

Governor Phil Murphy

In Honor of Black History Month, Governor Murphy and Lieutenant Governor Way Host Panel Discussion at Montclair Brewery: “Freedom, Slavery, and the American Revolution: A Conversation with Professors Jonathan Holloway and Michael Blaakman”

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*Rutgers Distinguished Professor Jonathan Holloway and Princeton University Professor Michael Blaakman Share Insights on Black History During the Revolutionary Era
Murphy Administration Continues Commemoration of Nation's 250th Anniversary*

MONTCLAIR – In honor of Black History Month and New Jersey's commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States, Governor Phil Murphy and Lieutenant Governor Tahesha Way today moderated a panel discussion at Montclair Brewery with Rutgers University President and Distinguished Professor Jonathan Holloway, a leading scholar of African American history, and Princeton University Associate Professor of History Michael Blaakman, a historian of the American Revolution. The discussion, entitled “Freedom, Slavery, and the American Revolution: A Conversation with Professors Jonathan Holloway and Michael Blaakman”, focused on the stories, questions, and tensions from this seminal time in American history – from the ambiguous consequences for African Americans in the new nation, to the role of Black soldiers in the Continental Army, to the reality of slavery in northern states.

“As we commemorate our nation's 250th anniversary, it's important that we honor the often overlooked stories of African Americans, who played an integral role in the founding of our nation,” **said Governor Murphy**. “President Holloway and Dr. Blaakman's expertise and scholarship provide an insightful and unique perspective on this complex period of our nation's history. Lieutenant Governor Way and I are proud to spotlight the stories of Black Americans as part of our 250th anniversary programming.”

“Black history is American history. And what better way to celebrate Black History Month than by recognizing the sacrifices and contributions of African Americans in the early days of our country?” **said Lieutenant Governor and Secretary of State Tahesha Way**. “I look forward to hosting more events to ensure the untold stories of Black Americans are rightfully shared as part of our commemorative activities.”

“The painful reality is that in making their own case for liberty, the colonists used the language of the day to complain that the British crown was treating them as slaves—somehow ignoring the people they literally owned, blind to their existence and to the irony of their own complaints,” **said Rutgers University President Jonathan Holloway**.

“The American Revolution was both a political struggle for independence and a violent civil war. At its heart lay the profound contradiction of slavery's persistence in a land proclaiming radical new ideas about liberty and equality, a tension inscribed in the Declaration itself,” **said Princeton University Associate Professor of History Michael Blaakman**. “The 250th offers all of us an opportunity to learn more about the men and women who participated in the Revolution – including the thousands of African Americans who fought for or against the patriot cause and who seized the moment to forge their own pathways to freedom. Their stories are essential for understanding what was truly revolutionary about the American Revolution.”

Black history in New Jersey dates back to the early days of the American Revolution, with roughly seven percent of New Jersey's population being made up of African Americans by 1790.

From its founding, New Jersey had deep ties to slavery, incentivized by land grants that gave settlers land if they brought enslaved people to the colony and strict slave codes. Thousands of African American men and women participated in the Revolutionary War, serving in various roles on both sides, often as a means to gain freedom. By 1830, over two-thirds of all enslaved people in the North were held in New Jersey. New Jersey was slow to ratify key amendments ending slavery and granting civil rights, initially resisting the 14th and 15th Amendments. New Jersey was also the last northern state to ratify the 13th Amendment.

Still, New Jersey has a rich history of Black liberation, spanning contributions from Revolutionary War soldiers and freedom seekers on the Underground Railroad to modern civil rights leaders shaping American democracy.

Montclair Brewery is a Black-owned microbrewery and tasting room that was born from the vision of co-owner, Leo Sawadogo, who turned his passion of home brewing and hosting into a successful business. For about 13 years, Leo has been brewing batches of beer in his home and gifting bottles to friends and family. After three years of planning along with his wife and co-owner, Denise, they secured a lease on their current building. After close to a year of construction, Montclair Brewery opened its doors in October 2018. They are currently in the midst of expanding with a 2nd location in East Orange, New Jersey.

“It is an honor to host this event on behalf of the Governor and Lt. Governor,” **said Leo Sawadogo, co-owner of Montclair Brewery**. “I look forward to having them tasting our craft beers and thanking the Governor personally for making it a little easier for breweries to do business in the state.”

“As the state's first Black-owned brewery, we are excited to host this event on behalf of the Governor,” **said Denise Ford-Sawadogo, co-owner of Montclair Brewery**. “Since the beginning in 2018, we have celebrated our culture and honored Black icons and look forward to this event to continue that trajectory.”

Last November, Governor Murphy and Lieutenant Governor Way officially **launched**

(https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://t.e2ma.net/click/b6kzzm/nrdit/njnnebb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtBA!MEGoa8DwtNSZJ7MeVWEY_fm4sOsJ8JzGj5khJ8m9GXKGvAOsgGoSEcAtC) Jersey's celebration of the nation's 250th Anniversary. The years-long initiative is led by **RevolutionNJ** (https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://t.e2ma.net/click/b6kzzm/nrdit/3bonebb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtBA!MEGoa8DwtNSZJ7MeVWEY_fm4sOsJ8JzGj5khJ8m9GXKGvAOsgGoSEcAtC) New Jersey's official organization charged with planning and promoting the state's 250th anniversary commemoration and serving as New Jersey's representative to **America250**

(https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://t.e2ma.net/click/b6kzzm/nrdit/j4onebb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtBA!MEGoa8DwtNSZJ7MeVWEY_fm4sOsJ8JzGj5khJ8m9GXKGvAOsgGoSEcAtC) the U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission. RevolutionNJ and the New Jersey Division of Travel & Tourism will host events across the state, highlighting New Jersey's critical role in the nation's history and culminating in a marquee event to celebrate July 4, 2026, marking the signing of the Declaration of Independence and our nation's 250th year of independence.

Programming offered by RevolutionNJ includes:

Tavern Talks: An interactive series of events that takes you back in time, featuring history that happened on your doorstep. Reenactors immerse participants in the past using questions and prompts to help you explore not only the past, but also issues you and your community face today. This popular program is taking place across the state at

different microbreweries.

Revolutionary Lives: Living the American Experiment Then and Now Traveling Exhibition: Coming this year, this exhibition will bring the stories of diverse people during the American Revolution in New Jersey to audiences across the state. This program will be offered free of charge and will take place at libraries, senior centers, and city halls, among other sites.

The RevolutionNJ Race Series: Launched at Monmouth Battlefield State Park in August 2024, this race series will include 5k races around several key Revolutionary War sites in New Jersey and will continue through the anniversary period. These races will continue again in spring 2025.

History Happened Here: This educational programming invites middle and high school students to conduct research on a topic of their own choosing that connects to the American ideals of freedom, justice, equality, self-determination, and the pursuit of happiness.

Foundations of Democracy: This resource provides teachers with a comprehensive annotated list of elementary civics materials, including activities that cultivate active citizenship and foster a democratic classroom.

Art Installations: RevolutionNJ will also be partnering with the New Jersey Arts Council to launch a series of Revolutionary-inspired installations throughout the state showcasing local artists.

Governor Phil Murphy

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Office of Governor PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625
609-292-6000