

AMERICANS, OUR HISTORY, AND THE 250TH: A DATA STORY

Americans value history. But not all Americans engage with history. What will engage more people with history?

First, consider their motivations for leisure travel. For most, it is a combination of relaxing and exploring.

Here's the bad news. Most people don't consider history "relaxing."

"I associate history with having to think and use my brain while my leisure time is meant to do as little thinking as possible."

But many do think history is a vital part of exploration ... of their understanding of what makes a place special.

"History definitely adds to the character and background of a vacation place. It defines what the place is, who it is, and its place in our American landscape."

What would engage them more with history?

They said it needs to:

- Be interactive ... for children and adults
- Share living history ... with demonstrations where history actually happened
- Focus on the sense of place ... the people, landscape, music, culture, and food
- Make them feel good about learning something ... even if learning isn't their goal

There was one barrier to history that non-visitors persistently noted.

Inclusion.

They just didn't feel history museums and historic sites were inclusive enough.

"I think rather than catering to the botched history most of us grew up on, historical sites and museums should focus on the facts without withholding or sugar-coating details."

"I find it really sad that many voices are not represented. It seems to me to always be white, straight, Christian men, and I would love to hear and see the world visions and voices of other marginalized or underrepresented communities more loudly and fiercely represented."

And that lack of inclusion affects their choices about engaging with history ... and how they view the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

"I want to feel empowered ..."

Though there is good news about the 250th: the majority of Americans DO want to mark it.

Some are enthusiastic and want to celebrate in traditional and celebratory ways.

But others want an inclusive commemoration that honors what we have accomplished while also acknowledging our country still has work to do to create an equal society for all.

So how do we come together for the 250th? By:

- Commemorating 250 years
- Exploring what freedom really means
- Striving to achieve freedom and equality of opportunity for all in America
- Using history to reach and achieve those values
- Asking Americans to be part of that process of making a better American future... through history
- Being inclusive in the past that is shared and in the visioning for what tomorrow can bring

"In 2026, hopefully we will have given up the divisiveness that dominates today and will be reaching for a better understanding and empathy for the experiences, contributions, and sacrifices within the diversity that contributes so much to the greatness of our country. We will also recognize that, as humans, we have made mistakes and will continue to admit to them, learn from them and continue to strive for that 'more perfect Union' for everyone in our diverse population."

Source info

"Americans, Our History, and the 250th" Data Story was created by Wilkening Consulting on behalf of the Virginia Tourism Corporation. Research fielded includes:

- Fall 2019 Surveys of Museum-Goers and Broader Population
- Winter 2020 Online Qualitative Panels of Museum-Goers and Broader Population

*Data Stories share research about both museum-goers (who visit multiple museums each year) and the broader population (including casual and non-visitors to museums).