 British troops, which is, I believe, the largest European force ever sent overseas, which gives you a scale, I suppose, of the challenge that is facing Great Britain, 30,000 British troops are coming ashore on Staten Island. And the British, so they've said, Sod Boston, Boston is gone. The priority now is New York. That's right, isn't it, Adam? Yes, they've given up on Boston. And the question now is, can they isolate New England? Can they use New York as a base from which they can take Philadelphia, which was functionally the capital of this newly declared independent country or nation or whatever it was, or empire.

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And they knew they had a formal opponent in the Continental Army under the command of George Washington. They had reason to believe, not least because of the Battle of Bunker Hill, that they shouldn't underestimate this enemy. But everything else was really still in flux at this point. What kind of a war this was going to be? What role, if any, the Navy was going to be able to play? How much resource could be diverted from the protection of British colonial interests elsewhere in the world? How important in the end was this going to be? How high were taxes going to go in Britain? Yet again, in order to pay for another war in North America, all of these things were still to be determined in 1776. And so two questions about the British. One is, are they conscious even at this stage about the French and the Spanish might pile in? Yes. That is their big fear. Of course, the King and the Lord North, they don't want to lose the 13 colonies anyway. There's a huge issue of pride and ego and patriotism and all these kinds of things. But there is a basic geopolitical anxiety. They previously fought this highly successful war, the Seven Years' War, expelled the French from North America. The obvious danger here is that this is going to provide an opening for the French to repossess part of their or all of their former colonial possessions in North America. So they have to keep some troops back. They have to defend Britain from French invasion conceivably. And they have to defend the Caribbean. They need to in both instances because that's the real worry is the loss of the Caribbean islands. And of course, there is a genuine threat of invasion after the French enter the war in the late 1770s. So they're not wrong to think that. So my second question very quickly is, are there some people in Britain who think, okay, cut our losses now, the thing is gone, this has not worked out, let's call the whole thing off? I mean, the impression I get is that actually quite a number of the High Command think that. A lot of people think that. And Lord Chatham, former William Pitt basically thinks that. And this is one of the problems that the King now has, is the King is really committed to suppressing this rebellion. And the only Prime Minister he can work with to achieve that goal is Lord North. And so when Lord North keeps on saying, I just can't cope with this anymore, please, please, please let me resign at the end of the next parliamentary session. And the King keeps on saying, no, because he knows that the only alternative is to invite one of the opposition factional leaders whose policy will be a peace policy. So just on George III, who's oddly being absent from almost all the story.

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At this point is George III genuinely a factor in that he is his stubbornness, his, you know, you can call it his patriotism, if you like, or his small sea conservatism or his sense of pride.

Is that really a factor in keeping the British fighting?

Yes, I think it is. I think it is.

And I think actually that's the right way of putting it, Dominic.

And really up until now, the irony is that the King hasn't been a major player and obviously he's not really in control of government policy.

He can only implement things through the cabinet.

And he's extremely conscious of constitutional prerogatives and precedents.

But he really does very, very, very strongly believe that the Americans should not be allowed to become independent. And so he works very, very hard to, you know, basically keep, put some backbone into his cabinet ministers.

So he is a factor there.

So the issue for the British, how on earth are they going to get America back?

Because they won the Battle of Bunker Hill, but then they had to evacuate Boston.

So in a sense, winning a battle isn't enough.

You are only as good as the territory you're holding.

And therefore the question is, what strategy can they put in

that would enable them to expand beyond the few kind of tow holds that they have along the coast?

And so New York becomes basically the kind of the focus for their hopes. Is that right?

Yes. One answer to the question of what strategy they can do is that they could destroy Washington's army, the Continental Army. And they could have, and they actually could have done so.

I mean, you know, one of the what ifs in this story is that there were moments, early in the war in 1776 and 1777 anyway, when General Howe and General Clinton, who were the two key military commanders in that region,

could potentially have cut off the Continental Army and destroyed it,

potentially even captured George Washington and the whole course of the war could have looked very different

if that had happened. I mean, famously, they could perhaps have prevented the Continental Army from evacuating from Manhattan and they didn't do so.

And there are very good reasons why they didn't do so based on logistics and supply and so on.

But nevertheless, Washington was able to escape.

But that's a key moment, isn't it, Adam? Because they had landed at Staten Island.

They have this huge battle on Long Island, which I think is the biggest single battle of the war, which the British win. Half of Washington's army is left trapped in Brooklyn.

And then the British hesitate. And one reason they hesitate is actually going back to something that Tom,

I think, said earlier on, which is that a lot of the British commanders are actually quite ambivalent about the whole business.

So General Howe, his brother is Admiral Howe, who's in charge of the Navy, and he used to play chess with Benjamin Franklin when they were in London.

So they're all quite sort of sympathetic to the Americans.

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Yes, they'd all opposed most of this legislation we've been talking about in previous episodes, all of these people.

I mean, it is amazing, yeah.

Yeah, they didn't really want the British to be in this situation.

Even General Cornwallis, who's famous later on, he had opposed, he voted against the Stamp Hacks, incredibly.

But anyway, they have a peace conference on Staten Island, don't they?

They meet John Adams and Benjamin Franklin, who meets his old chess sparring partner on Staten Island.

And the British say to them, listen, let's just shake hands and pretend this was all a bad dream.

Then they basically say, the king will pardon you.

But the Americans, is it just they're too far gone now?

Well, the Americans have already declared independence.

From their point of view now, the only terms for peace will be recognition of American independence.

And that, of course, is not something that the British military commanders are authorized or would have wanted to concede even if they had been authorized to do so.

So it goes nowhere.

But could, I mean, if George III had been a tyrant and the British had been the monsters from a Mel Gibson film,

presumably they would have just captured or killed the American delegates then and there, destroyed Washington's army, captured or killed him.

And we'd be talking about a very different scenario, would we?

I mean, is that, do they have the capacity to do that though, Adam?

Could they ravage the countryside, take all the towns?

You know, could they do that?

Do they have the capacity as in, do they have the military capacity or do they have the will?

I mean, they don't have the will, as you've been saying.

And so that's never really a realistic option.

I mean, there are some hotheads in London and some pamphlet writers, editorial writers who start suggesting this kind of strategy.

The Daily Mail.

I was just, actually, even as you were speaking, I was thinking 1200 words, I could bang that out by four o'clock.

But the weird thing is, is that you absolutely get a sense that Britain's already lost this war, that lots of the commanders already feel that they're too ambivalent, that things are going, you know, they don't really have a prospect of it.

But at the same time, the Americans feel that they've lost the war.

So, you know, they're kind of moaning the game is pretty nearly up.

And famously, the kind of the crisis point is when Washington finds himself on the wrong side of the River Delaware.

And this is kind of the end of, coming towards the end of December,

loads of his troops are going to, due to kind of, you know, their commissions kind of are up at the end of December.

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So he feels that he has to do some kind of stunt that will raise morale.

And so he goes back across the Delaware.

That's my summary of one of the most famous episodes in American history.

Washington crossing the Delaware, he does.

And you're right, Tom.

Lydia, the tattooed lady, you can see it on her back.

And that kind of fighting spirit attracts the attention of European courts.

And together with the British defeat at Saratoga, which is to come in 1777, convinces European powers that the American rebels need backing.

Well, before we get to Saratoga, just on the Delaware.

So the British had ended up capturing Manhattan after the failure of the talks at Staten Island. Washington had then escaped to New Jersey and then gone further south and crossed the River Delaware.

And actually to add to what Tom was saying, he'd had 19,000 men and now he's only got 3,000 men.

So it's a real, I mean, maybe sometimes people overstate the rag tagness, if that's a word of the Continental Army, but they are pretty rag tagging.

Yes, huge problems of supply.

Yeah, I mean, he's very upfront. He needs to raise the spirits of the people.

Yeah.

And this is when Tom Paine writes another of his pamphlets, doesn't he?

These are the Trojmen souls, he says, in The American Crisis.

Which is a good phrase.

It is a great, he's a good phrase maker.

I mean, like Jefferson, they're terrible people, but they're very good phrase makers.

And then Washington does this thing where he strikes across the Delaware on Boxing Day, Christmas night, is it?

Standing up, looking very noble with a flag behind him.

Is that the painting?

Yeah, so the famous painting that apparently got destroyed in the Second World War.

By who?

By the British, ironically, in a bombing raid.

It was on the Bremen, the Bremen Kunsthalle.

Was it really?

So it was destroyed in 1942.

But hold on, it still exists, though, doesn't it?

I thought, what are the images of it that you see on the internet?

It's, I suppose, copies of it.

Yeah.

Okay.

All right, fair enough.

So to get back to his attack.

So it's Christmas night and he attacks, and actually what's interesting is he attacks, it's a surprise attack.

He has to do it, this great coup d'etat.

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He attacks a camp that is described as the Hessian camp.

So the British have pitched up with a load of German auxiliaries.

What Americans would call the mercenaries from Hesse in particular.

And this is, am I right in thinking, Adam, that the Americans see this as an absolutely terrible act of betrayal that the British have brought all these Germans with them?

They do.

It was a perfectly natural thing to do.

I mean, I don't want to dig in in defending the British government, but of course the king was also the elector of Hanover.

It seemed a perfectly natural thing to do to find troops from his other domains in Europe.

And that was the way that British army always fought wars was by, you know, they were great naval power fighting land-based campaigns always required using troops from other countries.

I mean, the king wrote to Catherine the Great, hoping that she would send Russian troops.

That probably would have wound up the Americans even more.

And the American army themselves, of course, also used auxiliaries, including some from German troops by the end of the war.

But you're absolutely right that the Hesseans have become a kind of byword for the dirty way that the British were fighting this war,

or perhaps more to the point the fact that the Americans believed that the British were treating them as if they were completely outside the pale.

And that was what really stung.

Right.

But then Washington follows that up with another extraordinary coup d'etat.

And then he reaches Princeton, and then he looks like he's going to attack General Cornwallis' camp.

But actually, he sort of sneaks around by a back road, attacks Cornwallis' sort of rearguard, I think, takes them by surprise.

This is a Princeton.

And by the time Cornwallis gets there, Washington has outwitted him, attacked his rearguard and then escaped.

And these two together create this image.

Cheers to everyone up.

It creates the image of Washington as a tremendous commander.

It suggests the Americans haven't lost after all.

It sends a message across Europe.

And I suppose it makes the stakes for the British as they enter 1777 much higher.

And this is where we get back to your Hudson Valley strategy, because they really need this to work, don't they?

And this is Burgoyne.

And how?

So how he's going up from New York, isn't it?

That's the plan.

And Burgoyne will come down from Quebec.

But Burgoyne.

So Burgoyne is a poet.

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He's a playwright.

His nickname was Gentleman Johnny.

Which that doesn't suggest Marshall bigger, but it's not a strike fear in the rest of his enemies.

But I think that was because he was so polite to his own troops.

Polite?

Yes.

I think he was very, you know, he treated them very well.

Okay.

Well, I was going to say, I don't want to polite general.

I want a rough, raucous, hard driving bastard, Tom.

No.

So he's sitting in his tent writing plays and being polite to his men.

Right.

But I think he was actually quite an able general.

And he, he had a sense that basically the strategy, which is them, him moving southwards, how moving northwards, that it's not going to work.

What strikes me about all the British generals in this story is how fundamentally pessimistic they are.

Well, I'll tell you a fact about John Burgoyne that will make you think very, very highly of him.

He wrote a semi-operatic production of a play about Richard the Lionheart, Tom.

And do you know where it was performed in 1788?

No.

The Drury Lane Theatre.

Can you think of any other great acts that have played the Drury Lane Theatre?

Who have subsequently gone on to invade America?

The Rest is History.

You and me?

The Rest is History.

The whole podcast has been leading up to that moment.

To that moment.

I can see Adam, Adam is delighted.

This is the summit of his scholarly career.

So, so how he's going northwards, he's going quite well.

He's actually, I mean, he's kind of outmaneuvering Washington, I think at this point.

Washington's kind of complaining about this.

But he gets distracted, doesn't he?

Yeah.

So Washington says of how he's engaging in a variety of perplexing maneuvers.

You don't want someone to say that about you.

Because he ends up taking Philadelphia, which he shouldn't have done.

He should have just left Philadelphia alone and gone north, hasn't it?

Yeah.

And meanwhile, Burgoyne is coming south from Canada.

He has, I read, 30 carts of personal baggage and a baggage train three miles long.



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And they're proceeding so slowly, they're going less than a mile a day.  
Which is, is not the kind of, I mean, gentle, that's gentleman Johnny for you, Tom.  
He's proceeding at a sort of gentleman's pace instead of rushing as I would have him do.  
And they get to Saratoga in the autumn and they find a fellow there called General Horatio Gates.  
I don't know anything about him.  
Do you know anything about him, Adam?  
Yeah, he was an Essex lad.  
Yeah, he was born in Essex.  
That's what, that's the main thing I know about him, Dominic.  
They're all, all these Anglians kind of fighting each other.  
Yeah.  
That's very odd.  
So he gets there.  
So, so he's already there with his, with the New England militia.  
Burgoyne gets there and he, it's the classic thing.  
The British are always trying to attack uphill, which is grossly unfair against people hiding behind trees.  
Correct.  
Gates is on a place called Bemis Heights or Bemis Heights, I don't know how you pronounce it.  
Burgoyne charges up the hill on the 19th of September.  
600 of his men shot or wounded.  
And then he ends up basically trapped.  
So it's upstate New York, I guess, Adam.  
This is Saratoga.  
This is where they are.  
He's got no food.  
It's pouring with rain.  
It's very cold.  
It's very miserable.  
And the local people have all burned their farmlands.  
So he hasn't got any, can't get any supplies.  
And he's waiting for, you know, the other British armies going to get there.  
They don't get there.  
So he has another go on the 7th of October, driven back again by Gates's troops.  
And basically on the 17th of October, so 10 days after that, after just sort of hanging around, freezing, starving, wet, miserable.  
Burgoyne surrenders.  
But on good terms, right?  
Because the thing is that they're not kind of taken away to prison of war camps.  
It's agreed that they can go back to the European theater of war and serve there.  
It's just that they can't come back to America.  
Right.  
So if they go back to Europe means that they can replace troops that can then be sent to America.  
And so Gates is widely blamed for this.

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And I suppose the issue, though, from the British perspective is they can't keep losing armies.

I mean, they can't just keep throwing endless men into the American moor, as it were.

Well, I think that what it shows is basically that the whole British war effort is futile.

Essentially, they can't leave the Atlantic seaboard and go inland without being picked off.

And that's where the analogy with the Vietnam War, I think, kind of kicks in.

Well, almost any colonial war time, actually, when you think about it.

I mean, it's striking to me the extent to which, I don't know how much you think this is true, Adam, but this is a prototype for so many European colonial counterinsurgency campaigns in the 19th, 20th centuries.

GmbN Fu and all that, where you're desperate trying to pacify the countryside, but your troops go inland and then they get cut off and surrounded by guerrillas.

They run out of supplies and all that kind of thing.

Do you think that's fair to describe it as that?

Yes, I do.

But I also think, and I think Tom's description of the surrender at Saratoga reinforces this, that the British never really fully embraced that.

I mean, they did learn to it.

I mean, it wasn't that the British generals were just hoping for kind of proper set piece battles.

They did adapt to the realities of a guerrilla conflict,

but they never responded in the way that the Americans did in Vietnam, for example,

with a kind of scorched earth policy of their own or only in very occasional circumstances.

And usually it was loyalist partisans rather than the regular British army.

Right.

And so the fact that we're going as a gentleman is precisely the problem.

He really is a gentleman.

And so this is obviously a sense of shockwaves across Europe.

Now, the French have already been secretly supplying the Americans, haven't they?

Yeah.

I read that the playwright, Burmese, had formed a dummy corporation to send guns and gunpowder to the Americans.

And King Louis XVI had actually given them a million leave, you know, again, secretly, so it couldn't be traced back to him.

So the French, all this time, have been basically rooting for the Americans.

And I guess, what is it?

February 1778, they made that explicit when they declared war.

But just before that, Dominique, I mean, the most famous French supporter of American freedom is the Marquis de Lafayette, a very young man who, astonishingly, is inspired to go and fight for the Americans by meeting the younger brother of George III, the Duke of Gloucester. He's had a dinner with the Duke of Gloucester and the Duke of Gloucester is going on about how tremendous the American rebels are and how he's on their side, which seems kind of mind-blowing.

It's amazing.

And if you think of the Duke of Gloucester and Samuel Johnson as kind of, you know, different shades of opinion in Britain, it does give you a sense in which there is a kind of ideological

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civil war going on in Britain at this time.

But with the French, Adam, I mean, that's a game changer, right?

It's a complete game changer.

Lafayette was far from being the only European military adventurer to go and join the American cause during the war.

He becomes the famous one, doesn't he?

Because basically, he becomes Washington's adopted son.

He does.

And they loved him because he offered to fight for no pay and he was willing to serve in the ranks rather than just expecting to be given a commission as most of them did straightaway.

And also because Lafayette genuinely believed in the cause.

All the evidence is he wasn't just doing this in order to gain military experience and earn some money.

He was doing this because he really did believe in it.

And so he became a hugely important figure as a validation of the universal significance of what the Americans were fighting for, as well as for the military expertise that he and others brought.

So that sort of sense the whole world is watching.

Shot heard around the world, all that sort of stuff.

He bears that out, I suppose.

And so with the French entrance to the war, presumably for Britain now, you know, the American is they're not neither here nor there, but the absolute priority now is we can't lose huge tracks of air.

You know, we can't lose the Sugar Islands.

We can't.

We don't want to you lose Gibraltar.

Yeah, Gibraltar.

I mean, you know, these sort of, I don't know, Menorca, those kinds of places.

Yeah.

And India.

They don't want to lose ground in India to the French and Canada as well.

I mean, those or those parts of North America, which is to say, Canada and Florida at this point that are not engaged in rebellion.

Right.

So the war now enters a completely new phase.

Indeed, the American Revolution enters a new phase.

And I think we should probably call a halt here for those of you who are not members of the Restless History Club.

Of course, if you are, the tremendous news is you just keep listening because Adam will be with you in seconds talking about the final stages of the war, the surrender at Yorktown and the beginnings of the peacetime American Republic.

So you'll be back with all that when you add them.

You're looking forward to it.

I certainly will.

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I'm looking forward to that.

Yeah.

Very sad.

Tom's not looking forward to it, which is Tom's doing it under duress.

Presumably this whole series has been a trauma for you, has it, Tom?

Yeah, it's very traumatic.

But let's hope it hasn't been traumatic for everybody else.

And on that bombshell, we'll say thank you very much.

See you next time.

Bye-bye.

Bye-bye.

Bye-bye.

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