

THE POWER OF HISTORY

How Understanding the Past Creates a Better Future for Us All

An often-used quote from Thomas Jefferson's thousands of letters is a sentence he wrote to his fellow Albemarle County resident Charles Yancey in 1816: "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free ... it expects what never was and never will be."

At Monticello, we recognize that knowing more about our history provides a solid foundation for citizen engagement. In an era of extreme polarization moving at the speed of social media, it is more crucial now than ever for historic sites and museums to join together in providing resources, tools and activities that help citizens of all ages become more engaged in issues that are of concern to them. This is especially true among younger blocs of voters — the Gen Z and millennial cohorts. The next generation is ready to lead, and they are seeking out history. Education is central to our mission, and we are forging strong partnerships to bring history forward.

MADE BY US AND CIVIC SEASON

Monticello is a founding partner of Made By Us, a consortium of now more than 110 history institutions across the country whose collective mission is to provide trusted information on democracy and history to inform civic action. This summer, Made By Us launched the inaugural "Civic Season," a series of activities, programs and events running from

WHAT IS CIVICS?

From the Latin *civicus*, meaning "pertaining to a citizen or city," civics is the study of the rights, obligations and privileges of citizens.

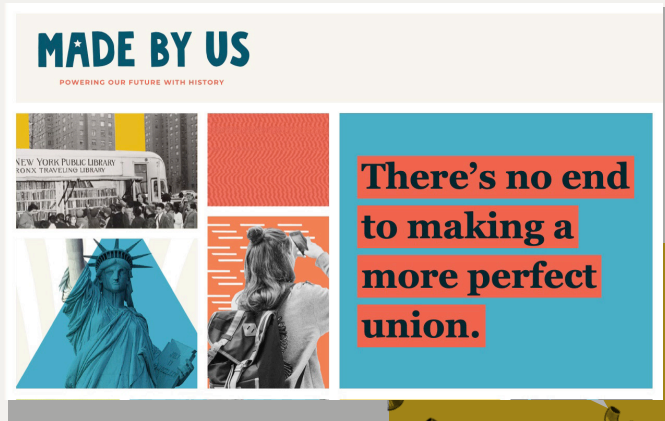
Juneteenth to July 4th. The goal is to create a new summer tradition to strengthen democracy with young adults leading the way. More than 450 different events sponsored by 200+ organizations provided multiple avenues to explore our country's history in more detail and to learn how our world is shaped by the experiences of the past.

As part of the programming, Monticello's Naturalization Ceremony returned to the West Lawn as part of Independence Day. A virtual Independence Day

program was created and has been viewed more than 20,000 times. Civic Season was "*e pluribus unum* brought to life." As we look to the future five years from now and the 250th anniversary of our nation's independence, Monticello, in partnerships and in our programs, will continue to seek more ways to bolster this kind of engagement with history.

FEAST OF REASON

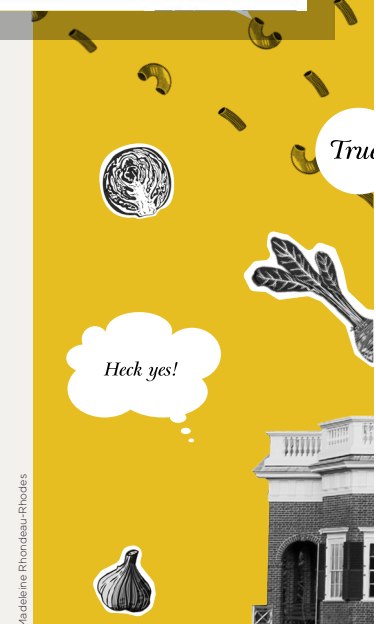
"Conversations about civics often start with big ideas and sometimes end with hurt feelings.



That doesn't need to happen," says Laura-Michel Balderson, a Monticello guide and project manager of a new initiative to foster dialogue about our future — the Feast of Reason Dinner Kit.

Having those conversations over a meal can often invite a more reflective dialogue. Jefferson also recognized the importance of a good meal to promote conversation. His granddaughter Ellen Coolidge described conversation at Monticello as the "feast of reason."

In that spirit, we have developed a set of activity cards designed to promote conversations over a shared meal,



Madeline Rhondaau-Rhodes



The Lewis and Clark Fife and Drum Corps performs at Monticello's Independence Day celebration.

Jack Looney

with friends and new acquaintances, on subjects related to civics. Thanks to a generous grant from the Peter G. Peterson Foundation, we have spent much of the past year field-testing our format and content, looking for ways to invite young adults (and adventurous participants of any age) to explore ideas and share perspectives in a relaxed, friendly setting. The cards help remind us that our country is a work in progress, shaped by many people whose contributions have inspired us to live up to the ideals of freedom and equality expressed in the Declaration of Independence.

The cards provide toasts, conversation starters and more in-depth questions to foster conversation as you move through your courses. The “toast” cards get the evening started and “appetizer” cards help break the ice with engaging questions

Ease Amos



for all. There are even “back burner” cards that you can play to set aside topics that may become too heated! You can mix or match cards to make the conversation as fun and in-depth as you like.

The spirit of a Feast of Reason dinner is to allow each guest to share their perspective on a given question so everyone who wishes to do so can contribute to the conversation. The goal is to give everyone fresh perspectives on both values that we share and ideas that we may not share.

Once the pandemic is mostly behind us, we will be doing more pilots of the Feast of Reason with members of our Monticello Young Advisors, a group that provides inspiration, ideas and critiques for new programs and initiatives. Educators at our Monticello Teachers Institute this past summer gave us great feedback, as have many Monticello staff as they have tested prototypes. We are looking to make the kits available for download and in a limited run of boxed sets in the spring of 2022.

