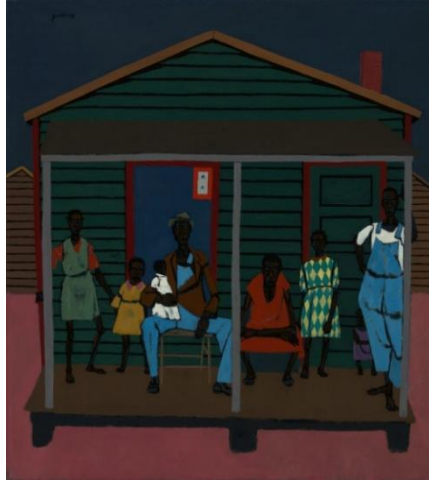


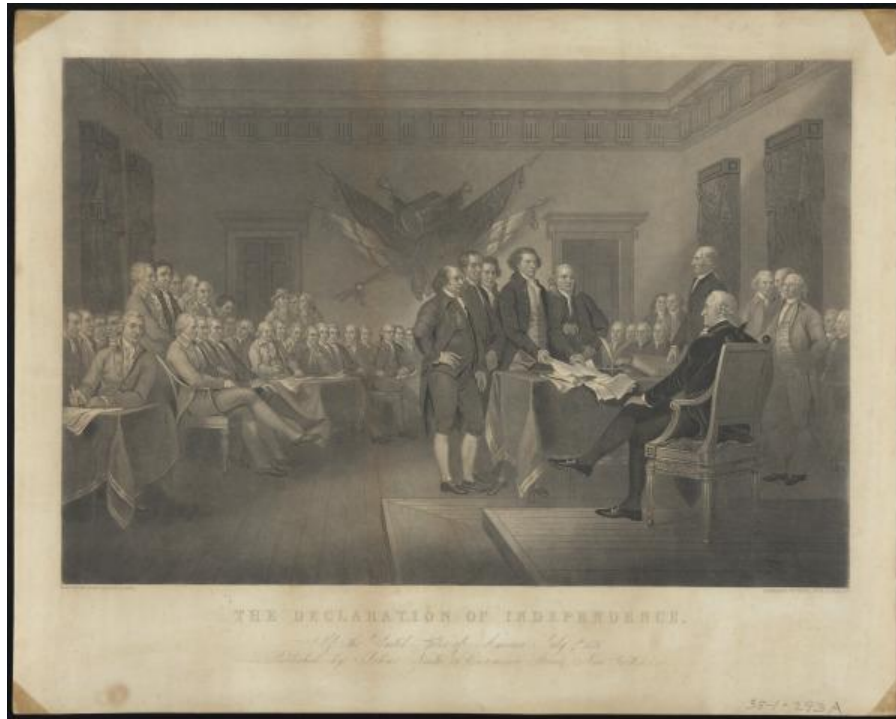


Virginia as America:

Navigating ‘Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness’

The spirit of rebellion that sparked the American Revolution and transformed the North American colonies into a United States was decades in the making, and the ideas that catalyzed it continue to shape American debate and dissent today... Two hundred and fifty years on, the principles that inspired the Revolution in 1776 continue to bond a diverse and discordant population towards the realizing of a “more perfect union.” The road to that achievement has been navigated by Virginians since the colony became a Commonwealth, its experience manifest in the material culture made by and for its people.

PART I: *LIFE* – The Birth of a New Republic



After John Trumbull (American 1756-1843)

Henry S. Sadd (English, 1811-1893), engraver

John Neale, Publisher

The Declaration of Independence, ca. 1840

Steel engraving on wove paper, mounted on board

Bequest of John Barton Payne, 35.1.293a

Henry Sadd's print, *The Declaration of Independence*, is an engraving after the painting by American artist, John Trumbull. A collaboration between Trumbull and Thomas Jefferson, who encouraged the artist to record the scene, the image captures the Declaration's five principal authors – Thomas Jefferson (Virginia), John Adams (Massachusetts), Benjamin Franklin (Pennsylvania), Roger Sherman (Connecticut), and Robert Livingston (New York) – presenting the document for approval to John Hancock, President of the Continental Congress...The Declaration established the founding principles and aspirational promises of American democracy: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.



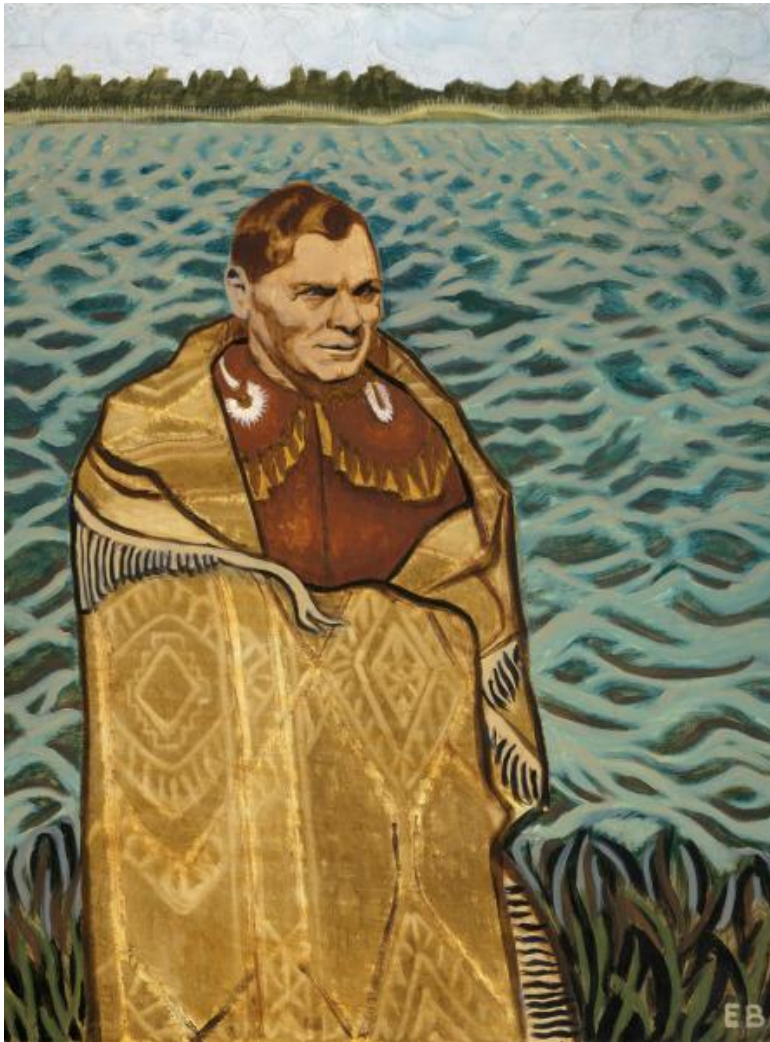
Edward L. Henry (American, 1841-1919)
The Meeting of George Washington and Rochambeau, 1873
Oil on board
Gift of Mrs. Preston Davie, 60.52.7

Edward Henry's painting *The Meeting of General Washington and Rochambeau* speaks to America's victorious struggle for independence and its indebtedness to an alliance with France. In its effort to undermine Britain's global influence, France officially recognized the United States in 1778 and provided critical financial and military support for the Revolution. The Comte de Rochambeau, depicted here, was a key figure in the successful battle at Yorktown that resulted in the surrender of Britain's General Charles Cornwallis.



After Gilbert Stuart (American, 1755-1828)
George Washington, 19th century
Oil on canvas
Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Collection, 49.18.3

The surrender of Britain's Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown in October 1781, and the independence formally established by the Treaty of Paris in 1783, catapulted George Washington into mythological fame, generating a "cult of Washington" that endures today. Like the ancient Roman hero, Washington became celebrated as the American "Cincinnatus" who demonstrated his civic virtue by refusing offers of public power, resigning his military commission, and returning to Mount Vernon as a citizen-farmer. Addressing a special session of Congress, Washington bid "an affectionate farewell to this August body under whose orders I have so long acted." The gesture prompted King George III to remark, "he will be the greatest man in the world."



Ethan Brown (American, b. 1988)

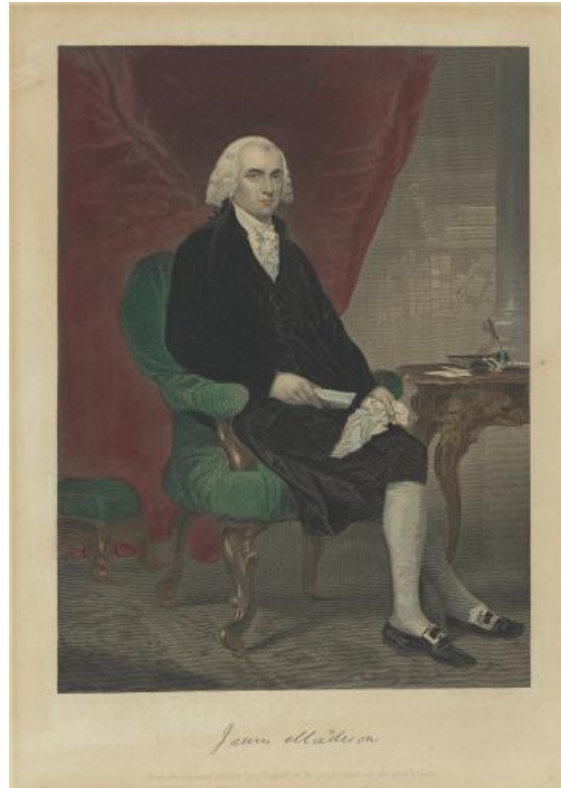
Walter Bradby, 2017

Oil on canvas

National Endowment for the Arts Fund for American Art, 2019.225

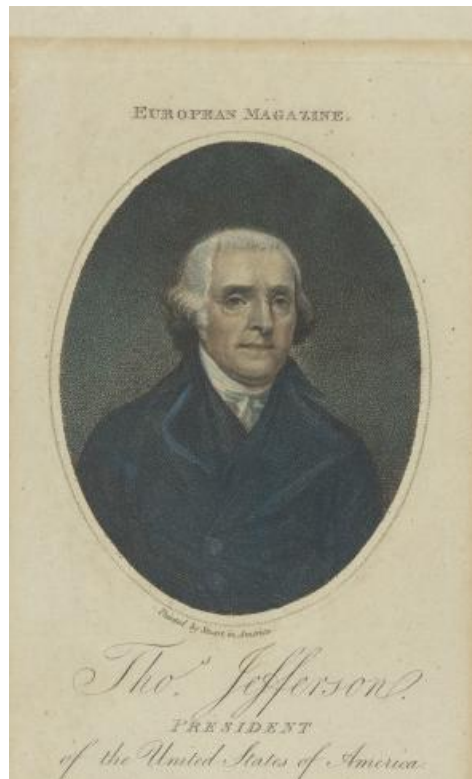
...Walter Bradby, chief of the Pamunkey in the late 1930s, stands before a site of critical importance to his people: the Pamunkey River, east of Richmond. Looming large, his figure appears absorbed by the river and its bank. That sense of oneness imparts the long-standing connection of Indigenous Americans to the land, a projection of belonging that quietly questions the claims and costs of the visually absent European settler.

PART II: *LIBERTY*– Individual Rights under the Law



After Alonzo Chappel (American, 1828-1887)
Johnson, Wilson & Co., New York, publisher
James Madison, 1874
Hand colored engraving on wove paper
Gift of A. J. Carstens, 71.29.14

In 1787, a Constitutional Convention was held to address the relationship between the thirteen former colonies and their central government. Among the fifty-five delegates to the Convention, James Madison of Virginia is singled out as the “Father of the Constitution.” Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay all urged the ratification of a constitution that formalized the three-part federal structure of executive, legislative, and judicial branches. But not everyone favored the strong central government that informed Madison’s “Federalist” stance. Virginians George Mason... and Thomas Jefferson... were among an “Anti-Federalist” opposition group, later known as Jeffersonian “Republicans,” who advocated for states’ rights and individual liberties at the expense of a central government.



After Gilbert Stuart (American, 1755-1828)

John Sewell, London, publisher

Thomas Jefferson, 1802

Hand colored engraving on wove paper

Gift of A. J. Carstens, 71.29.13

George Mason and Thomas Jefferson believed the central government should have limited powers, and each defended his Anti-Federalist position before the Virginia General Assembly: Mason in his Virginia Declaration of Rights (1776) and Jefferson in his Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom (1779). The disagreement between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists over the distribution of federal, state, and individual rights promptly fueled political debate, resulting in a series of letters between James Madison and Jefferson that led Madison to adjust his position. In 1791, 10 amendments, written by Madison, were appended to the Constitution as the Bill of Rights. The First Amendment, modeled on Jefferson's Statute for Religious Freedom, protected core freedoms, including the rights of citizens who practiced minority faiths.



Unidentified Maker

Presentation Box, ca. 1785

Gold

Inscribed: "Presented to Major Benjamin Wolfe by his brother officers, Richmond, Virginia, 1794"

James H. Wilcox, Jr., Endowment, 2023.781

Beginning in the colonial period, the promise of religious freedom encouraged Europeans of diverse religious beliefs to migrate to America and, by 1800, Richmond boasted the fourth largest Jewish population in the United States. Among its most prominent citizens was Major Benjamin Wolfe. A Jewish émigré from England, Wolfe settled in Richmond in 1774. He subsequently served in the Continental Army under George Washington and became a major in the War of 1812, a member of Richmond's town council, and a founder of its Hebrew Cemetery. In the wake of the Revolutionary War, he was presented with this gold box by his fellow officers in acknowledgement of his extraordinary service.



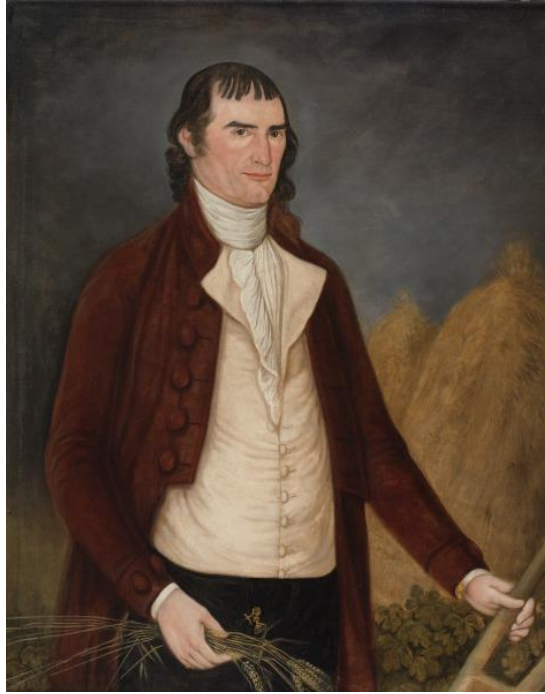
Henry Webber (English, 1754-1826), artist
William Hackwood (English, 1757-1839), modeler
Wedgwood Factory (est. 1759)
Anti-Slave Trade Medallion, modeled 1787, manufactured early 19th century
Blue and white jasperware ceramic
Virginia Museum Art Purchase Fund, 2001.13

...

In 1787, while the Constitutional Convention was struggling to navigate the question of federal, state, and individual rights, the London-based Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade was established.

Shortly thereafter, it approved its powerful emblem: a kneeling black man in chains who asks, “Am I Not a Man and a Brother?” Josiah Wedgwood, a prominent English ceramic manufacturer and Society member, produced the image as a jasperware cameo at his factory and, in 1788, he sent a shipment of medallions to Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia, where the Society of Friends (also known as Quakers) promoted the abolitionist cause.

PART III: *PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS*— Becoming and Defining “American”



The Payne Limner (active ca. 1780-1803)

Archer Payne, ca. 1790-91

Oil on canvas

Gift of Miss Dorothy Payne, 69.34

The first two decades of the 19th century witnessed the rise of an “Anti-Federalist” or “Republican” party staunchly suspicious of centralized power. Promoting intellectual and economic self-sufficiency, it celebrated the virtues of the farmer who voted his conscience while tending his fields. *Archer Payne* illustrates this ideal. Payne stands before a landscape piled high with sheafs of wheat, evidence of his successful cultivation. Though the plow that he holds and the simple costume he wears signal an unpretentious humility, Payne’s intellect is signified by the gold seal at his waist, which was used to secure his letters—evidence of his education and community engagement. In identifying with the values of economic and intellectual independence, Payne—like George Washington before him—imparts the character deemed essential to the Republican citizen.



Thomas Jefferson Wright (American, 1798-1846)
Elizabeth Thatcher Corbin Major of "Fairview" Plantation, Culpeper, Virginia, 1831
Oil on canvas
Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund, 88.61.2

Complementing the Republican vision of the citizen-farmer was the “Republican mother.” She was charged with tending the domestic sphere and ensuring civic virtue in the nation’s future citizens. Seated upright, her hand and glasses folded neatly on the Bible, Elizabeth Major highlights these values. The Bible is evidence of the Christian tenets she will nurture in her children while, visible through the open window, the neatly cultivated garden evokes the qualities of a well-tended home. Elizabeth Major’s portrait coincides with a transitional moment in American history. Painted in 1831, its sitter witnessed the expanding powers of the central government and the reimagining of a modern America.



Reverend Heinrich Diefenbach (American, 1771-1837)

Joseph Spengler Birth Certificate, ca. 1800

Watercolor and ink on laid paper

J. Harwood and Louise B. Cochrane Fund for American Art, 2024.333.1

Joseph Spengler's birth certificate, which is based on a Germanic folk art tradition called *fraktur* that arrived in Virginia with new and migrant settlers, bears inscriptions in both English and German, highlighting the diversity characteristic of America's inland settlements. Independence from Britain invalidated former limitations on westward migration and the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 nearly doubled the size of the new United States. Together, these shifts increased the opportunity to own land, accelerating the migration of European peoples. But the promise of land came at a cost: the dispossession of Indigenous peoples...



Elbridge Wesley Webber (American, 1839-1914)

J. H. Bufford and Sons, Publisher

Appomattox Courthouse, 1865

Hand colored lithograph on wove paper

Virginiana Fund, 71.15.2

On April 9, 1865, the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia surrendered to Union forces at McLean House in the village of Appomattox Court House, marking the beginning of the end of the Civil War.

From the time of the Constitutional Convention until the Civil War, tensions over the balance of authority accorded federal, state, and individual rights only heightened. While the first 10 amendments to the Constitution satisfied demands for an individual Bill of Rights (1791), concerns over state sovereignty continued to build along geographic lines.

...In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln gave his Gettysburg Address, heralding a “new birth of freedom,” of the people, by the people, and for the people. Ultimately, Union victory at Appomattox Court House decided two issues deferred in 1776: the overarching power of the central government and the individual rights of all Americans, born enslaved or free.



Robert Gwathmey (American, 1903-1988)

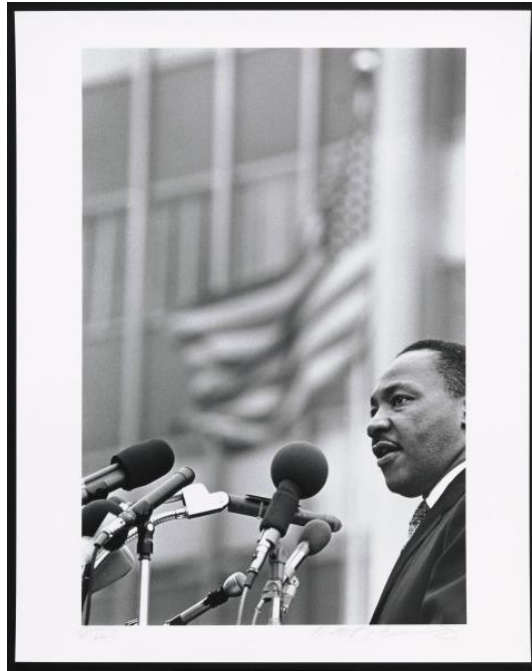
Family Portrait, 1945

Oil on canvas

Katherine Rhoads Memorial Fund, 45.10.1

In Robert Gwathmey's *Family Portrait*, an African American couple and six of their children are seated on their porch. At the center of the canvas, a service banner highlights the active military status of the family's eldest sons. Decades earlier, that spirit of patriotic sacrifice had inspired President Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and its aspirational promise of a "new birth of freedom."

Gwathmey's painting unites the family's commitment to duty and sacrifice with the economic limitations suggested by their "shotgun" cabin, a narrow one-room structure historically occupied by working-class families of limited financial means. These inconsistencies of merit and reward, and their link to inequalities arising from race and gender, gave rise to the civil rights movement of the 1950s and '60s.



Benedict J. Fernandez (American, 1936-2021)
Eastman Kodak Company, Publisher (est. 1888)
Dr. King, United Nations, April 15, 1967, 1967-68, printed 1989
Gelatin silver print
Katherine Boone Samuels Memorial Fund, 2010.198.1

In January of 1958, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. addressed an audience in Newport News: “We stand today between two worlds, the dying old and the emerging new.” When protests against the racial integration of Richmond’s white public schools erupted later that year, he highlighted the significant role Virginia would play in preserving the promise of America’s founding principles, writing: “Virginia, in this critical hour, has the opportunity to give direction and destiny to our troubled South. As Virginia goes, so goes the South, perhaps America, and the world.”

...King earned the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 for his non-violent campaign to end racial inequality. His famous “dream”—that people would come to be judged not “by the color of their skin but by the content of their character”—evokes the aspirational ideals of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” articulated by the Declaration of Independence. That dream continues to inspire the realization of “a more perfect union.”