

Final paper

Designing a history course is complicated work. When I designed ours for the first time, I combined things I'd learned from hundreds of books and articles to create lessons and choose primary sources. I revise the lessons every summer based on new things I've read, and frequently change the primary sources we read. But I still have to make choices about what to include and exclude, based on the overarching argument I want to make in the course, the limits I place on what I can ask you to learn, and the amount of new scholarship I can read.

There's always more that we could learn about, and this assignment allows you to learn more about something *you* are interested in. To do so, you're each going to choose one episode of Liz Covart's podcast *Ben Franklin's World*. After listening to and thinking about the episode, you'll write about what you learned, how it contributes to or challenges what we've learned this semester, and how you'd integrate this new knowledge into the class.

Due in class on **Monday, December 11th**, your paper will be **1250-1750 words** (approx. 5-7 double spaced pages). It will be in two parts, and should address all of the questions below as expansively as possible.

The first part:

- In each episode, Liz interviews a historian (sometimes more than one) about a new book or other project. What questions is the historian in your episode trying to answer with their new project? Why? What were the problems with older interpretations? Was the historian trying to correct a view they thought was wrong? Or fill in a gap in our knowledge about the past?
- How did they go about answering their questions? For example, did they use new or unexamined evidence? Use new methods to examine old evidence? Consider new perspectives? Use a different geographical or chronological framing?
- What conclusions did they come to? Did they find those conclusions surprising? Why do they think their project changes our understanding of the past in important ways?

The second part:

- How does this historian's work add to or change what we've learned this semester? Does it challenge or refute arguments I've made in the lessons? Does it make some of them more complicated? *Be specific.*
- Make an argument for why this historian's work should be included in our lessons. What specific lesson should it be a part of? What could you *remove* from that lesson to make room for it? Would including it change how you read that week's think-aloud document? Would including it change how you thought about specific things that we learn about *after* the point in the syllabus where you think it should be inserted?
- In general, why would the course be *better* with this historian's work woven in? Would it be worth sacrificing something else in the course to include it?