

VA American Revolution 250 Commission (VA250) Strategic Plan

**Approved
July 6, 2022**

I. AUTHORITY

The American Revolution 250 Commission (VA250) was established by the General Assembly for the purpose of commemorating the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution, the Revolutionary War, and the independence of the United States.

The Commission has the following statutory powers and duties:

1. Formulate and implement a program for the inclusive observance of the 250th anniversary of the independence of the United States and the Revolutionary War in Virginia, including:
 - a. Civic, cultural, and historical education and scholarship concerning the ideals of the American Revolution and their contemporary relevance
 - b. Visitation of museums and historic sites, including battlefields
 - c. Creation and publication of historical documents and studies
 - d. Cooperation with agencies responsible for the preservation or restoration of historic sites, buildings, art, and artifacts
 - e. Establishment of exhibitions and interpretive and wayfinding signage
 - f. Arrangement of appropriate public ceremonies
 - g. Comprehensive marketing and tourism campaign encompassing CY 2025 through 2026
 - h. General dissemination of public information regarding Virginia's involvement in the American Revolution and its legacy today
2. Submit to the Governor and General Assembly an annual executive summary of the interim activity and work of the Commission no later than the first day of each regular session of the General Assembly.

II. KEY THEMES

A. VA250 Key Themes

The Declaration of Independence, adopted by the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776, announced to the world that 13 North American colonies had separated from Great Britain. In formalizing the separation, the colonial representatives articulated the causes of a revolution that had been underway for more than a year and would take many more years to consummate.

Were the Declaration of Independence merely a revolutionary document, it would be an essential part of our nation's history, applicable to one people at one time. Instead, as Lincoln observed, the document declared essential truths applicable to all people and at all times. Thus was the American experiment bound up from the start with universal principles: that all people are created equal and endowed by their Creator with the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that governments are created to protect these natural rights; and that governments ultimately are accountable to the people.

After the Declaration, it would take the American revolutionaries five long years to outlast the powerful British military and another six years to fashion an enduring Constitutional charter. Yet, out of the fraught events of our founding commenced our great, perpetual project: to form a more perfect union in which the Declaration's universal promise gains ever more universal acceptance and application.

"Never before in the history of the world has a sociopolitical document expressed in such profound, eloquent, and unequivocal language the dignity and the worth of human personality," Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. declared in an Independence Day address in 1965. And yet, as Dr. King candidly noted, too often have we failed to practice the democratic principles we so proudly proclaim.

No generation – not the revolutionary generation, and not any since – has fulfilled the Declaration's promise. Yet, for nearly 250 years, we have been ennobled by the pursuit, inspired by the progress, and strengthened by the struggle. Over time the United States has woven principles of equality and justice into our laws and become the greatest example of liberty and opportunity in human history. The philosophical and legal foundation laid in the Revolutionary Era is the sturdy structure on which we have built and are building still.

Virginia's history is America's story: promising yet complex, a multicultural story that in the Revolutionary era was Native American, European, African and American, Patriot and Loyalist, and is now so much richer for its diversity. The Virginia Semiquincentennial will embrace all facets of the history of the era, and celebrate the origins of a revolutionary new nation - now a beacon of hope and opportunity for the world.

I. Virginia's history is America's story. 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 so much 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.
- American optimism, passion for change, and desire for economic self-improvement 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, property rights and “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”
- The 250th anniversary of independence is an opportunity to honor those who fought for American independence, to commemorate battles and other important events of the American Revolution, and to celebrate the richness of Virginia’s stories.

III. In Virginia, the American Revolution was a war, and more than a war. It was a Revolution of Ideas.

- 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 revolution for property rights of American colonists, including the right to self-govern.
- It was a revolution for religious freedom, including the end of persecution of dissenting ministers, equal treatment for dissenters, and the end of a state-supported and mandated church.
- It was a struggle that produced a promise of equality in the Declaration of Independence, participation in government as promised in the Constitution, and protections defined in the Bill of Rights.
- It was a struggle that produced the confiscation or destruction of Loyalist property in Virginia, with minimal due process or compensation.
- It was a struggle that resulted in many Loyalist Virginians fleeing the state forever.
- It was a struggle whose conclusion excluded many Virginians of the time, but which has inspired disenfranchised 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 that examine all facets of our history while celebrating this milestone anniversary with and for all Virginians.
- The story of Virginia is the story of America: land of hope and opportunity: leading the journey toward a more perfect union.

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