



News

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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University of Richmond to host first event in Civil War Sesquicentennial series April 29; registrations now being accepted

In 1859, the United States was still two years from the beginning of the Civil War, yet there were signs that things were about to change. John Brown led a raid on the armory at Harper's Ferry, the slave-based economy of the South was at an all-time peak and a presidential election with some calling for radical change was nearing.

A group of nationally recognized Civil War historians will gather April 29, 2009 at the University of Richmond's Robins Center to explore the state of the country two years before the first shots were fired in the nation's deadliest conflict.

"America on the Eve of the Civil War" is the first in a series of seven annual conferences and two symposia sponsored by the [Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission](#), created by the Virginia General Assembly to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Virginia's participation in the war. It also is the first Civil War sesquicentennial commemorative event in the nation, according to William J. Howell, Speaker of the Virginia House of Delegates, who chairs the commission. Senator Charles J. Colgan Sr., President pro tempore of the Virginia Senate, is the vice-chair of the commission.

Registration for the free, day-long conference is now open and will be limited to 2,500 people. To register, go to [VirginiaCivilWar.org](#) or call (804) 786-3591.

Led by conference chair Edward L. Ayers, president of the University of Richmond and an award-winning historian and author of the American South, the program will focus on four

topics from the year 1859:

- Taking Stock of the Nation – The U.S. is completing its most exhaustive census to date and all parts of the country are booming. Are the regions becoming more integrated or divergent? How will the growth affect politics, religion and reform?
- The Future of Virginia and the South – The slave-based economy of the South is at an all-time peak, and slaves and cotton have never been worth more. Will those trends continue?
- Making Sense of John Brown’s Raid – The electrifying event of 1859 was John Brown’s raid on the armory at Harpers Ferry. What are the long-term effects of the raid?
- Predictions for the Election of 1860 – Panelists will discuss the potential candidates of each party and determine who has the best chance for winning the nomination and general election. There is turmoil among the Democrats, and Southern-rights advocates are calling for radical change.

The interactive program will feature speakers from varied perspectives and will be similar to news programs like “Face the Nation” and “Meet the Press.” Speakers will limit themselves only to what would have been known in 1859.

Panelists for session one are: Christy S. Coleman, president, American Civil War Center at Historic Tredegar; Gary W. Gallagher, John L. Nau III Professor in the History of the American Civil War, University of Virginia; Walter Johnson, professor of history and African-American studies, Harvard University; and Joan Waugh, professor of history, UCLA.

Session two panelists are: Charles B. Dew, Ephraim Williams Professor of American History, Williams College; Robert C. Kenzer, professor of history and American studies, University of Richmond; Gregg Kimball, historian and director of publications and educational

Civil War Sesquicentennial, 12/08/08, 3.

services, Library of Virginia; Nelson D. Lankford, Virginius Dabney editor of the Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, Virginia Historical Society; and Laurant Lee, curator of African-American history, Virginia Historical Society.

Session three panelists are: David W. Blight, Class of 1954 Professor of American History, Yale University; David Reynolds, distinguished professor of English, Baruch College and Graduate School, City University of New York; Manisha Sinha, associate professor of Afro-American studies, University of Massachusetts, Amherst; and Clarence Walker, professor of history, University of California at Davis.

Fourth session panelists are: Jean H. Baker, professor of history, Goucher College; Daniel W. Crofts, professor of history, The College of New Jersey; Eric Foner, DeWitt Clinton Professor of History, Columbia University; and Elizabeth Varon, professor of history, Temple University.

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