

**Testimony Before the U.S. House Subcommittee on
National Parks, Forests and Public Lands**
*H.R. 6201, the National Liberty Memorial Preservation Act
(Rep. Coleman and Rep. Hinson)*

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

Mr. Chairman, thank you for scheduling this hearing and for cosponsoring H.R. 6201. I am delighted to recall that Rep. Debbie Dingell and Rep. Tom McClintock managed the National Liberty Memorial Clarification Act of 2015, H.R. 1949. This led to the National Park Service becoming the lead agency for the National Liberty Memorial.

In that bipartisan spirit, Rep. Bonnie Watson Colman and Rep. Ashley Hinson introduced H.R. 6201 to preserve the authorization (division B of Public Law 112-239) of National Mall Liberty Fund DC until September 30, 2027, and continue the authority (Public Law 113-176) to select a site in Area I. The Fund examined [42 sites in Areas I and II](#). This includes our preferred location on the west side of the historic Jamie L. Whitten Building between Independence Avenue and Jefferson Drive.

The National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission endorsed an environmental assessment on Whitten and an alternate site. There were many consultations with the General Services Administration and the Department of Agriculture. The Fund engaged an engineering firm contingent on the availability of funds.

This is possibly the most efficient project ever authorized, including the work of multiple federal agencies. There was much accomplished without friction or the wasteful spinning of wheels. The staff has our 2021 activity report and multiyear financial statement. All services were undertaken pro bono: architectural, legal, media, engineering, printing, research, site studies, photography, website, business plan,

agency presentations, meetings, a draft environmental assessment, travel and minor expenses. No salaries were paid. There were no contracts with professional fundraisers. The Fund has no debts.

We may have leveraged as much as \$2.8 million in intangible assets for less than the cost of a used car. With planning underway for the Semiquincentennial on July 4, 2026, America's elevated levels of patriotism make this the last best opportunity to reach critical mass. The Revolution is represented in Washington by 24 memorials – 9 are to foreign heroes. Other memorials have gone up lately. Why not this one?

In anticipation, the Fund continues to encourage and assist commemorative activities anywhere. For example, in 2019, [Rep. Rashida Tlaib](#) spoke at a ceremony in Detroit honoring, perhaps, the most evocative American ever, [Pvt. James Robinson](#), a veteran of the Revolution and War of 1812. When he died in 1868, at 115 years, he had published his story, become a preacher, fathered children and outlived his enslavers and the bitterness of being twice-denied his freedom.

Actor Morgan Freeman once said, “they weren’t just picking cotton and singing spirituals.” For many, particularly prospective donors, believing anything else is an enormous leap. After learning next to nothing through every level of education, I sometimes have feelings of disbelief myself. For 13 years, I crossed Route 10 in Plainville, Connecticut to attend school without a clue that thousands of soldiers had marched beneath my footsteps on the Rochambeau Route, between Boston and Yorktown.

In the Washington region, the Route crosses I-395 below the Pentagon. Just a few hundred yards away, the Rochambeau Bridge spans the Potomac River as one of the 14th Street Bridges. Approaching the intersection with Independence Avenue, the Whitten site is the first visible portion of the Mall. There, the Memorial would connect to 600 miles of history and suggest the existence of a gateway to Freedom Plaza and downtown Washington, from the Pentagon. The converging sightlines could explain

how the gathering will to extinguish evil cast a set of unassailable principles out of the declarations of founders and the actions of slaves.

I am the son of an immigrant from Cape Verde. Through my biracial maternal grandmother, I am the descendant of Revolutionary War patriots, a Civil War casualty and a black Virginia family that was likely free before 1863. I am the nephew of a woman who challenged the exclusionary policies of the Daughters of the American Revolution and won. But her crowning achievement was the publication of research that enabled us to match many of the 5,000 black veterans to [communities in 24 states](#).

Every citizen has something in common with those uncommemorated souls, whether heritage, appearance or the grit not to allow suffering and injustice to dull their purpose.

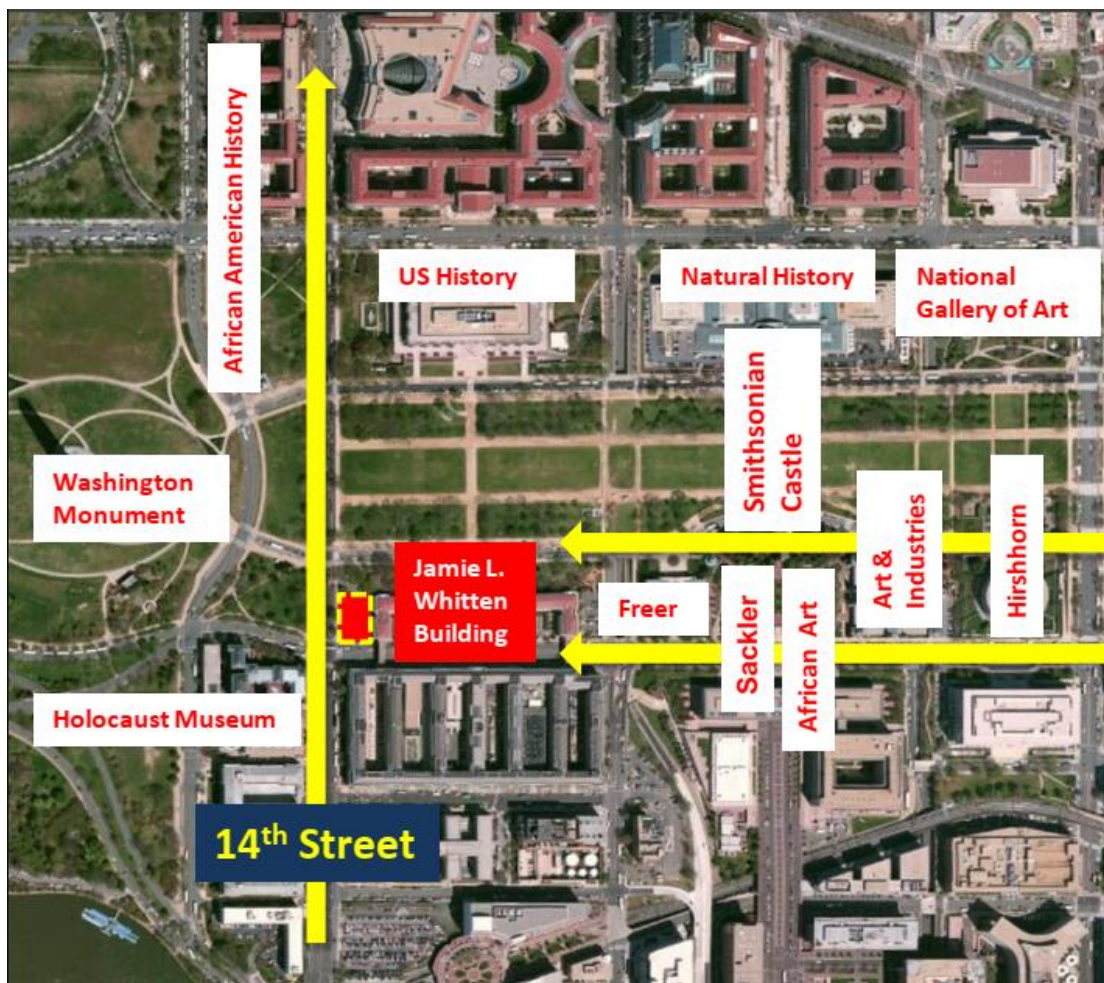
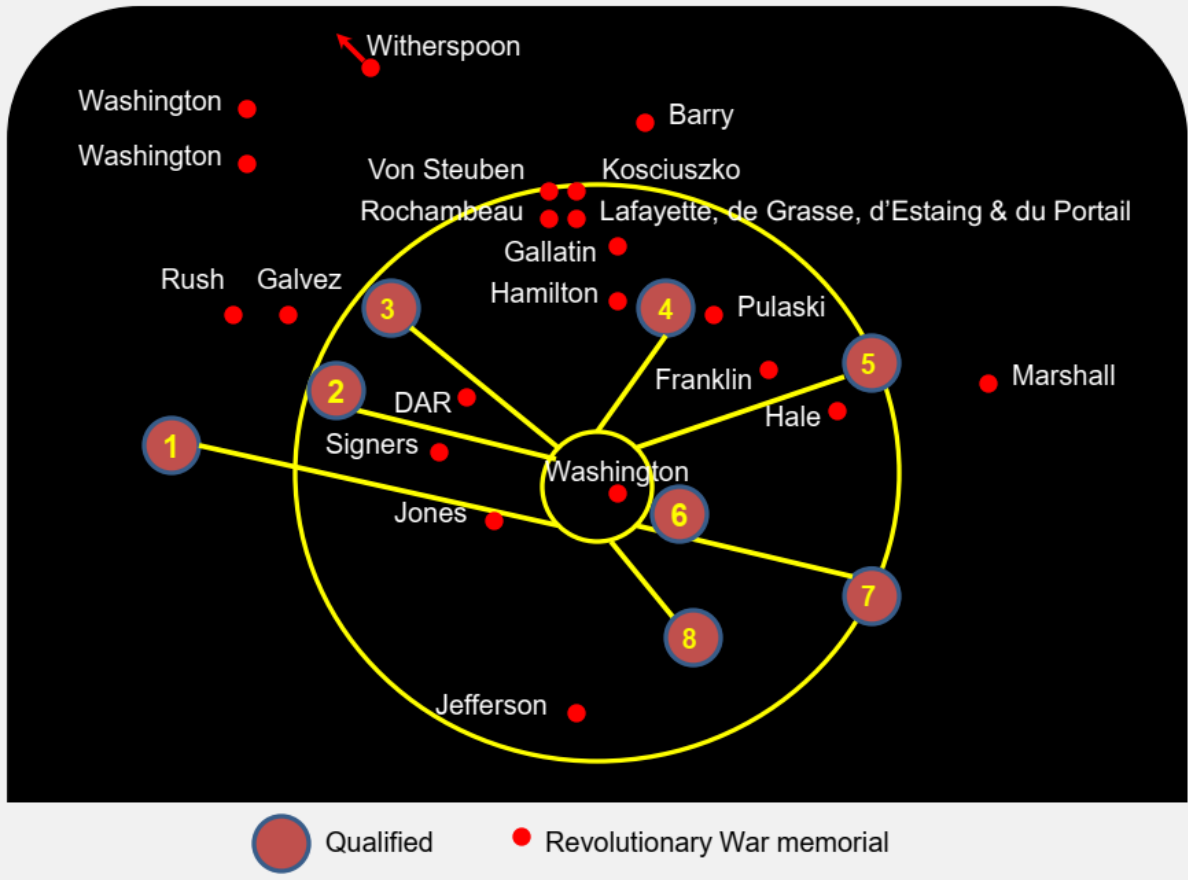


Figure 1-4. Sites 1–8 in Relation to the Washington Monument and Memorials to Other Patriots of the Revolution.



- ✓ 14 between Old Post Office, Lafayette Square, Signers Memorial and Washington Monument
- ✓ 22 of 23 within 880 yards of White House and the one at Washington Square is under a mile away

Source: LFDC

National Mall Liberty Fund DC Site Selection Report, July 23, 2013