Brief for

**2024 Revolutionary Rhetoric**

**October 10-12th, 2024**

This document is the official brief for both Congress and Forensic events. This brief is to help competitors focus their efforts and to suggest material that is appropriate for the themes and purpose of this tournament.

The brief is intended to be a starting point for competitors, not a limitation on them other than where specifically noted. It provides topics competitors might want to consider as well as possible source material to begin research. You may choose subject matter beyond the suggestions provided it remains within the scope laid out in the brief for the given events.

It should not go unnoticed that some of the issues that will be discussed in these events will refer to Native Peoples and/or their ancestral homelands. In addition, how colonists viewed Native Peoples and their homelands is very different than what would be acceptable today. Accordingly, the organizers of Revolutionary Rhetoric believe it is important to show our respect and support of Native Peoples by gratefully acknowledging the Native Peoples on whose ancestral homelands we gather, in particular Native communities descended from the Powhatan Confederacy such as the Chickahominy, as well as other diverse and vibrant Native communities that make their home in this region today.

For several reasons, the organizers have made the decision to prohibit any participant in Congress or Declamation from mentioning enslavement during the event. That restriction does not exist in the other events. However, just as in any tournament, the organizers of Revolutionary Rhetoric are committed to fostering diversity, equity and inclusion for all participants in this event. Trigger warnings must be given for content that may reasonably cause distress to some people.

Additionally, the organizers of Revolutionary Rhetoric are committed to providing participants, judges, coaches, and staff the opportunity to pursue excellence in their endeavors in a safe environment. This opportunity can exist only when each member of our community is assured an atmosphere of mutual respect. The organizers of Revolutionary Rhetoric recognize that while some historical material may be distasteful or even offensive, its contextual and accurate presentation is wholly different than participation in harassment, hate and discrimination in a modern-day context—actions that are absolutely prohibited by the organizers of this event. Accordingly, all forms of harassment and discrimination, whether written or oral, based on race, color, religion, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, marital status, citizenship, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, or any other characteristic protected by any applicable federal, state, or local law are prohibited, whether committed by participants, judges, coaches, or observers. Individuals who are found to have violated this policy will be subject to the full range of sanctions, up to and including removal from the tournament premises and reporting to senior school administrators.

**Resources**

Each event brief lists some resources that participants may choose to use as they prepare for the event. Below are some general resources that might be of use to begin to understand the colonial period.

Archer, Richard. *As If an Enemy’s Country.* Oxford University Press. 2010.

Barber, Brooke. *King Hancock.* Harvard University Press. 2023

Bunker, Nick. *An Empire on the Edge.* Knopf. 2014

Calloway, Colin G. *The Scratch of a Pen.* Oxford University Press. 2006.

Calloway, Colin G. *The Indian World of George Washington.* Oxford University Press. 2018.

Chernow, Ron. *Washington.* Penguin. 2002.

Merrell, James H. *Into the American Woods.* W.W. Norton & Company, 2000.

Middleton, Richard and Lombard, Anne. *Colonial America.* Wiley-Blackwell. 2011

Nelson, James L. *With Fire and Sword.* Thomas Dunne Books. 2011

Preston, David L. *Braddock’s Defeat.* Oxford University Press. 2017.

Richter, Daniel K. *Facing East from Indian Country.* Harvard University Press. 2001.

Roberts, Andrew. *The Last King of America.* Viking. 2021

Schiff, Samuel. *The Revolutionary.* Little Brown and Company. 2022

Shannon, Timothy J. and Gellman, David N. *American Odysseys.* Oxford University Press. 2013

Taylor, Alan. *American Colonies*. Penguin. 2002.

Taylor, Alan. *American Revolutions*. W. W. Norton & Company. 2016

Williams, Glenn F. *Dunmore’s War.* Westholme Publishing. 2017.

**Congress Brief**

Legislation must relate to events real or imagined[[1]](#footnote-2) that would have occurred between 1770 and 1775. The only restrictions on subject matter are that legislation proposed must be credible to the period, and no legislation may take up the issue of enslavement[[2]](#footnote-3) or any declaration of independence in any form or fashion. Please note that your committee and your party will not be assigned to you until you arrive but there will be time to draft legislation while you are in Williamsburg. However, you may want to do research ahead of time to consider what sort of bill you might draft for various party and committee assignments as your legislation MUST be written for consideration by the committee you are assigned to.

The following topics are suggestions and starting points as you begin researching possible legislation. Remember there are four committees that will be the starting point for each chamber and competitors will be assigned to a committee once they arrive. That means you will need to be prepared to write legislation relevant to each committee and be prepared to ensure that it aligns with your party’s goals and ideology. There will be time to work legislation during your time in Williamsburg.

The four committees are:

* Committee on Crown/Colonial Relations (6 members)
  + This committee deals with relations between the colonists and Kingdom of Great Britain entities like the Governor, Parliament, the British military stationed locally, etc. Issues like bills passed in parliament that impact the colonies are debated here, as are bills about the relationship between the Kingdom of Great Britain and the colonies, trade between Virginia and the Kingdom of Great Britain, and inter-colonial political coordination.
* Committee on Colonial Defense and Security (6 members)
  + This committee deals with the goals and operations of a potential militia, construction of fortifications, any purchase of arms or defensive equipment, as well as defense from piracy, defense against hostile Native American tribes, alliances with friendly tribes, and similar bills.
* Committee on Courts of Justice, Commerce and General Laws (8 members)
  + The committee deals with projects to improve the economy and non-defense infrastructure of the colony and handles bills related to business, commerce, roads, public hospitals, agricultural policy, trade with other colonies and countries other than the Kingdom of Great Britain, as well as similar issues.

The two parties are:

* **Loyalists:** Loyalists generally support the British government position as put forth by the King, Parliament and the colonial Governor. They are loyal to the King and will not tolerate criticism of him or the Governor generally. They typically support British military forces, British imperialism, legislation that benefits Britain (as long as it is not unreasonably skewed) and the Church of England. For the purposes of this competition, they are also more conservative on economic and social issues not directly related to Crown/Colony relations. For a Patriot to get a Loyalist to cross the aisle, they will either have to persuade the Loyalist that the bill has some benefits for the Loyalist point of view or amend their bill to gain Loyalist support without losing any of their Patriot members.
* **Patriots.** Patriots generally oppose the British position. While not openly disloyal to the King, they are willing to openly criticize and attack the Governor and the British Parliament in debate and in legislation. The want more colonial autonomy if not outright independence. For the purposes of this competition, they are also more liberal on economic and social issues not directly related to Crown/Colony relations. For a Loyalist to get a Patriot to cross the aisle, they will either have to persuade the Patriot that the bill has some benefits for the Patriot point of view or amend their bill to gain Patriot support without losing any of their Loyalist members.

Here are some of the topics and questions for consideration. These are simply a jumping off point. Provided the issue, real or imagined, would be salient to Virginia in the period of 1770-1775, you are on the right track.

Reducing violence

**What should Virginia do to stop fighting that causes significant bodily harm? Should victims the be awarded financial damages by a jury in a criminal case? What should happen if the convicted does not pay restitution ordered by a court?**

Back in 1752, the House of Burgesses[[3]](#footnote-4) passed a resolution to make the purposeful and malicious maiming of another a felony. The House was not talking about minor cuts and scrapes. The bill mentions gouging out eyes, biting off noses and cutting off limbs as examples of what was covered by the bill. The bill however, protected land and possessions from being seized as part of the penalty. Victims could sue, but the offender often could hide his assets leaving the victim unable to collect the judgement

In 1772, some members of the House proposed cracking down harder. A bill was put forward to broaden the injuries covered under the maiming law to include malicious wounding like slitting the nose, stamping on someone or biting someone. To make sure the victim was compensated, the bill allowed for the jury to not only reach a verdict in the case but also to assess damages to the convicted. If the convicted did not pay in three months, they could receive up to 39 lashes of the whip.

*WHEREAS many disorderly and quarrelsome persons do frequently molest, disturb, and ill treat many of his majesty's peaceable and quiet subjects, often wounding and doing them great injury….[[4]](#footnote-5)*

Adoption of the Virginia Nonimportation Association Resolutions

**Should the Colony of Virginia adopt the Virginia Nonimportation Association resolutions, boycotting British goods, as proposed by George Washington, George Mason, Richard Henry Lee, and others? If Virginia participates in a boycott, how should it be policed and what penalties, if any, should be given to those who smuggle in or sell British goods? Should the colonial government enact any economic measures to offset any economic impact of the resolutions? How would Loyalists want to address issues around this legislatively?**

To improve the local economy and in reaction to the Townsend Acts, Virginia’s dissolved House of Burgess,[[5]](#footnote-6) meeting at Raleigh Tavern as the Virginia Association, passed an agreement to boycott the importation of British goods. For the purposes of this competition, if you choose to draft legislation on this issue, it will be debated as if the House had not been dissolved.[[6]](#footnote-7)

*That we will not receive into our custody, make sale of, or become chargeable with, any of the articles aforementioned, that may be ordered after the 15th of*June*instant, nor give orders of any from this time; and that in all orders which any of us may hereafter send to*Great Britain*we will expressly direct and request our correspondents not to ship us any of the articles before excepted, and if any such goods are shipped contrary to the tenour of this agreement we will refuse to take the same, or make ourselves chargeable therewith.[[7]](#footnote-8)*

Forming a Committee of Correspondence

**Should Virginia form a committee of correspondence, and call on the other colonies to do the same, to help share news and to act in unison when necessary?**

With travel times long, it can be hard to make sure news is shared and that people who are united in purpose know the plan of action. This was the basis for committees of correspondence. Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry and others felt a need for the 13 colonies to create these committees to coordinate their activities, share news and otherwise unify in the face of what they viewed as unjust taxation and other affronts from the British government. On May 12, 1773, the House passes a resolution to form the Committee and to encourage the other colonies to do likewise

*…a committee, whose business it shall be to obtain the most early and authentic intelligence of all such Acts and resolutions of the British Parliament, or proceedings of administration, as may relate to or affect the British colonies in America, and to keep up and maintain a correspondence and communication with our sister colonies, respecting these important considerations; and the result of such their proceedings, from time to time, to lay before this House.[[8]](#footnote-9)*

The Formation of Independent Militia Companies

**Is the formation of independent militia companies a justified means to defend the civil rights and liberty of British Subjects and Freemen in the British Colonies? What form should they take? How large should they be? How might they be funded and armed? Who would be permitted or conscripted to participate? What sort of training should be required? Would Loyalists and/or Patriots support this?**

Virginia began forming independent companies in the fall of 1774 after the Boston Port Bill, the first of which was the Fairfax Independent Company. This militia and others like them were not controlled by the Governor, the British Military or the British government. On September 21st, 1774, a resolution spurred by Colonel George Mason was adopted by Fairfax County declaring,

*In this Time of extreme Danger, with the Indian Enemy in our Country, and threat’ned with the Destruction of our Civil-rights, & Liberty, and all that is dear to British Subjects & Freemen; we the Subscribers, taking into our serious consideration the present alarming Situation of all the British Colonies upon this Continent as well as our own, being sensible of the Expediency of putting the Militia of this Colony upon a more respectable Footing, & hoping to excite others by our Example, have voluntarily freely & cordially entered into the following Association…. That we will form ourselves into a Company, not exceeding one hundred Men, by the Name of The Fairfax independent Company of Voluntiers…*.[[9]](#footnote-10)

Boycotting Goods Imported from the Kingdom of Britain

**Should the Colony of Virginia abide by the Articles of Association and boycott British goods as a response to the Intolerable Acts? If Virginia participates in a boycott, how should it be policed and what penalties, if any, should be given to those who smuggle in or sell British goods? Should the colonial government enact any economic measures to offset any economic impact of the resolutions? How would Loyalists react?**

The Virginia Association’s non-importation resolutions fell apart by 1771, but what the colonists referred to as the Intolerable Acts reignited the nonimportation/boycott movement throughout the colonies. On October 20, 1774, the First Continental Congress meeting in Philadelphia adopted the Articles of Association which state that all colonists would boycott British goods beginning on December 1, 1774. On November 1, 1774, Virginia began a boycott of British goods in response to the Intolerable Acts, one month before the date set by the Congress.

Additional Virginia Reactions to the Intolerable Acts

**Other than a boycott of British goods which is discussed above, what, if any, other steps, short of independence, can Virginia take to oppose the Intolerable Acts? Should a day of prayer and fasting be set? What other actions might the House consider? Would Loyalists push a resolution in support of the Acts?**

In addition to boycotting British goods, many localities and colonies looked for other ways to show their opposition to the closing of the Port of Boston and the other requirements of the Intolerable Acts.[[10]](#footnote-11) The House of Burgesses passed a resolution proposed by George Wythe calling for a day of fasting and prayer, causing the Governor, Lord Dunmore, to dissolve the House.

*THIS House being deeply impressed with Apprehension of the great Dangers to be derived to British America, from the hostile Invasion of the City of Boston, in our Sister Colony of Massachusetts Bay, whose Commerce and Harbour are on the 1st Day of June next to be stopped by an armed Force, deem it highly necessary that the said first Day of June be set apart by the Members of this House as a Day of Fasting, Humiliation, and Prayer…[[11]](#footnote-12)*

Lord Dunmore’s War

**Should the House of Burgesses pass Lord Dunmore’s request to raise regular military forces to protect colonial settlers in the westernmost part of the Colony from Shawnee and Mingo tribal attacks? Should the House oppose the Governor’s request and only provide a temporary militia force?**

As explorers, surveyors and settlers continued to push west into Appalachia and beyond, they continued to encounter established Indigenous-American communities. Violence would sometimes break out. These incidents reached a crescendo when a Mingo hunting party containing relatives of a tribal leader was killed in an event now known as the Yellow Creek massacre. This caused the tribes to begin to seek revenge and attack settlers.

Lord Dunmore, the Governor of the Colony of Virginia wanted to protect the settlers and end the violence,[[12]](#footnote-13) causing him to request the House to approve a large, fully equipped military force to go to battle, paid for by the colonists. The House preferred Dunmore use temporary militia forces, which, although less capable, would not require additional government funds, and was an option already legally available to him during emergency periods.

The Yorktown Tea Party

**What should the Burgesses direct the citizens of Yorktown to do with British Tea on board a ship anchored in the York River? What should be the official position of the House of Burgesses concerning the Yorktown Tea Party?**

So-called “tea parties” were not limited to Boston. They occurred in several colonial localities. On November 7, 1774, a group of Virginia colonists living in Yorktown boarded a ship[[13]](#footnote-14) and tossed the two half-chests of tea overboard into the York River. A House committee was to have debated the issue and told the citizens what to do about the tea, but when nothing had been heard by noon, they chose to act.

The merchant who was planning to sell the tea, John Prentiss of Williamsburg, was apologetic as noted in the *Virginia Gazette* on November 24:

It gives me much Concern to find that I have incurred the Displeasure of the York and Gloucester Committees, and thereby of the Publick in general, for my Omission in not countermanding the Order which I sent to Mr. Norton for two Half Chests of Tea; and do with Truth declare, that I had not the least Intention to give Offence, nor did I mean an Opposition to any measure for the publick Good. My Countrymen, therefore, it is earnestly hoped, will readily forgive me for an Act which may be interpreted so much to my Discredit; and I again make this publick Declaration, that I had not the least Design to act contrary to those Principles which ought to govern every Individual who has a just Regard for the Rights and Liberties of America.*[[14]](#footnote-15)*

Resources:

[The Rockefeller Library Digital Library](https://research.colonialwilliamsburg.org/?_gl=1*xw3s3n*_ga*NDM2NDEwODcuMTY5MDU1MzEyMw..*_ga_DL4M8SY7PH*MTcxNjIxMjc0MS42MDkuMC4xNzE2MjEyNzQxLjYwLjAuMA..*_ga_85G4WZQQQG*MTcxNjIxMjc0MS4yMTIuMC4xNzE2MjEyNzQxLjAuMC4w)

[The Bob & Marion Wilson Educator Resource Library](https://teacherresources.colonialwilliamsburg.org/?from=teachers&_gl=1*y4b68s*_ga*NDM2NDEwODcuMTY5MDU1MzEyMw..*_ga_85G4WZQQQG*MTcxNjIxNzUzMS4yMTMuMS4xNzE2MjE4NTI0LjAuMC4w*_gcl_au*NTkyOTAzNjYyLjE3MTQ2ODI4NTE.*_ga_DL4M8SY7PH*MTcxNjIxNzUzMS42MTAuMS4xNzE2MjE4NTI0LjYwLjAuMA..)

[The Rise of Virginia's Independent Militia - Journal of the American Revolution (allthingsliberty.com)](https://nam12.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fallthingsliberty.com%2F2014%2F09%2Fthe-rise-of-virginia-independent-militia%2F&data=05%7C02%7Crcurrie%40cwf.org%7C31f6f33306fa4c0cead708dc76aadb95%7Ce5987f962bd0460084448a217767e8ba%7C0%7C0%7C638515723427009758%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=aRpcNx7fU%2FEe3%2B5SdjhJVS2GatleDrHRi7%2FF%2FWqs1hk%3D&reserved=0)

[Original records of Virginia Revolutionary Conventions](https://lva.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/collectionDiscovery?vid=01LVA_INST:01LVA&collectionId=81164609780005756)

[Hening’s Statutes at Large](https://usgenwebsites.org/vagenweb/hening/)

**Original Oratory Brief**

Your speech must be related to a historical issue or event, large or small, in Virginia or impacting Virginia, during the period of 1770-1775. It can be a modern-day commentary on the topic during the period or it can be delivered as if you are in the period. Other than the topic relating to the required time period and relevance to Virginia, there are no limitations on subject matter.

Below are some sample topics although other topics that meet the brief are welcome:

The Intolerable Acts

Lord Dunsmore’s War

The formation of independent militias

Boycotting British goods

The Conciliatory Resolution

Virginia’s participation in the First Continental Congress

**Declamation Brief**

Your speech should directly relate to any issue or event, large or small, related to one or more of the thirteen colonies that became the original states. It must come from any primary source material from the period of 1750-1776, including speeches, writings, letters and other documents. These primary sources do not have to originate in the 13 colonies. Other than the time period and relevance to an issue related to one or more of thirteen colonies, there are no limitations on subject matter other than the material you choose may not mention enslavement.

Below are some sample primary source materials, but you may use any primary source item that relates to the brief:

[Common Sense by Thomas Paine](https://oll.libertyfund.org/pages/1776-paine-common-sense-pamphlet)

[Speech to Parliament by King George III](http://ushistory.org/paine/more/kingspeech.htm)

[Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania by John Dickinson](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/47111/47111-h/47111-h.htm)

[Account of the Boston Massacre by Captain Prescott](https://www.let.rug.nl/usa/documents/1751-1775/captain-prestons-account-of-the-boston-massacre-march-5-1770.php)

[Speech on Presenting the American Papers to the House of Commons by Lord North](https://digital.lib.niu.edu/islandora/object/niu-amarch%3A90773)

[The Olive Branch Petition by the First Continental Congress](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/contcong_07-08-75.asp)

[Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death! By Patrick Henry](https://www.colonialwilliamsburg.org/learn/deep-dives/give-me-liberty-or-give-me-death/)

[On American Independence by Samuel Adams](http://breedshill.org/The_Breeds_Hill_institute/On_American_Independence.html)

[Speech on Conciliation with the Colonies by Edmund Burke](https://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch1s2.html)

[The Role of the Indians in the Rivalry Between France, Spain and England by Governor James Glen](https://www.let.rug.nl/usa/documents/1751-1775/governor-glen-the-role-of-the-indians-in-the-rivalry-between-france-spain-and-england-1761.php#:~:text=Governor%20Glen%20of%20South%20Carolina,would%20insure%20tranquility%20for%20Carolina.)

[Speech on the Stamp Act by William Pitt the Elder](https://www.let.rug.nl/usa/documents/1751-1775/william-pitts-speech-on-the-stamp-act-january-14-1766.php)

**Poetry Brief**

Your poem must have been written during the period of 1750-1776. Poet chosen must have written the piece while residing in one of the 13 colonies or the Kingdom of Great Britain, or in transit between the two.

A sample of poets you may want to consider:

* William Blake
* Robert Burns
* Lord Byron
* Elizabeth Graeme Fergusson
* Philip Freneau
* Thomas Gray
* Hannah Griffitts
* Jupiter Hammon
* Milcah Martha Moore
* Annis Boudinot Stockton
* John Trumbull
* Phillis Wheatley
* William Wordsworth
* Susanna Wright

**Program Oral Interpretation Brief**

Your piece must comment on an issue or event issue or event, large or small, related to one or more of the thirteen colonies that became the original states. The issue or event must have occurred during or be relevant at some point within the period of 1770-1775 although it may begin prior to that period or extend past it. There is no limitation on subject matter or source material, beyond its salience to the specified time period.

1. For example, a competitor can propose an infrastructure project appropriate to the period even if it is not one that actually came before the House of Burgesses. Provided a resolution is plausibly relevant to events or realities of the time period and abides by the subject matter limitations related to enslavement or independence, the legislation will be considered. Should there be any question about plausible relevance of a piece of legislation by a majority of the Committee or by the Committee Chair acting individually, a determination will be made by the Tournament Committee. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Mentions of, or legislation pertaining to, indentured servitude is fully allowed. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Although Congress does not exist in the colonial period, Congress in the form of this event is acting in place of the House of Burgesses. Accordingly, all mentions of the Burgesses in this brief, including issues they considered or might consider, should be considered issues to be addressed by Congress for the purpose of this event. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Resolution of the Virginia House of Burgesses, February 1772. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. The House had been dissolved by the Governor, Lord Botetourt, as he was displeased with the passage of a resolution asserting the Parliament did not have the right to tax the colonies without their consent. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. In fact, any historic issue during this period that would have been taken up in a period while the Burgesses were dissolved or otherwise not in session will be treated as if Congress is in session as normal. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. “Finalized Document of the Virginia Nonimportation Association, ConSource, Pembroke College, University of Oxford, accessed Thursday, June 13, 2024, <https://www.consource.org/document/finalilized-document-of-the-virginia-nonimportation-association-1770-6-22/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Resolution of the Virginia House of Burgess, May 12, 1773. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Rutland, ed., “Fairfax County Militia Association 21 September 1774*,” The Papers of George Mason*, Vol. 1, (University of North Carolina Press, 1970), 210-211. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. The British referred to the Intolerable Acts as the Coercive Acts. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Resolution of the Virginia House of Burgess, May 24, 1774. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Indigenous people of the time would have seen it differently to be sure. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. The ship was named *The Virginia,* ironically. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Prentiss, John, “Letter of Apology”, *Virginia Gazette,* November 24, 1774 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)