

INDEPENDENCE 250!

THE SECOND CIRCUIT CELEBRATES *INDEPENDENCE 250!*



The Sagamore



Declaring Independence Panel (from l. to r.): Hon. Dennis Jacobs (2d Cir.), with Professors Akhil Reed Amar, Mary Sarah Bilder, and Joanne B. Freeman



The Legacy of Independence Panel (from l. to r.): Hon. Reena Raggi (2d Cir.), with Professors Akhil Reed Amar, Gordon S. Wood, and Jack N. Rakove



Securing Independence Panel (from l. to r.): Professor Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy and Rick Atkinson

This summer, more than 700 judges, lawyers, and guests gathered in Bolton Landing, NY for the 2026 Second Circuit Judicial Conference. Organized by Chief Judge Debra Ann Livingston, Circuit Judge Reena Raggi, and a Planning Committee of judges and lawyers, the Conference brought together the country's foremost Revolutionary era historians to celebrate the ideas, events, and people critical to procurement of American independence. At the Conference's opening night, Second Circuit Justice Sonia Sotomayor offered reflections on the 250th anniversary of American independence, followed by a fireworks display over Lake George. The next morning, Pulitzer Prize winning Stanford historian Jack Rakove delivered the Conference Keynote Address: "American Independence: Decision and Declaration." This was followed by four programs over two days.

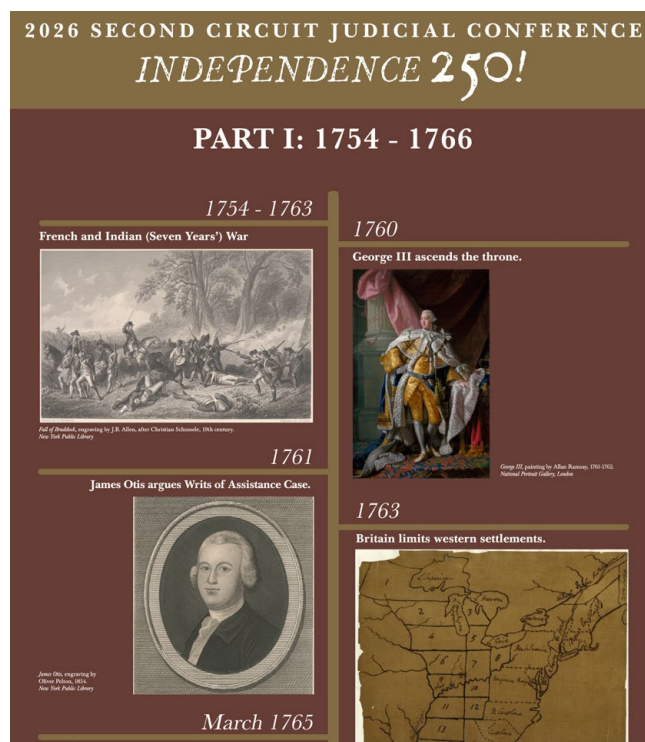
The first program, "Debating Independence," saw Circuit Judge Barrington D. Parker moderate a conversation between Pulitzer Prize winning Brown historian Gordon Wood—the preeminent scholar of the American Revolution—and University of Virginia historian Andrew O'Shaughnessy (author of the multi-prize-winning "Men Who Lost America") about the "imperial debate" leading to independence. In the second program, "Declaring Independence," Circuit Judge Dennis Jacobs engaged Bancroft Prize winning Boston College historian Mary Sarah Bilder, and Yale historians Joanne Freeman and Akhil Amar in a conversation about the Declaration of Independence: its antecedents, drafting, editing, and uses. In the third program (ret.) Army four-star General David Petraeus, Pulitzer Prize winning military historian Rick Atkinson, and Prof. O'Shaughnessy discussed the challenges of the Revolutionary War, its critical battles, and Washington's evolution as a leader. In the final program, "The Legacy of Independence," Judge Raggi moderated a conversation among Professors Wood, Rakove, and Amar about how independence led to a decade of constitutional experimentation, the emergence of the federal judiciary, and the Declaration's transformation—particularly by Lincoln—from a revolutionary to an aspirational document. Making what turned out to be his last public appearance, Prof. Wood closed the Conference

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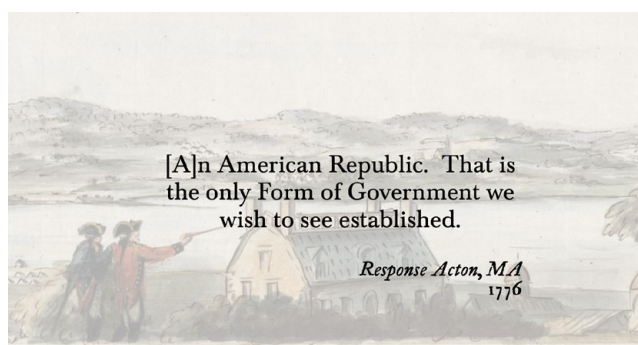
on an inspirational note by reminding everyone that “to be an American is not to be someone, but to believe in something,” specifically, the principles pronounced in the Declaration of Independence.

Conference programs were greatly enhanced by the extraordinary efforts of the Second Circuit Library, particularly Chief Circuit Librarian Luis Lopez, Head of Tech Services Librarian Peter D’Antonio, and Digital Strategies Librarian Allison Morrissey, who designed and produced several original publications and graphic projects to celebrate the Semiquincentennial. Among these were 13 six-foot high, illustrated timeline banners detailing more than 100 key events from George III’s accession to the British throne in 1760 to Washington’s surrender of Continental Army command in 1783; and 350 illustrated contemporaneous quotation shown in four streams, each curated to one of the Conference programs. The text of the timeline and quotations were also made available to conferees in a [64-page booklet](#). The centerpiece of the Library’s efforts was a meticulously designed 304-page book of [Primary Source Readings book](#), each selection illustrated with a contemporaneous etched print. Among the readings included in this book were James Otis’s *Speech Against the Writs of Assistance*, John Dickinson’s *Letters from a Pennsylvania Farmer*, Benjamin Franklin’s satiric *Rules by Which a Great Empire May Be Reduced to a Small One*, Edmund Burke’s *Speech on Conciliation with the Colonies*, Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*, John Adams’s *Thoughts on Government*, George Mason’s *Virginia Declaration of Rights*, and Thomas Jefferson’s *Original Rough Draught of the Declaration of Independence*. For the final Conference dinner, the Library produced a video montage of the Circuit’s newest judges reciting the Declaration of Independence.

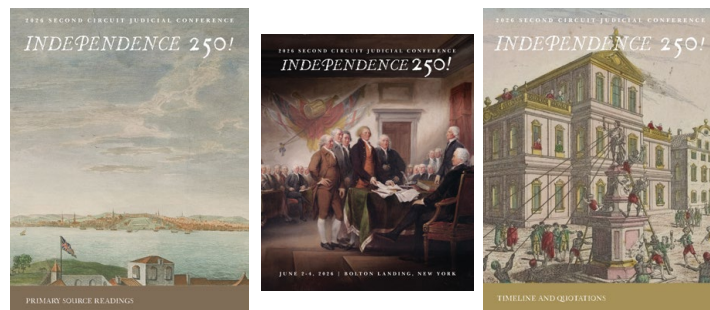
You can explore digital versions of these and other conference materials (accessible by the links above), and you can visit the timeline banners, which will soon be on display in the U.S. Courthouses in Manhattan and Brooklyn.



Detail of a timeline banner



An on-screen illustrated quotation



Three of the booklets produced by the Second Circuit Library