The Day the Revolution Began

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[00:00:00.2] Tanaya Tauber: Welcome to Live at the National Constitution Center. The podcast sharing live constitutional conversations and debates hosted by the Center in-person and online. I'm Tanaya Tauber, the senior director of Town Hall programs. In this episode, historians Rick Atkinson, author of *The British Are Coming: The War for America, Lexington to Princeton, 1775-1777*, Mary Beth Norton, author of *1774: The Long Year of Revolution*, and Rosemarie Zagarri, author of *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic*. Join us for a conversation marking the 250th anniversary of the Battles of Lexington and Concord. Together they explored the events leading up to the first shots of the American Revolution, the battles themselves, and the colonists response to this pivotal moment in history. Jeffrey Rosen, president and CEO of the National Constitution Center, moderates. Here's Jeff to get the conversation started.

[00:01:10.8] Jeffrey Rosen: Rick Atkinson, Mary Beth Norton and Rosemarie Zagarri, it is an honor to welcome you to celebrate the anniversary. Rick, your definitive and superbly relevant book, *The British Are Coming*, begins in March 1775 and tells the story of the Battle of Lexington and Concord. Why did you start in March? What happened in March, including Dr. Warren's oration, which you begin with and tell us about the Battle of the Lexington and Concord?

[00:01:49.3] Rick Atkinson: Thanks Jeff. Thanks for having me. It's great to be with you today. Well, things had unspooled long before March of 1775, obviously. For the better part of 100 years the colonists, let's call them the Patriots, had been largely left alone by Britain and that benign neglect had begun to unstitch in a significant way after the French and Indian War, the Seven Years War, as it's called in Europe, when Britain first of all tried to claw back some money to help pay off the debt that they had incurred during the war and also began posting troops in America to help keep things settled on the frontier between the colonials and the Indians. So, we'll go back in a few minutes and look at some of the backstory that leads to April 19th. But in general, what you have in April of 1775 is 5,000 British troops posted in Boston. They believe that the Americans don't have the capacity to withstand this professional, experienced British army and the Royal Navy, which is the greatest navy the world has ever seen

and has a significant fleet on the eastern seaboard of the United States. The British commander, General Gage, has believed until late 1774 that he has the wherewithal to Put down any kind of bad behavior by the rebels and there has been bad behavior, including the dumping of tons of tea, famously in Boston Harbor.

[00:03:40.3] Rick Atkinson: He tells his political masters in London that the American thirteen colonies don't look to be united. He basically says that it's unlikely that the southern colonies in particular, which he said talk high, meaning that they swagger a bit, but they're unlikely to come to the service of Massachusetts colonies should push come to shove and shooting begin. He changes his mind and basically he subsequently writes to London in November of 1774. If you think 10,000 men is enough here, which would be twice what he's Already got, send 20. If you think one million is enough, send two million. You'll save blood and treasure to the end. So, he has come round to recognizing that he's in a perilous circumstance. London basically says, "Okay, you got to get a hold of yourself here." A 24 paragraph letter is sent to him from London, Lord Dartmouth, who's the American secretary. It's written in January 1775. It arrives in mid April. It tells him that he should arrest and imprison the principal actors who are causing trouble in the colonies. But it gives Gage a fair amount of leeway to do what he thinks best. Gage subsequently drafts a 319 word order for the commander of the detachment that he's going to send out.

[00:05:15.9] Rick Atkinson: He's not going to chase people like Samuel Adams and John Hancock all over New England. He thinks that that's a losing proposition. But he is going to try and seize what he knows to be caches of munitions in places like Concord. Concord specifically. So, this 1900 word order for Lieutenant Colonel Francis Smith says, "March with a group of picked men. There'll be about 800 of them in Concord. Seize what you can, come back and do it quickly." What we see on the night of April 18th is Colonel Smith tries to tiptoe out of London, out of Boston. All of Boston, of course, is entirely aware that there's a column of 800 British troops going out. Warnings are sent out to the countryside. Famously, two couriers in particular, William Dawes and another guy, a silversmith named Paul Revere. They carry word out into the countryside, not that the British are coming, which wouldn't have made sense to people who at the time still thought of themselves as British. This would be like saying we are coming. But what Revere is quoted as calling out over and over is the regulars are coming out, meaning the regular British army coming out of Boston.

[00:06:37.8] Rick Atkinson: This column heads toward Lexington, which is on the way to Concord, 18 miles from Boston. And Colonel Smith sends an advance party, 200 men, because he wants them to seize the bridges over the Concord River. They get to Lexington, and they find that the rebels there have been alerted. There is a group, initially it's about 150 militiamen. They have waited and waited and waited, and they get bored and they're cold, and basically they disperse. Many of them go into Buckman Tavern and have a glass of flip, and then there is an

alarm that in fact they are coming. And so about 70, maybe a bit fewer, muster again on Lexington Common. And the vanguard of this British column showed up. Officers, British officers, yelling, "Disperse, you rebels." The commander on the scene at the time, Captain John Parker, who is dying of tuberculosis, orders his men to disperse. They turn their backs. A shot is fired. No one knows who fired the first shot, but undisciplined fire, particularly by the British, continued for several minutes. And at the end of that time, you've got eight Americans dead, 10 wounded, and the American Revolution has begun.

[00:08:00.8] Rick Atkinson: The British soldiers gather together. The rest of Colonel Smith's column closes up. They've got 800 men again, and they're going to march on to Concord. When they get to Concord, they find that the militia there are ready, waiting, and angry. And what we're going to have in Concord is a decision by the local commanders to not fight in Concord, but to retreat across, famously, the bridge over the Concord river, and they will fight there where they've got better fields of fire. More men are coming all the time to join this. We're eventually going to have about 15,000 militiamen from 58 villages and towns all over Massachusetts and eventually from other colonies in New England. About 4,000 of them are actually going to be involved in combat against the British. It's going to be a long, bloody day for everyone, but particularly for the British. Two things I'll mention, and then we'll move on. One, the shot heard around the world. Famously, it's estimated that about 75,000 rounds were fired by the Americans during this long day at Lexington, Concord, and the British retreat to Boston. About one out of every 300 of those rounds actually hit a red coat.

[00:09:23.6] Rick Atkinson: Muskets were notoriously inaccurate, but when you have 75,000 rounds being fired, you're going to hit eventually. About 259 British soldiers are wounded, 279 and 79 of them are killed, but the shot heard around the world probably missed. Second, the British quickly discerned that the Americans were shooting, specifically aiming at the officers. And it's true that the Americans eventually made it a practice of aiming at the reddest of the Red Coats, those that were almost vermilion in hue because they were usually worn by officers who could afford them more expensive dyes that made those coats pop. And the belief was that if you kill or incapacitate the officers, discipline falls apart and you've got a leg up. And this begins, really, on April 19th, 1775. I'll stop there. We'll pick up the rest of the battle later.

[00:10:26.0] Jeffrey Rosen: Bravo. We're all just at the edge of our seats. What a superb narrative of the battle. We all now will know that we have to declare the Regulars are coming out rather than the British are coming when we reenact this battle. And thank you so much for the incredible details which bring it to life. Mary Beth Norton, in your important book, "1774," you describe that you chose to write about that year because you wanted to understand the battle between Loyalists and Patriots, which was far more intense and prolonged than the standard histories gave credit for, and also explore some of the clashes before Lexington and Concord that gave rise to the Revolution, including the Powder Alarm clash, which was seen as a dress

rehearsal for what happened in April 1775. Tell us about, "1774," and why you chose to write about it and what we can learn from it?

[00:11:28.3] Mary Beth Norton: Thanks, Jeff. I'm happy to talk about it. So, "1774," I decided, was really the crucial year, and I decided that long ago because of my work on the Loyalists in my dissertation, because that was, it seemed to me, when Loyalists and disloyal people separated over the course of the year. The Powder Alarm is a fascinating dress rehearsal for Lexington and Concord. It occurred in September of 1774. So, very early, a rumor spreads through the countryside. I won't go into the origins of it, but a rumor spreads through the countryside that the British are bombarding Boston. And so, thousands of militiamen, in fact, move in from the countryside, and they join up with others on Cambridge Common, where they're prepared to attack whatever is happening in Boston. There really is, it's very disorganized at that point. And the Boston committee figures, finds out what's going on, and they send people out and they say, "No, no, it's a false rumor. Nothing's happening. Go home." So people do, in fact, go home. They yell and scream and force a couple of people to resign from their positions and so forth, but they leave. But it shows that when the news went out to the countryside, just as it did, as Rick was talking about people gathered.

[00:12:56.8] Mary Beth Norton: The militiamen were ready. They may not have had full sets of ammunition, but they would muster. And so, the Power Alarm was actually a very important dress rehearsal. But what I regard as the beginning of the end happens because of the news that arrived from England in early December of 1774. And that's the news of the king's order in council that he issued in October of 1774. So remember, we're talking here about delays because of the transatlantic passage. And Rick already talked about that with respect to the orders from Dartmouth to Gage about taking some action in the Boston area. So basically, what was the king's order in the Council of October 1774? It said that, "No arms and ammunition could be exported to the colonies, period, from Britain for the next six months." This set off a tremendous alarm in New England communities in particular. And it led to, because the arrival in early December of 1774 led to attacks on three forts in New England. In Newport, Rhode island, and in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. In all three towns, groups of locals attacked the forts to gather and take away their arms and ammunition and cannon muskets, everything, you name it.

[00:14:39.8] Mary Beth Norton: Because they assumed that the British would come and confiscate them, because that would be a part of the action that the king had ordered. It wasn't really the king. The king's order said nothing about arms that were already in America, but it did try to prevent other arms from arriving. So, the Americans said, if we're going to have any arms in the future, we have to make sure we've got the ones we have physically. And so in all three towns, groups of men attacked the forts and moved the arms that they confiscated out into the countryside and hid them. Now, the British, or rather the local authorities, were terrified by this. And in fact, about this time in December and January, December of '74 and January of 1775, I

started reading these letters from the leaders of the colonies, that is, the governors and the other appointed officials from Britain. And they all said, "These people are absolutely ungovernable. Everything is falling apart here." Several governors said, "If I tried to enforce any rules, and this is certainly true of the governor of New Hampshire dealing with the people who attacked the fort there in Portsmouth, if I try to do anything, it will just show the impotence of British authority."

[00:16:06.9] Mary Beth Norton: And literally everything is falling apart. So, what I found very interesting was this idea in December of '74, January of '75, that everything is falling apart from the standpoint of the guys who are trying to enforce what's going on at the time. And indeed, I found that it wasn't just the revolutionaries, it wasn't just the governors and so forth. There were a lot of regular Americans writing to France and England saying, "Everybody is in favor of the Continental Congress, everybody is obeying the Continental Congress, nobody's obeying the King, nobody is obeying the Parliament, and in fact, we expect war in the spring." So, this is a standard line that I saw even among people who were later Loyalists and who believed in upholding the King's authority. They basically said, "Everything is falling apart." So then the next phase happened when the news of the King's speech to Parliament, now a new Parliament, was elected in England in the summer and fall of 1774. It was opened formally by the King with a formal address on the 30th of November of 1774. And when he delivered this speech, he basically gave a hard line. He basically talked about cracking down on all this upset and all this dissent that he's seeing in North America.

[00:17:47.8] Mary Beth Norton: That news arrived in late January, and a lot of people, including, for example, Abigail Adams, said, "The die is cast. This is the end. We're going to have war for sure." The die is cast, I discovered, is a quote that's used by a whole bunch of people in the immediate aftermath of learning about the King's speech. And again, they learn about it in January, in late January, but it's delivered in late November. And then the final straw of these events before the battles comes in with the bombshell of early April, when the news arrives that Parliament in mid February had declared the colonies to be in rebellion. And that's the final, final straw. And so, I have to say that when the regulars marched out of Boston on April 19, it wasn't a surprise to anybody because they had all expected this for months. So I'll stop there.

[00:19:01.0] Jeffrey Rosen: So interesting. Thank you so much for signaling these transformative events, in particular the King's speech in November and Parliament's declaration that the colonies are in rebellion in April, that transformed public opinion and used so interestingly remind us of the effects of slow communication technology, the fact that people expected different news, and the fact that the debate was completely transformed when these news arrived. Rosemarie Zagarri, I'm so excited that you are contributing an essay for the National Constitution Center's Civic Toolkit about Jefferson's list of grievances in the Declaration of Independence and tracing them back to clashes between the colonies And Britain

that occurred as early as the 1760s. I think that's going to be an invaluable civic education service. Give us a sense of what some of those grievances were and the broader political and economic context that led up to the Battle of Lexington and Concord.

[00:20:06.6] Rosemarie Zagarri: Okay, thank you, Jeff, and thanks for having me. Well, I think one of the big questions here is how did Massachusetts become the center of the nascent rebellion against Great Britain? And Massachusetts was from a very early date, a very active participant in civic government and self government. Their whole tradition of town meetings is a very robust assembly. But they were loyal subjects of the crown and like most other colonists at the end of the French and Indian War, didn't anticipate separating from Great Britain. But as Rick mentioned, circumstances changed and Parliament for the first time started taxing the colonists directly. And that changed the game. And Massachusetts, the people of Massachusetts, the political leaders of Massachusetts, very quickly took the lead in resisting what they saw as parliamentary infringements on their right to self government. And so, you see some of the most violent and some of the most robust actions against the Stamp Act of 1765 in Boston and in Massachusetts. In fact, a rioting mob in Massachusetts in The summer of 1765 attacked Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson's house and actually dismantled the house, hacked it apart, stole his valuables and his family barely made it away with their lives.

[00:21:51.2] Rosemarie Zagarri: So, Massachusetts was gaining a reputation for radicalism. After the repeal of the Stamp Act. I think some people hoped that things would go back to normal. They did, very, very briefly. But American colonists were on the alert. And in 1767, Parliament passed the Townshend Acts, which the colonists once again saw as an infringement on their own right to tax themselves. And so, there was once again a revival of protest. And it's at this point in 1768 that the British decided to send in two regiments of troops to Boston. And they entered on October 1st, 1768. And on that date a woman named Mercy Otis Warren, whose family was at the center of the revolution in Boston, wrote these words in a book she published, "The History of the American Revolution." The American war may be dated from the hostile parade of this day, a day which marks with infamy the councils of Great Britain. So, in her mind, and in the minds of many other colonists, the use of a standing army against what they regarded as peaceful civilians was really a major turning point. And the relationship between Bostonians and Massachusetts deteriorated further from there.

[00:23:17.6] Rosemarie Zagarri: That led to, of course, the so-called Boston Massacre in March of 1770. Situation continued to be tense after that. Bostonians commemorated the Boston Massacre every year on March 5th by having their speakers dress up in togas and talk about how great the colonists were for standing up to British tyranny. And so, I just want to emphasize how tense things were in Massachusetts. And then that led to, after the passage in 1773 by Parliament of the Tea act, which was actually not designed to tax the colonists, but to help the British East India Company. It would have resulted, the colonists feared, in them inadvertently paying the tax

on tea. And so to preempt that, the Bostonian leaders organized this group event that led to the dumping of the tea in Boston harbor in December of 1773, which in turn led Parliament to pass these very, very harsh acts we call the Intolerable Acts, or they call the Intolerable Acts, which were meant to make Boston pay for the tea, which curbed the right to self government among Bostonians and in Massachusetts more generally, which was an attempt to isolate Boston from the rest of the colonies, to isolate Massachusetts.

[00:24:51.6] Rosemarie Zagarri: But it closed the port of Boston, and the other colonists knew that Boston could not survive without their port open. And so, the colonies actually rallied to the support of Massachusetts in response to these coercive acts. So, this was meant by Britain to stop the contagion of resistance or the contagion of rebellion from spreading, but it actually activated that spirit more than ever. And so again, things were very, very tense in Massachusetts at the end of 1773, the beginning of 1774, and then into 1775. Before 1775, in that fall, the colonists had actually joined together—

[00:25:46.9] Jeffrey Rosen: Sorry, I think you may have frozen, which is we're all riveted. And I'll just jump in to say thank you so much for calling out the great Mercy Otis Warren, your definitive biography of Mercy Otis Warren, A Woman's Dilemma. Mercy Otis Warren and the American Revolution brings her to life. You remind us that John Adams commissioned for Mercy a poem about the Boston Tea Party which talks about how the intruders poured a profusion of delicious teas which, wafted by a soft Favonian breeze, supplied the watery deities in spite of all the rage of jealous Amphitrite. Love it.

[00:26:28.3] Jeffrey Rosen: And you really show us how those events dating back to the early 1770s, helped turn public opinion. And the fact that it was commemorated every year, contributed to the oration by Joseph Warren that Rick begins with. Rick, back to you. You are, you know, taking us both back to before the battle. Tell us about Joseph Warren and the political context that Mary Beth and Rosemarie have helped us understand then, details of the battle that you want to highlight that you weren't able to talk about on your first round. And then take us to the incredible story of how news of the battle was communicated to Britain, how there was a fight over how to spin it, which had to do with communication technology and how both sides attempted to win the propaganda wars.

[00:27:21.3] Rick Atkinson: Yeah, thanks, jeff. Well, where Rosemarie left off, the annual commemoration of the Boston massacre, as we call it, the British did not call it that. Took place in 1775. And Dr. Joseph Warren, who was a young physician and a patriot leader, he was a widower. He gave the oration that year, in the spring of 1775. British officers were invited to come and listen, and they did. There were several dozen of them that filled the pews in the church where the oration took place. At one point, Warren said something that the officers disliked, and someone yelled, "Fi, fi." Meaning, you know, damnation basically, this was heard

by the thousands of people in the church as fire. And then there was sort of a comic opera scene in which people thundered out of the church and into the streets and out the windows and into the streets, trying to get away because they thought the place was on fire or that the British were ordering troops to fire. None of that happened. It was quite peaceable, if slightly ridiculous, and the town went about its business until April 18th and 19th. Well, we left the British marching out of Lexington, having killed eight Americans on Lexington Green, and wounded 10 others.

[00:28:54.0] Rick Atkinson: Eight hundred of them are marching toward Concord, only six miles away. As this is happening, the alarm is spreading through the countryside with warning shots and bells clanging and couriers hurrying to and fro, some on foot, some on horseback. The men came down as if from the clouds, as one of the witnesses reported, rallying to confront the British in Concord. Colonel Smith arrives in town, finds that the town is mostly empty. People have fled. The militiamen have gone west of town across the Concord river. He sends 200 men because he can find very little war material in Concord. He sends 200 men to go look for more material on the farm of James Barrett, who is the militia commander in Concord, and his farm and mill are two miles away. 100 men continue on to Barrett's farm. They find very little. They cannot find the stuff because it's hidden in furrows in his fields and so on. 100 remains a Concord bridge. And as they look up on the hill on the other side, they see about 450 armed rebels ready to confront them. And that number is growing on Punkatasset Hill by the minute. The rebels see smoke rising from Concord just to the east, and they think the British are burning the town.

[00:30:31.2] Rick Atkinson: In fact, they've started a bonfire with some of the war material that they found. It spreads briefly to the town hall. British soldiers helped put the fire out. They're not trying to burn the town, but they don't know this. On Punkatasset Hill, the rebels begin moving down toward Concord Bridge. There's a direct confrontation. The British retreat back across the bridge. These hundred men who are left there to guard the bridge. Shots again are fired. We know this time the British fire first. And there is a brief exchange of fire. Two Americans are killed, several are wounded. Two British soldiers were killed. Four lieutenants are wounded badly, one of them mortally. The British realize that they are in danger of being massacred at the bridge. They retreat back into Concord. The Americans give pursuit, but not very far. There's an atrocity, it's the first atrocity of what will be many during the course of the war, a wounded British soldier is on the bridge, he's trying to get up, he's badly wounded. An American soldier, an American militiaman, comes along with a hatchet and knocks his brains out. It's basically killing prisoners. The British at this point know they've got problems.

[00:31:52.3] Rick Atkinson: The hundred men have gone to Colonel Barrett's farm, come back into Concord. Colonel Smith knows he's got to get 18 miles back to London, back to Boston. Knowing that the rebels are inflamed. He organizes his troops, and about noon, they head back down what is today known as Battle Road, the road to Boston. The first mile, it's pretty easy

because it's a wide road. It's a four rod road, meaning its rod is five and a half meters, so it's 66ft wide. The British can march eight abreast. But when they get farther away from conquer, the road narrows. There are bridges in which the column is canalized. And then the skirmishing begins in earnest. And the hundreds and then thousands of armed, angry militiamen who are going to line the road, basically, particularly at points of ambush on the way back to first Lexington and then conquered, are beginning to take a serious toll on the British. The British army will later do tests proving that soldiers wearing conspicuous red uniforms are more than twice as likely to be shot in combat as those wearing muted blues and grays. All we can say in retrospect is, duh, these are big targets, even with inaccurate muskets.

[00:33:26.3] Rick Atkinson: And so, there are British soldiers, British officers, who are being Wounded, in some cases killed, heading back to Lexington. It looks as if this 800 man column could be annihilated. It's that harrowing for them. And as they reached Lexington, they looked ahead and lo and behold, there's salvation because a thousand reinforcements have come out of Boston. It's taken them a while. They've been disorganized, there have been orders lost and so on. But these thousand men come out of Boston. They're led by a very capable Brigadier General. The 800 men now, minus about more than 100, have already been wounded or killed and in some cases abandoned to the rebels, are brought into the safety of these thousand men. And so, then the entire British contingent, now 1800, is trying to retreat to Boston. Some of the most intense fighting is yet to happen yet, particularly through Monotony, now known as Arlington. There are more than 50 British and American troops killed in Monotony. There are lots of atrocities again, wounded men bayoneted to death on both sides. The British are doing a lot of looting in Monotony and elsewhere. The column gets back to Cambridge, and the British make what is the best tactical decision of the day.

[00:35:09.6] Rick Atkinson: Instead of veering to the right around over a long bridge going back into Boston the long way, the decision is made. We're going to go back through Charlestown, Charlestown peninsula, and we're going to be rowed across the Charles river because the opportunities for American ambushes are fewer that way. And that turns out to be the correct tactical decision to make. We get to the end of the day, night falls, they're shooting, you know, until it's completely dark. There are some civilians who are shot dead, sometimes in the crossfire, sometimes it appears by execution. The British get back to Charlestown, the Royal Navy is there ready to row them across the Charles river into Boston proper. And the battle ends. And the battle ends with 15% of the total British force. These 1800 that have been there altogether killed, wounded, captured or missing. It's 273 Brits, 73 of them are dead. American casualties are about 95, of whom 49 are killed in action. So, it has been a bad, bloody day for both sides, but particularly for the British. When word is going to spread like the proverbial wildfire, in part because the American propaganda uses of this awful day, April 19, 1775, the American capacities for propaganda are brilliant.

[00:36:54.2] Rick Atkinson: And so, immediately the American fathers, like Joseph Warren, Dr. Warren and others, begin gathering affidavits, depositions from witnesses, including British troops who've been captured. They provide Newspaper copy. The first newspaper account of the battle is April 20th. The next day, the word is spread throughout the colonies very quickly, there are couriers sent out, including the guy we've already heard about, Paul Revere, who has become known for his ability to ride long and hard, carrying news hither. And so, within three weeks, the accounts of the battle, the rebel accounts of the battle, which are skewed as you might expect to embrace a narrative of violated innocence, British aggression, atrocities against innocent American rebels, they shot first, and all of these accounts reach Savannah and Charleston within three weeks. At the same time, the Americans charter a fast vessel called the Quiero, and copies of these depositions, copies of these newspapers, copies of the rebel narrative are put on the Quiero, and the Quero crosses the Atlantic in almost record time. It's 29 days.

[00:38:47.0] Rick Atkinson: It arrives in Britain in late May. These accounts are taken to sympathetic printers in London and elsewhere, and the American account is promulgated through Britain. Again, the narrative is innocence violated, the British fired first, atrocities committed by the British. It's going to take General Gage two extra weeks to get his account together. It's very bare bones. It's basically four paragraphs telling his side of the story for that account to reach Britain. So by this time, the Americans really have a leg up when it comes to controlling the narrative and influencing British public opinion, and more importantly, arousing the 12 other colonies to recognize, A, we're at war. There's no way around it. We're at war. B, the British are at fault, and C, we need help. And so, you're going to see very quickly, with the assistance and encouragement of Congress, American militiamen, and the creation of the Continental army heading toward Boston in the aftermath of April 19th.

[00:40:01.8] Jeffrey Rosen: Absolutely fascinating. We're at war. The British are at fault, and we need help is the message. It's transported using this communication technology, and it just transforms the politics of the war. Mary Beth Norton, tell us about the effects of the war on public opinion. You have written definitively about the Loyalists. How did the balance between Loyalists and Patriots shift after the war? And I do want to quote from the Joseph Warren oration that several of you have noted. This is 1775, right before he's killed at the Battle of Bunker Hill. Warren says, "It was the noble attachment to a free constitution which raised ancient Rome from the smallest beginnings to that bright summit of happiness and glory. When this decayed her magistrates lost their reverence for justice and the laws and degenerated it to tyrants and oppressors." It's really a Jeremiah where he's warning Americans to avoid the fate of Roman citizens who allowed Danforth to consolidate power in his own hands. What effect did the battle have in persuading Loyalists to. To embrace this narrative and take us up in the years after the Battle of Lexington and Congress?

[00:41:13.4] Mary Beth Norton: Well, if it's okay, Jeff, I'm going to start a little bit before the battle. There were, Rosemarie mentioned earlier, the coercive acts and the opposition that was developed to them. But I have to say that as I read what happened in 1774, there were people who defended, these are mostly future Loyalists who defended the Coercive Acts. There were people who said, "Yeah, Boston should have paid, should pay for the tea, so they deserve what they're getting." There were people who said, "You know, the changes in the Massachusetts government just made it like the rest of the colonies, so there's not a problem." But the one coercive act that everybody hated, including future Loyalists, was what they called the Murder Act. And this was the act that was officially known as the Administration of Justice Act. And basically, had it ever really been implemented, just the easiest way to think about it is that it would have moved the Boston Massacre trial to England. And it basically gave people who were trying to support British authority, either troops or civilians, the ability to kill colonists in the eyes of the colonists. And that's why they called it the Murder Act.

[00:42:34.3] Mary Beth Norton: And everybody hated it. Everybody hated it. And so, I found nobody in 1774 who defended the Murder Act. Zero. And. But once the war started, there were debates. Obviously, the debates had continued over the later period of '74 and '75. And basically what happened was the war hardened what had been debates among a whole bunch of people and led to the people who defined themselves as Loyalists very much becoming ostracized, on the outs with the rebel community, with the committees that were in the Congresses that were now controlling the government. And they were isolated, very deliberately prevented, for the most part, from organizing themselves, and they began to flee to England, where they thought they would wait for a couple of years, or not even a couple years, a few months, and then they'd be able to come back because they were sure that the British were going to win. I mean, I think the best estimate of the eventual divisions of the American colonists was made by Paul Smith, a researcher at the Library of Congress. And he made this estimate a few years ago. We're all familiar, I think, with John Adams saying one third, one third, one third, but that's really not Right.

[00:44:11.5] Mary Beth Norton: Basically, Paul Smith shows, I think, very clearly that the populace eventually divided about 2/5 in favor of the Revolution, about one fifth opposing the revolution, and about 2/5 in the middle, who sort of went back and forth and it kind of depended. And this is especially true in the south, of which armies were in control of the area at the time, as people changed their allegiances, which, by the way, got people who ended up on the Loyalist side into trouble when they were in England asking for compensation as Loyalists. And if they had actually at some point supported the Americans, which many people in the south had done, when the Americans were in control of areas, it got them into trouble, and the British didn't want to give them the compensation that they claimed for the loss of their property.

[00:45:06.2] Jeffrey Rosen: Wow. So, interesting. And that statistic is so interesting, too. Two fifths, one fifth and two thirds.

[00:45:12.8] Mary Beth Norton: Yeah, I think it's right. I mean, when Paul published an article. Oh, my gosh, I can't remember now how long ago, but I remember he used Loyalist data to do it. And I thought, well, I have data on Loyalists that he didn't have. So, let me see if his ratios work for the ratios of the Loyalists that I had. And they absolutely worked. And so, that's why I'm convinced that he's right and that John Adams was wrong to say, 1/3, 1/3, 1/3, it's 2/5, 1/5 and 2/5 sort of going back and forth.

[00:45:46.2] Jeffrey Rosen: Thank you so much for that, Rosemarie. So, glad you're back. When we lost you, I was quoting from your amazing biography of Mercy Otis Warren, which is just, I'm recommending to all of our listeners. And take us back to where you left off. You were really bringing us right to the verge of the battle and the principles, the revolution. And then take us afterward. What were the effects of the battle and how did it define and shape the subsequent political debate over the principles of the American idea?

[00:46:17.5] Rosemarie Zagarri: Events are unfolding at a very rapid pace at this point, and I think Mary Beth's book, "1774," is just spot on. And seeing, "1774," so pivotal. As I was saying before, the First Continental Congress ended in October of 1774, calling for a re-gathering, a reconvening in May of 1775, but without understanding what would transpire in the intervening months. Of course, as we know, the king declared, the Parliament, declared the colonies in rebellion. And we had the Battle of Lexington and Concord. But again, as Mary Beth said, things were unraveling. But some People were still blaming Massachusetts for the problem. But on the other hand, it also rallied some people to the cause of Massachusetts and helped them see that the cause of Massachusetts was the cause of all the colonies. And if Parliament could deprive Massachusetts of their right to self government, they could also do so to the other colonies. And they thought that it was wrong for Parliament to try and starve the Bostonians out. And so, other colonies sent food and supplies so that the Bostonians wouldn't starve. So, there was a massive kind of recalibration of the sentiment surrounding what was happening with Great Britain.

[00:47:54.5] Rosemarie Zagarri: And then In May of 1775, 12 of the 13 colonies elected representatives and sent them to Philadelphia for this, what they called the Second Continental Congress. Now remember, this has no official legal standing. This is a gathering of the colonists that is outside the bounds of the royal system. It had only the authority that the people in the colonies granted it. But by this time, there was wider support, at least for resistance, though not yet war. Still, these intervening events had made the political leaders of the colonies realize that they had to put themselves on a war footing. And so, in June of 1775, in the wake of Lexington and Concord, the Continental Congress organized a continental army and appointed George Washington at its head. Now, at the same time they're doing this in Massachusetts, they're in

Philadelphia. In Massachusetts, you have thousands of numbers of militiamen swarming Boston, and you have that culminating in the so-called Battle of Bunker Hill. And that too is a pivotal event. But I want to emphasize that we're In June of 1775, there is war, but there is not yet a Declaration of Independence. The Declaration of Independence would not come yet for more than a year.

[00:49:29.5] Rosemarie Zagarri: Why was that? Well, it took over a year for the leaders of the colonies to believe that they had a majority of the people or enough of the people on their side to be able to mount some sort of effective resistance against Great Britain. And so, you have the Continental Congress in 1775 issue a declaration of the causes and necessities for taking up arms. But it's still another year before there is an official Declaration of Independence, but you have actual warfare going on in Massachusetts. And then after the Continental army is formed, then you have the incursion into Canada, the Battle of Quebec. And so, I think it's important that people understand that the war started in the wake of Lexington and Concord, but a year before independence was declared.

[00:50:30.6] Jeffrey Rosen: Absolutely fascinating. What an important observation that it took over a year for leaders to be convinced they had a majority of people on their side and that was necessary for the Declaration to be issued. Well, we just have time for a few moments of closing thoughts from each of you in the five minutes that we have left. And Rick, as you, your book, of course, takes the story up further and your trilogy on the American Revolution will tell the whole story. But why don't you tell our audience the effects of the Battle of Lexington and Concord and how it made possible the issuance of the Declaration of Independence a year later?

[00:51:18.3] Rick Atkinson: There's great consternation, as you can imagine, because a lot of blood has been shed and there's going to be a lot more shed at Bunker Hill on June 17, 226 dead British soldiers at Bunker Hill. 1,000 casualties altogether. British casualties. You know, what we're going to see is the Americans deciding, as Rosemarie said, that we need an army. We can't just rely on militia forces. Washington shows up in Cambridge to command the brand new Continental Army. As a Virginian in charge of a largely New England army, he showed up on July 2, 1775. The Siege of Boston. It's not really a siege because the British control the seaways to, to and from Boston and they have access to the Atlantic. But nevertheless, they're in dire straits in Boston because they are fundamentally surrounded by still angry rebels. This is gonna last until March when Washington sends a 25 year old, overweight Boston bookseller named Henry Knox, who has a knack for gunnery, to Fort Ticonderoga to bring back 50 cannons. And those cannons are emplaced on high ground to the surprise of the British when they wake up in the morning and find that they are under the gun, literally.

[00:52:47.0] Rick Atkinson: And so, they evacuate Boston very quickly. And the war is going to move on eventually to New York, where things go better for the British. It's the beginning of

an eight year civil war. And it's a civil war on several levels, including obviously between British citizens in America and British citizens in Britain. It's a civil war between Indian tribes. Six nations of the Iroquois have gotten along quite well for a century. And now they're going to have to choose sides. And four of them are going to back the British, two of them are going to back the Americans, and then within America, it is really our first civil war. Mary Beth quoted the statistics. You can see that there are at least as many people just trying to stay out of the way as firmly committed to one side or the other. So, it all starts on April 19, and when the bullets start flying and men start dying it's time for people who have been arguing over principles and self rule and taxation to decide whether they want to take this into a full fledged war, which of course, is what's going to happen.

[00:54:00.6] Jeffrey Rosen: So powerful, the civil war between Brits and patriots among Indian tribes and within America. And you tell that story so powerfully in your books and also in the new Ken Burns documentary on the American Revolution in which you're a central voice explaining how the war unfolded over the next few years. Mary Beth Norton, your final thoughts about the effects of the Battle of Lexington and Concord and how it brought us up to the Declaration of Independence and beyond?

[00:54:33.7] Mary Beth Norton: Well, I would agree with Rick that it really causes people to have to choose a side. Before that, people waffled back and forth. And there were, as I show in my book, many people who say, "I'm in favor of American resistance, but I still want reconciliation with Britain and so forth." But basically once the shooting starts, the decisions have to be made. And then once the decisions are made, it inevitably leads inevitably to independence because as I show in the book, Americans are tending towards independence already. They're voting with their feet. They're not obeying the British authorities in their colonies. And it doesn't take that much to lead them. And this is true not just in Massachusetts, but in many other colonies as well, except for Georgia. Georgia is the big exception. Lead them to support the Declaration.

[00:55:33.1] Jeffrey Rosen: Thank you so much. And Rosemarie, the last word in the superb discussion to you. The legacy of the Battle of Lexington and Concord and how it took us to 1776 and beyond?

[00:55:43.2] Rosemarie Zagarri: Yeah. And just in the wake of that, in the wake of the outrages of Lexington and Concord, there was war fever spreading throughout the colonies. But it took more than just that eruption of sentiment. And I just want to emphasize how much organization it took for Washington to pull that Continental army together, how much persistence on the part of the Continental Congress, how the help of France with the navy and the money and troops and how loans from Dutch bankers, how all of that had to come together to persist throughout these long eight years. And so, Lexington and Concord kind of provided the

immediate emotional stimulus, but that it was organization and leadership that led us through the war and independence.

[00:56:34.3] Jeffrey Rosen: Thank you so much, Rick Atkinson, Mary Beth Norton and Rosemarie Zagarri for this deep, exciting and inspiring discussion of, "The legacy of the Battle of Lexington and Concord." I am so looking forward to learning with you about the principles of the American Revolution leading up to the 250th anniversary next July. And you have started us off in this year of learning in the most inspiring way possible. Thank you all so much and thanks to all of you for joining.

[00:57:00.7] Tanaya Tauber: This episode was produced by Lana Ulrich, Bill Pollock and me, Tanaya Tauber. It was engineered by Dave Stotz and Bill Pollock. Research was provided by Yara Daraiseh, Samson Mostashari, Gyuha Lee, and Cooper Smith. Check out here the full lineup of exciting programs and register to join us virtually at constitutioncenter.org. As always, we'll publish those programs on the podcast, so stay tuned here as well. Or watch the videos, they're available in our media library at constitutioncenter.org/medialibrary. Follow Live at the National Constitution Center on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or your favorite podcasts app. On behalf of the National Constitution Center, I'm Tanaya Tauber.