



SPIRIT OF AMERICA 2020

Just before stay at home orders and social distancing were put in place, six from Greater Cincinnati traveled to Valley Forge for the Spirit of America Youth Leadership conference on March 12-15.



From left to right:

Devlin Cassidy, Highlands High School

Katie Johnson, Highlands High School

Gaven Carter, North College Hill High School

Keith Spangler, chaperone, North College Hill High School

Jens Bartel, Talawanda High School

Gavin Halsey, Edgewood High School

Our students participated in a variety of activities, with one of the favorite being the mock congress. “It enhanced my knowledge of how the House of Representatives worked...”

Other group activities included lectures, small group activities and field trips.

The students learned about key concepts of citizenship. One student said that the conference gave him “much to consider in terms of values and serving.” Another student commented about a new insight about women as citizens. “Women had little to say in daily life and politics... and we have come a very long way...”

Another favorite activity was the field trips to Valley Forge and Philadelphia.

Students were able to gain new insights about the founding of the country and begin to sense the significance and symbolism of these famous places.

When asked about the most important things they learned, students responded:

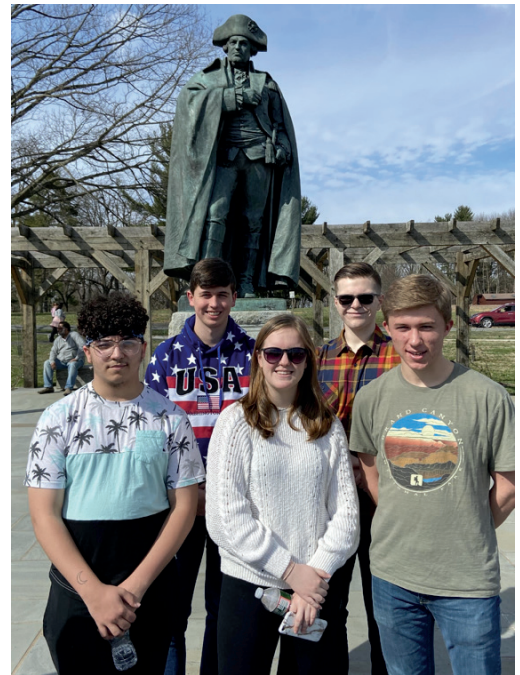
- Society needs a balance between liberty and security.
- Leadership is being passed down to us, and we need to be capable.
- The free market system is the best.
- Respect other people’s opinions.
- We have economic freedoms in this country.
- I have a deeper appreciation for the freedoms that we have in our country.



Students met other students from all over the country.



Students worked in small groups to accomplish tasks, learning about leadership and freedoms.



Our students had a chance to speak to the entire conference.



BEHIND THE SCENES OF PORTRAYING THOMAS JEFFERSON

One of the favorite parts of the Spirit of America conference is listening to the historical interpreters who portray the founders of our country. The following article is re-printed with permission from the Spirit Newsletter, Summer 2016.

Steve Edenbo is the actor-historian who portrays Thomas Jefferson for the American Historical Theatre. He has appeared at Freedoms Foundation regularly since 2000 for our educational programs.



As an actor – historian, why do you think first-person historical interpretation is a valuable teaching tool?

It compliments third person interpretation, i.e. lectures, biographies, tours of historical sites etc. First person interpretation presents a perspective not available from a 3D person vantage point. It shows what it's like to walk a mile in the shoes of those who have come before us.

How do/did you prepare to become Thomas Jefferson?

The preparation and review are continual and cumulative. I try to vary my sources of learning: biographies, primary documents, audiobooks/courses, historical sites and tours, attending lectures by experts etc. Writing new scripts and improving the old ones is important, even though a big part of what I do is improvisational. The acquiring and maintaining of correct costumes is also not to be taken lightly.

What is the most challenging question you have been asked?

It's changed over the years as the public's focus has changed and my understanding has expanded. The question of the dichotomy between "all men are created equal" and the reality of slavery in Jefferson's life used to be the most challenging. Then the Sally Hemings question took its place. Now, my biggest struggle might be with explaining, in character, why Jefferson died so terribly in debt.

Who is your favorite interlocutor on stage?

That is a tough call. John Adams, Abigail Adams, and Alexander Hamilton all pose their unique perspectives and press Jefferson into different facets of his. I am preparing a debate with John Marshall, which is opening up a wide range of new challenges and ideas. My favorite though is when audience members get so caught up in the moment that they engage "Mr. Jefferson" in extended, sincere conversation.

What do you like best about coming to Freedoms Foundation?

Freedoms Foundation creates and nurtures an ideal environment for the voices of our nation's founders to be heard and understood. Even better, I know that FFVF sends the students and teachers homeward on a trajectory and with the energy to put that civic insight to use in a practical way. It is very fulfilling to interact with audiences in a place where I know that my efforts are consciously integrated into a greater purpose, namely that of serving our country.





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BILL OF RESPONSIBILITIES: HOW WE BECOME ENGAGED CITIZENS

The founders of Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge developed this list of responsibilities as guidelines for active citizens to follow. The goal is to be engaged in our society as effective and committed citizens.

Preamble: Freedoms and responsibility are mutual and inseparable; we can ensure enjoyment of the one only by exercising the other. Freedom for all of us depends on responsibility by each of us. To secure and expand our liberties, therefore, we accept these responsibilities as individual members of a free society.

- To be fully responsible for our own actions and for the consequences of those actions.
 - To respect the rights and beliefs of others.
 - To give sympathy, understanding, and help to others.
 - To do our best to meet our own and our families' needs.
 - To respect and obey the laws.
 - To respect the property of others, both private and public.
 - To share with others our appreciation of the benefits and obligations of freedom.
 - To participate constructively in the nation's political life.
 - To help freedom survive by assuming personal responsibility for its defense.
 - To respect the rights and to meet the responsibilities on which our liberty rests and our democracy depends.
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