

**Virginia American Revolution 250 (VA250) Commission
African American Advisory Council
January 5, 2024
Richmond, Virginia**

Members present:

Senator Mamie Locke, Chair
Delegate Delores McQuinn
Professor Ervin Jordan
Dr. Cassandra Newby-Alexander (virtual)
Dr. Edward L. Ayers
Reverend William Lee
Dr. Nathaniel L. (NL) Bishop
James Warren (virtual)
Connie Matthews Harshaw
Felix Sarfo-Kantanka, Jr.
Phyllis Terrell
Rohulamin Quander
Chief Justice Bernard Goodwyn (virtual)
Lt. Governor Winsome Earle-Sears (virtual)

Chair's Remarks and Charge to the Advisory Council

Senator Mamie Locke, Chair, convened the first meeting of the VA250 African American Advisory Council. After introductions, Chair Locke noted that the nation's 250th – its semiquincentennial – holds promise for all Americans, and all Virginians, to unite, engage, and inspire, and that she and Chair Austin are committed to ensuring that all stories are told and that all communities are engaged.

Chair Locke asked members to consider the questions below to guide initial discussions, and to help develop solutions to the many problems that we will identify. The Chair called on members to join in ensuring that every Virginian sees themselves in the commemoration and that it inspires hope in our collective march toward a more perfect Union.

Questions for Reflection:

What lessons can we learn from previous commemorations?
How do we make the semiquincentennial meaningful to all Virginians?
What programs should be planned?
What would you like to see occur during this commemoration to highlight African American history and culture? How do we get there?
What are the under-told and under-known stories that should be highlighted statewide?
What should be our next steps?

Points of Discussion

Discussion was robust, impassioned, and productive. Three main themes emerged: (i) the importance of including all stories; (ii) freedom and independence: the inextricable link between Juneteenth and July 4; (iii) raising awareness; and (iv) equipping educators:

I. Including all stories

The Commission must ensure that all Virginians understand the contributions of African Americans to American independence during this commemoration. Need to create the atmosphere and understanding of the full history of America and need to excavate those stories for our children.

Note the following important sites, events, entities and seek input from the African American Council for more:

- Hinton Rescue Squad – tell their story.
- The birthplace of Henrietta Lacks
- Battle of Yorktown – tell the whole story of black and white who fought, include James Armistead.

Fort Monroe African First Landing memorial at Old Point Comfort will be completed by 2026. The William Tucker family will be featured.

Note that Africans arrived on Virginia soil from Angola with a full complement of skills and knowledge. The full story begins here with the arrival of people from Africa and their contributions to Virginia.

It is critical that we focus on saying what we will do and doing what we say. How do we craft a narrative about who we are and where we are going? If done correctly it can be legacy building and life changing.

It is important to leverage the resources of organizations already doing this work: Colonial Williamsburg, JYF, Ft. Monroe...

Frederick Douglas, tell the bigger history.

II. Freedom and Independence: The inextricable link between Juneteenth and July 4

Why is the 250th commemoration is relevant to African Americans who gained no freedom on July 4th, 1776? The answer is that it was not a moment of celebration then, but it was a starting gun. The fight for freedom began the moment African Americans touched this soil in chains, and it continues to this day.

We must link Juneteenth with July 4 to make the point that African Americans were fighting for independence long before 1776 and continued long after

We must talk about slavery and talk about what the enslaved people did and said, not what others said about them.

Need to integrate the story of African Americans, not separate it, make it front and center. The story of the American Revolution is bigger than the easy story and needs to include:

- Why people were seeking freedom
- What they were fighting for and against
- Note that black and white loyalists were able to flee and resettle in places like Jamaica and Halifax, NS

III. Raising awareness

So many events and meetings are only attended by a small group. How will average people outside of Richmond and Williamsburg know about VA250?

Get stories to Dwayne Yancey (Cardinal News 250 series) and in the media, get in front of the appropriations committees for funding, and other communities who may not be aware of VA250.

IV. Education

Include educators and grassroots organizations from the ground up and get resources to them to help them prepare. The key people are Virginia school teachers. They need a voice at the table and a prepared curriculum. Stand with teachers and support them.

Use the arts and humanities to tell stories

Take the question to school-age students and ask them what they want to see in the 250th

Ideas for further exploration

- **Designate a "Commission Sunday" to create a time for discussion within the Black faith community. Include historians.*
- Establish pop-up museums – ex. The Liberation of Richmond in Shockoe Bottom
- Develop a teacher curriculum legacy project that will inform the way people learn for the next 20 years.
- Identify the important stories of Virginia's African American colonial population.
- Use the arts and humanities to tell stories.
- Involve genealogists.

Next steps for Advisory Council

- Schedule a meeting at Fort Monroe
- Plan for virtual meetings to encourage attendance.
- Get local committees engaged more fully by hosting meetings.
- Get churches more involved.