

Testimony Before the U.S. House Natural Resource Committee on
H.R. 6201, the National Liberty Memorial Preservation Act
February 3, 2022

Representative Bonnie Watson Coleman of New Jersey's Twelfth Congressional District

Chairman Neguse, Ranking Member Fulcher and members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for scheduling this hearing regarding my bill, H.R. 6201 – The National Liberty Memorial Preservation Act. I am excited to see that this bipartisan, bicameral legislation is being considered, especially during Black History Month.

I am one of eight members of Congress to be a Commissioner on the United States Semiquincentennial Commission. This Commission was established in 2016 and is charged with organizing and coordinating the 250th anniversary of the founding of our nation, July 4, 2026.

While the Fourth of July is meant to be a celebration for every American, we rarely use that space to address the whitewashed retelling of the American Revolution. It is long past time the United States recognized the contributions of Black and Indigenous soldiers to the founding of the nation. By the time they marched to victory in Yorktown in 1781, these troops represented one-quarter of the fighting strength of George Washington's Continental Army. While this fact is well known to historians, if not always highlighted in their work, the larger story of these soldiers is rarely taught in the classroom. During the Revolutionary War, the American military was more integrated than it would be again until the 1950s. Yes, America's founders utilized soldiers of color out of necessity rather than principle — but the contributions of these men were instrumental to declaring our independence and must be acknowledged as such.

Thanks to the work of the Liberty Fund DC, we know the names of at least 5,000 Black soldiers who fought for the idea that would become the United States. It is the work of this organization that has inspired me to introduce the National Liberty Memorial Preservation Act.

If enacted, this bill will extend the authorization for the establishment of a commemorative work to honor enslaved and free Black individuals who served in the American Revolution. The extension provides enough time for this work to be completed by the nation's 250th birthday in 2026.

Let us ensure these stories survive and are shared with all Americans. I thank you again for your consideration and hope you support my legislation.