

National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission
S. 2495, the National Liberty Memorial Act
June 27, 2006

Senator Christopher J. Dodd

I would like to thank the Commission for holding this hearing on legislation I introduced earlier this year along with my colleagues, Senators Grassley, Byrd, Chafee, Allen, Dole and Obama. I regret that I am unable to be with you today due to Senate business but I know you will hear compelling testimony from Maurice Barboza, the founder of the National Mall Liberty Fund D.C., and many others.

The breadth and depth of patriotic contributions by African Americans in the Revolutionary war have gone practically unrecognized throughout American history. Historians now estimate that more than 5,000 slaves and free blacks fought in the army, navy, and militia. They served and struggled directly alongside their white counterparts in major battles from Lexington to Yorktown. While black soldiers from all the colonies participated in these conflicts, the majority hailed from the North, many from my State of Connecticut. Many of these soldiers were integrated throughout Connecticut's various regiments. In fact, General Washington's Army, headquartered in White Plains, New York in 1778 included 210 black soldiers from Connecticut.

Further, Timon Negro participated at Lexington and Cash Africa fought with the Marquis de Lafayette's army at Yorktown. Jordan Freeman and Lambo Latham fought bravely but were killed in 1781 at Fort Griswold during the Battle of Groton Heights. A slave named Jack Arabus was sent to war in place of his master's son. When he returned from fighting, he was denied his freedom. Arabas' fight for freedom prompted the movement that led to the eventual emancipation of all slaves in Northern states. Actions such as these laid the foundation for later emancipation of all American slaves and the modern Civil rights movement.

In 1986, as a result of my constituent, Maurice Barboza's efforts, Congress authorized and President Reagan signed a law for construction of a memorial to these early patriots. The memorial was to be placed at Constitution Gardens on the National Mall. The group in charge of the project fell into disarray and the memorial was never constructed. In the interim, I am aware, even supportive, that Congress passed the Commemorative Works Act (CWA) amendments which restricted the construction of further monuments on the Mall.

However, it is my understanding that this proposed memorial and the proposed memorial to Dr. King were the only preexisting memorial proposals that were exempted by the CWA to create the Reserve. It is my further understanding that since the Dr. King Memorial did not expire, the National Liberty Memorial is the only commemorative work that will ever fall into the category of a project that may have expired and was revived. The bill I introduced, S. 2495, would not set a precedent for further exemptions or additional construction. In fact, this modest memorial will enhance the legacy of the Mall and pay homage to the role that these brave men played in the creation of America's fundamental values.

I continue to believe that this memorial highlighting the heroic efforts and the diversity of the men who fought in the Revolutionary War deserves a place within Constitution Gardens on the Mall. These soldiers have waited more than 200 years to tell their story and we must honor their sacrifice and memory with a worthy memorial along the Mall. I ask that you join me and my colleagues in support of retaining this site in Constitution Gardens.