

Virginia 250: Semiquincentennial KEY THEMES

Virginia’s history is America’s story: complex, diverse, and promising, a multicultural story that in the Revolutionary era was Native American, European, African and American, and is now so much richer for its diversity. Focusing on Revolutionary events in 1775 and 1776, the Virginia Semiquincentennial will embrace the inclusive history and narrative breadth of the era, and mark the origins of a revolutionary new nation.

- I. Virginia is a powerfully historical place, home to sites and stories essential to our American story.**
 - Virginia’s historic places include the stories of both prominent and ordinary people.
 - Virginia’s native peoples were first to shape the place that is the Commonwealth, and continue to shape Virginia and the nation.
 - Virginia’s honest reckoning with the paradox of our origins in both freedom and slavery aims to be a national model.
 - Virginia’s sites and museums reveal chapters of our founding narrative: key ideas about American governance including the first representative assembly in British America, the Virginia Resolution for Independence, Virginia Declaration of Rights, Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and the Statute of Religious Freedom.
 - Much of American history is here in Virginia – native lands, a founding colonial settlement, the American Revolution, the Civil War, Civil Rights, and more.

- II. The Revolutionary challenge continues.**
 - The American experiment has resulted in the most robust and longest democracy in history.
 - The American Revolution was a time when passionate activists, summoning the courage to challenge centuries of an established world order, led a revolution that would change the world.
 - Many of those who fought for liberty -- including enslaved people —were young radicals, rule breakers, optimists, justice seekers, change agents.
 - American optimism and passion for change have been driving forces for progress, improvement and innovation.
 - The American founders could not have envisioned inclusion and diversity as we know it, but their work entitled Americans over more than two and a half centuries to fight for a more equal society.
 - The 250th anniversary of independence is a chance to assess our resolve to deliver on the American “promissory note” of freedom, equality, and “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

III. Here in Virginia, the American Revolution was a war, and more than a war.

- It was a war waged by Virginians, that divided some communities and families and brought others together.
- It was a revolution of ideas, with many sources of inspiration for ideas about freedom including from European enlightenment thinkers, and ancient Greek and Roman philosophy.
- It was a revolution for expressions of liberty, including from enslaved people seeking freedom and Native Americans asserting sovereignty.
- It was a struggle that produced a promise of equality in the Declaration of Independence, participation in government as delineated in the Constitution, and protections defined in the Bill of Rights.
- It was a struggle whose conclusion excluded most Virginians of the time, but which has inspired disenfranchised, subjugated, and disempowered groups to fight for their rights as Americans on the basis of our founding documents and the ideals they express.

IV. We can tell our history to reflect the fullest American story.

- Virginia's semiquincentennial of the American Revolution will serve as a continuum of recent Virginia commemorations —of 1607, and of 1619—that emphasized the challenges, diversity and dynamism of the Commonwealth.