Colonial Williamsburg Explores “The Idea of America”

Who Are We and What is Expected of Us?

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. (March 26, 2013) – A new book published by Colonial Williamsburg reaches well beyond the colonial and Revolutionary periods. “The Idea of America: How Values Shaped Our Republic and Hold the Key to Our Future” argues that American history has been shaped by a great debate that began with the founders and continues today. In fact, authors Richard Scotter, H. Michael Hartoonian and Bill White argue that it is the responsibility of all Americans as “revolutionary people” to continue that debate to preserve the republic.

“The premise of ‘The Idea of America’ is that Americans embrace values that are often in tension,” said Colin Campbell, Colonial Williamsburg’s president and CEO. “By examining how these value tensions played out throughout our history, this book demonstrates the continuing relevance of our founding ideals.”

Campbell added that, in its role as a center for history and citizenship, Colonial Williamsburg examines these tensions and continues the debate every day.
“The Idea of America” argues that Americans agree on a series of values and that these values—law and ethics, freedom and equality, unity and diversity, common wealth and private wealth—are often in tension with each other. It casts political debates—past and present—in the context of these value tensions.

Colonial Williamsburg’s Idea of America initiative includes several programs and products that explore the value tensions and continue the debate. Two interactive digital American history programs, one for high school students and one for the general public, explore the value tensions by examining case studies and offer a rich array of resources to make the history vibrant and relevant. A website, called Colonial Williamsburg Connect, provides historical background for current issues and allows the public to participate in the discussion via social media and online.

Hartoonian is a scholar in residence at Hamline University in Saint Paul, Minn., Van Scotter is a writer based in Colorado Springs, Col., and White is Colonial Williamsburg’s Royce R. & Kathryn M. Baker vice president of productions, publications and learning ventures.

White said he hoped the book would point a way through America’s current political gridlock. “We believe a better understanding of the way these value tensions have played out in American history will lead to a more informed and civil discourse today.”

The book has received pre-publication praise from both scholars and businesspeople. Pulitzer prizewinning historian Gordon Wood called the book “a superb account of American life through the centuries” and said “readers will come away with a remarkably comprehensive understanding of America and all of its paradoxes.”

Norm Augustine, retired chairman and CEO of Lockheed Martin and former Undersecretary of the Army, said, “Rarely, if ever, has anything been written that examines the fundamental dilemmas faced by our nation as starkly and readably as does ‘The Idea of America.’”

The book is available for $18.95 in paperback through Colonial Williamsburg stores and williamsburgmarketplace.com or by calling 800-761-8331. Beginning in April, it will be available for $9.95 as an e-book from Amazon.

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, a center for history and citizenship, is a not-for-profit educational institution and cultural destination. The Foundation is dedicated to promoting the importance of an informed, active citizenry. Its mission, “that the future may learn from the past,” is realized through offering innovative, imaginative and interactive experiences—both on- and off-site—designed to educate guests about the importance of the American Revolution. From the RevQuest: Save the Revolution! series of technology-assisted alternate reality games, to the theatrical programming of Revolutionary City®, guests can become immersed in the drama of the American Revolution and discover the ongoing relevance of the past. Guests can also visit the Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg, enjoy the many gardens and green spaces, and visit up to 35 historic sites. To experience all that the Foundation offers, guests may stay in one of the five award-winning Colonial Williamsburg hotels and enjoy the renowned golf courses of the Golden Horseshoe Golf Club, indulge in The Spa of Colonial Williamsburg and shop in 40 stores. Fine dining is offered in more than 20 locations from historic dining taverns to restaurants with contemporary fare. Colonial Williamsburg is open 365 days a year.

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