





# Happy 250th birthday, USA!

The United States of America is celebrating its **semiquincentennial anniversary** in 2026. This newsletter looks at the 250-year history of the country from different perspectives. **How have ideas of American national identity and belonging changed over the past 250 years?** We will investigate this question in the context of US history, looking at anniversaries of the past and what they celebrated, whose history was remembered and how the narrative might have differed from reality.

## How it works: project plan

You are going to analyze different events in US history by working individually and in groups. Before you start, read the project plan. Refer back to it while working on steps 1-5, and tick the box every time you're finished with one of the steps.

	Individual / Group work	Task	Materials	Done? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Step 1	Individual	Explore the founding of the US in 1776. Fill in the respective column in the grid.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>tasks step 1</li> <li>grid / timeline</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Step 2	Home group 	Get together in groups of five (= your home group). Each one of you finds out more about one US anniversary (50, 100, 150, 200, 250 years). You'll become an expert on your chosen anniversary. Work through the materials and do the tasks concerning your anniversary. Take notes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>tasks step 2-3</li> <li>your notes</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Step 3	Expert group 	Get together with the other experts on the same anniversary (=your expert group). Compare and discuss your findings. In the grid, fill in the respective column for your anniversary. Do more research in case you think that important background information is missing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>your notes</li> <li>grid / timeline</li> <li>research tool</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Step 4	Home group 	Get back together with your home group. Present your anniversary using your notes and the grid. Create a timeline together by completing the grid.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>your notes</li> <li>grid / timeline</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Step 5	Home group 	Find a creative way (e.g. museum exhibition, poetry performance) to answer the lead question: <b>How have ideas of American national identity and belonging changed over the past 250 years?</b> Use your timeline as a starting point.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>your notes</li> <li>grid / timeline</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Step 1

## 1776: The founding of the USA

### Individual work



Signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776 in Philadelphia

1. Give an objective description of the scene above.
2. Find out about the context of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the contents of the document. What core values does it promote? What promises does it make?
3. Think about who was living in the US at that time. Who is represented in the scene? Who isn't?
4. Fill in the column of the timeline grid titled "1776: the founding". Do research in case you feel like there is something missing to understand the full picture better.

## Step 2-3

## 1826: 50 years USA

### Home group / Expert group A

As the young United States marked the **50th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 1826**, towns and villages across the nation celebrated with parades, speeches, and patriotic ceremony. Newspapers of the time captured the pride and optimism of the day, often echoing President John Quincy Adams's description of a joyful nation. Yet beneath the festive surface lay a society shaped by strict social roles, limited rights, and deep inequalities. The following fictitious small town newspaper article recreates how such a celebration might have been reported.

# The Flemington Gazette

## “Our Jubilee of Independence Celebrated with Great Ardor”

FLEMINGTON, N.J., July 4.

This morning dawned bright and temperate upon the **Fiftieth Anniversary of American Independence**, and our village rose early to greet the day with the reverence due to so signal an occasion. As President John Quincy Adams has so fittingly written of this day, “every heart was bounding with joy and every voice was tuned to gratulation” – and such was surely the spirit that animated Flemington.

At sunrise the church bell was rung with solemn dignity, and at nine o'clock the fifty guns were discharged from the green, each report echoing the years that have passed since the Declaration first proclaimed our liberties.

The procession formed at the courthouse shortly thereafter, led by the Survivors of the '76 Revolution, whose presence drew heartfelt applause from all assembled. Though their number grows smaller with each passing year, their step – though measured – remains steady, and their countenances bore the quiet pride of men who have seen the Republic from its infancy to its present flourishing condition.

Following the veterans marched the town officers, the militia company, and a delegation of schoolchildren bearing garlands and small flags. The children sang a hymn of thanksgiving as they passed the square, their voices rising sweetly above the crowd.

### The Esteemed Women of Our Town

No account of the day would be complete without acknowledging the indefatigable labors of the women of Flemington, whose preparations lent the celebration its grace and order. The church was adorned with wreaths and ribbons of their making, and the long tables set beneath the elms were furnished with cakes, preserves, and other delicacies prepared with their customary skill.

In the oration delivered at noon, the speaker paid particular tribute to the women of the Republic, declaring them the “guardians of virtue” and the “gentle instructors of patriotism in the rising generation.” Their influence, he observed, is felt not in the halls of legislation but in the hearthside cultivation of character, where the foundations of the nation are daily renewed. The sentiment was met with warm approbation, for all present recognized the truth of his words. The women of our town, though not called to public office, are nonetheless the moral keepers of our civic spirit, and their contributions to the day's festivities were both visible and deeply felt.

### Reading of the Declaration

At one o'clock, the crowd gathered before the courthouse steps for the public reading of the Declaration of Independence. The familiar words – “all men are created equal” – were received with solemn attention, and many an eye glistened as the reader's voice carried across the green. The principles therein contained remain the pride of our people and the envy of nations less fortunate.

### A Day of Harmony and Gratitude

The afternoon was spent in cheerful fellowship. Families picnicked beneath the shade, children played at hoops and battledore, and the veterans recounted stories of the old struggle to eager listeners. As evening approached, lanterns were hung along Main Street, and the townsfolk gathered once more to sing patriotic airs. Thus has Flemington observed the Jubilee of our Independence – with gratitude for the blessings of liberty, reverence for the founders of our nation, and renewed devotion to the principles that have guided us these fifty years. May the next fifty find us still united in purpose, prosperous in industry, and steadfast in the cause of freedom.

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# Happy 250th birthday, USA!

1. a) According to the fictitious article, how is the 50th anniversary of US independence celebrated in Flemington?  
b) How does the article describe the mood of the town on the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence?  
c) How does the tone of the article reflect the values of the time?
2. a) Highlight phrases in the newspaper article that define the role of women at the time.  
b) Read the fact file below about women in the US in 1826. How is this information reflected in the article?  
c) Use the newspaper article and the fact file information to write a newspaper editorial response from a woman's perspective. Comment on women's role in society at that time.

OR

Explore the status of women's rights in the United States today. You can start by looking up "The State of Women's Rights" on the Human Rights Watch website. Then create an informative social media post (choosing a fitting format) that reflects upon the development of women's rights in the US in the past 200 years. What has evolved, what still needs to change?

## Women in the US, 1826

- women made up roughly 50% of the US population
- 90% lived in rural or semi-rural communities
- most were married by their early 20s; marriage was considered their primary social role
- average number of children per woman: 5-7
- no voting rights
- not allowed to hold public office, serve on juries, speak in most public meetings, own property, sign contracts, control her wages, sue or be sued in their own name
- literacy rate of white women: 50-60%, free Black women: 20-30%, enslaved women: mostly illiterate
- higher education for women was rare (the first women's college – Mount Holyoke – didn't open until 1837)
- fewer than 10% of women worked for wages

3. Which groups of US residents are not mentioned in the article? Why might that be important?
4. In your expert group (A), fill in the respective column for this anniversary in the timeline grid.

## Step 2-3

## 1876: 100 years USA

### Home group / Expert group B



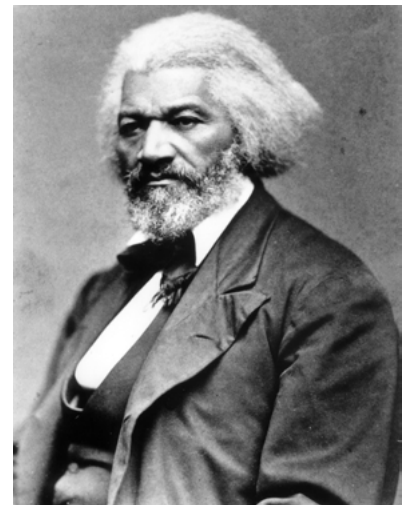
By the time the United States reached the **100th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 1876**, the nation stood at a crossroads. Eleven years had passed since the end of the American Civil War (1861-1865) between the northern states (the Union) and the southern states (the Confederacy). The war was fought mainly about slavery. The North won, which meant the country had stayed united and slavery had been formally abolished – at least on paper. However, the war had also caused massive casualties and left deep social conflicts. After the war, Black Americans had briefly experienced new freedoms in the Reconstruction era (approximately 12 years after the end of the war): three new amendments were added to the Constitution, formally granting citizenship and equal rights to formerly enslaved Black Americans. Finally at least officially they were given voting rights, access to public schooling, and political representation. Yet the promise of equality was already under attack by the time the US celebrated its 100th birthday. In the South, violence, intimidation, and discrim-

inatory, oppressive laws made by white Americans against Black Americans signalled the rise of what would soon become Jim Crow. (The so-called Jim Crow laws were introduced in the Southern states and enforced racial segregation, thus upholding a system of racial oppression in American society.) While the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia celebrated a century of American progress, many Black Americans faced a harsh reality: the ideals of 1776 were still unevenly applied, and their hard-won rights were under threat.

- How does the introductory text above illustrate the gap between the nation's founding principles and the situation one hundred years later?
  - Which rights and opportunities were gained, and why were these achievements already under threat by the time of the Centennial?
  - What does this contrast reveal about national memory, public celebrations, and the selective way history can be presented?
- Look at the poster above, advertising the “Centennial Exposition” that was held as part of the celebrations in 1876. What story does the poster tell about the US and its society at that time? Focus on who is presented and how, and look for symbols of progress.
  - What message does the poster send about national pride and unity?
- Read the profile of Frederick Douglass and the quote below. How does Douglass challenge the poster's version of the US?

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Frederick Douglass (1818–1895) was one of the most influential African American speakers, writers, and civil-rights activists of the 19th century. Born into slavery in Maryland, he escaped at the age of 20 and built a new life in the free North. There he became famous for his powerful speeches and autobiographies, which exposed the cruelty of slavery and demanded equal rights for Black Americans. After the Civil War, Douglass played a major role during Reconstruction, fighting for voting rights, education, and political participation for formerly enslaved people. By 1876, the year of the Centennial Exposition, he warned that the United States was celebrating 100 years of freedom while Black Americans were losing many of the rights they had just gained. His speeches from this period highlight the gap between American ideals and American reality. Today, Douglass is remembered as a symbol of courage, justice, and the power of words.



*“I am not included within the pale of glorious anniversary! Your high independence only reveals the immeasurable distance between us. The blessings in which you, this day, rejoice, are not enjoyed in common. – The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought light and healing to you, has brought stripes and death to me. This Fourth July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn.”*

Frederick Douglass, July 5, 1852, in his speech “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?”

3. **b) How does the message of the poster in task 2 compare to the lived reality of Black Americans in 1876?**
4. **Write a caption for the Bicentennial Exposition poster from Douglass’s perspective. Think about: What would he have had to say about this depiction of the US? Where would he have agreed / disagreed? Why?**  
**OR**  
**What do you think the poster for the Centennial Exposition would have looked like if Douglass had designed it? Create a picture that depicts the US from his perspective (e.g. by using an AI tool). Think about: What message would he have wanted to send about the US at that time? What and who would be shown? How? Which symbols and allegories would he use?**
5. **In your expert group (B), fill in the respective column for this anniversary in the timeline grid.**

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## Step 2-3

## 1926: 150 years USA

### Home group / Expert group C

By the time the United States celebrated the **150th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 1926**, Native Americans were living through a period of deep contradiction. Just two years earlier, the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 had granted all Native Americans legal US citizenship, but voting rights were still controlled or denied by individual states. Many states used discriminatory laws, literacy tests, or residency rules to prevent Native Americans from voting, meaning that citizenship on paper did not translate into full political participation in practice. Federal policies continued to push assimilation. Assimilation policies aimed to force Native Americans to abandon their languages, religions, and cultural practices in order to adopt Euro-American norms instead. Boarding schools, in particular, removed children from their families and attempted to “Americanize” them through strict discipline and cultural suppression. While the Sesqui-centennial celebrations focused on national pride, modern progress, and the “American story,” Native Americans were often portrayed as part of the distant past rather than as contemporary communities fighting for rights, sovereignty, and recognition.



Debating class at Carlisle Indian School (boarding school for Native American students), Carlisle, Pennsylvania, 1901

1. Describe where you see signs of forced assimilation in the picture from Carlisle Indian School, a boarding school founded under US governmental authority. You can also research further images on the website of the Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center. What do these images reveal about Native American life 150 years after the Declaration of Independence?

### Find out more

- Look up some names in the Student record section on the website of the Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center. What do you notice?
- Search for images of individual students, for example a student named Tom Torlino (Navajo). You'll find a picture of him from 1882 and one from 1885. What changed?

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2. “Kill the Indian in him, and save the man” (coined by R. H. Pratt, founder of the Carlisle Indian School, in 1892) is a deeply racist and violent statement that was used in the context of assimilation. Explain what this sentence reveals about the racist ideology that is central to assimilation and boarding schools in particular.
3. Research who Zitkala Ša was and the role she played in the fight for Native Americans’ rights. Take notes.
4. How do you imagine Native Americans participated in celebrations in 1926? To get started, read the fact file about the history of Columbus Day below, another similarly controversial US holiday. Go through your notes from task 1-3 again. Then present your ideas in one of the following ways:
  - a multi-perspective collage using, for example, quotes or key words from tasks 1-3, images, speech bubbles, symbols ...

**OR**

  - a short analytical paragraph, explaining why Native Americans were ambivalent about the 1926 celebrations

### The history of Columbus Day

- **1492:** from the perspective of European colonists, the Italian sailor Christopher Columbus, in the service of Spain, ‘discovers’ America on October 12, 1492
- **1892:** Columbus Day is officially celebrated as a one-time national holiday to commemorate the “discovery” of America
- **1971:** Columbus Day becomes an official federal holiday in the US
- **1990s:** institutional criticism leads to local celebrations of Indigenous People’s Day instead of Columbus Day
- **2010s:** local protests against Columbus Day and the narrative around it
- **around 2020:** after decades of pressure by Indigenous communities, many statues of Columbus have been officially taken down
- **2021:** President Joe Biden proclaims Indigenous Peoples’ Day a national holiday, while still keeping Columbus Day
- **2026:** some US states do not recognize Columbus Day at all and only celebrate Indigenous People’s Day

5. In your expert group (C), fill in the respective column for this anniversary in the timeline grid.

## Step 2-3

## 1976: 200 years USA

### Home group / Expert group D

When the United States celebrated the **200th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 1976**, the country was still struggling with the deep wounds left by the Vietnam War, which had ended only the year before. The Bicentennial was meant to be a moment of national pride, unity, and reflection, yet many Americans felt disillusioned, divided, or uncertain about the nation's direction. Returning veterans often faced public criticism, trauma, and a lack of support, while protests, political scandals, and social movements had shaken people's trust in government and traditional institutions. The Vietnam War itself had become one of the most controversial conflicts in US history: many Americans questioned its purpose, condemned the high casualty rates, and opposed the draft, leading to massive nationwide protests. The war also left deep psychological scars on soldiers and civilians, contributing to a sense of national grief and moral uncertainty. At the same time, the Watergate scandal had revealed that members of President Nixon's re-election team had broken into the Democratic Party headquarters to steal documents and plant listening devices – and that the administration then tried to hide its involvement by lying to investigators, destroying evidence, and misusing government agencies. When the truth came out, Nixon resigned – the first US president ever to do so – which dramatically increased public mistrust in the government and raised doubts about political integrity. Against this backdrop, the Bicentennial celebrations tried to present a hopeful image of American resilience – but the reality for many citizens was far more complicated.

### 1. Read the fictitious diary entry of a Vietnam war veteran from July 4, 1976.

I'm sitting on the fire escape outside my apartment in North Philadelphia and it's like I'm listening to two different Americas.

I can hear the TV from the living room, hammering the Bicentennial into my ears again. I don't need to see the screen to know what's on it – smiling families in colonial costumes, kids waving flags, a giant birthday cake for the nation. On TV, the past is all harmony and progress. No poor neighborhoods. No war. No protests. Just music and fireworks.

From down on 33rd St & Diamond St, I can hear something else. Drums. Chants. A marching band playing slightly out of tune. I look down from my perch on the fire escape and see the Coalition protest parade turning into my street. It's nothing like the official parade on TV: it's loud, messy, and very real.

In the midst of the protesters, I notice some guys from Vietnam Veterans Against the War. They're wearing their old army uniforms. I watch them come closer as they shout: "One, two, three, four – we won't fight another rich man's war!" I join their chant before I even realize it, and suddenly I'm back in the Vietnam jungle, and all I can hear and feel are the deafening noise of warfare and the terrible fear. I feel a wave of anger coming on as I ask myself: All that, for what? To come home to a country that doesn't even appreciate all that you sacrificed for it, or how hard you fought for it. Instead of glory and honor, all you got was unemployment, loneliness, so many limitations and so little support. Oh, and a medal, of course.

Watching the march, I think about the draft dodgers I once had so much resentment for. Back then I thought they were cowards. Now I'm not so sure. Maybe they saw the truth earlier – refusing to kill strangers in a senseless war, or die for politicians who lied to us. And the peace protesters ... I used to think they were spitting on us. Now I can see they were fighting for us, trying to bring us home.

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Behind the veterans march other activists – Native Americans, Black Americans, Puerto Ricans, women's rights activists, LGBTQ groups – all carrying signs about violence, bad schools, housing, jobs, and their call for equality. People are watching the protest from the sidewalks. Some of them are raising their fists and clapping in support. Others are watching from inside their apartments, staring down at the tumultuous street through their broken windows. They don't seem to care about what is happening on the street.

The protest route tells its own story. They're marching through North Philadelphia, my neighborhood, with its abandoned houses, littered sidewalks, and disillusioned teens hanging around the burned out cars. The "other" USA. I can't help but ask myself: What are we really celebrating today? On TV, they're selling us a glorious revolution that brought us freedom. A celebration of the Founding Fathers and the heroic soldiers (hypocrites ...) that fought for and defended their promises. And all the time happy consumers are buying all that Bicentennial merchandise and stuffing their faces with red, blue and white ice cream. But I know that too many people in my neighborhood never got their share of that promised freedom and wealth. This march below my window is shining a light on the shadows: the poverty, the discrimination, the disillusionment, and a government that seems to have enough money for years of war but not enough for our schools and hospitals.

200 years of waving the flag while leaving so many of us behind, how are we supposed to still believe in the American Dream?

2. a) Analyze how the historical context of 1976 shapes the veteran's emotional response in the diary entry.
  - b) Explain the contrast between the official Bicentennial celebrations and the reality depicted in the diary entry.
  - c) Evaluate the narrator's changing perspective on draft dodgers and peace protesters.
  - d) Compare the Bicentennial's message of "freedom and progress" with the veteran's view of the American Dream.
3. a) Research the goals, symbolism, imagery and public reception of the "Bicentennial Wagon Train Pilgrimage" of 1976.
  - b) Compare this narrative with the veteran's diary entry. Evaluate what these conflicting perspectives suggest about who was included – and who was excluded – in the Bicentennial's vision of the US.
4. Discuss: Can a nation celebrate its past while still dealing with painful recent events? What should a celebration include to feel honest and meaningful in your opinion?
5. In your expert group (D), fill in the respective column for this anniversary in the timeline grid.

## Step 2-3

## 2026: 250 years USA

### Home group / Expert group E

As the United States approaches the **250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 2026**, national celebrations once again raise questions about how the country understands its past and how it presents its identity today. Public displays – such as the banners on federal buildings highlighting selected historical figures – and official speeches by political leaders, including President Trump, show how different groups try to shape the story of America’s heroes and values, as well as its future direction. At the same time, debates about education, representation, and national memory reveal that the meaning of “American history” is far from settled. In this section, you will examine how the 250th anniversary is being presented in 2026 and consider what these choices say about the nation’s priorities, divisions, and hopes for the next chapter of its history.

1. **Several banners presenting “heroes in American education” were hung on the building which houses the US Department of Education in Washington as part of the national celebrations of this anniversary. Among them are: Booker T. Washington (1856-1915), Catharine Beecher (1800-1878), and Charlie Kirk (1993-2025). Research into who each of the people are and what their contribution to the field of education was. What do you notice when you compare their input?**
2. **Find a video of President Trump’s address: “The Story of America: President Trump’s Freedom 250 Address”. The address is part of a video series that tells the story of American independence in the context of the 250th anniversary. You can find it on the website of the White House Washington, for example. Compare the atmosphere in the video to that in the painting of the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776 (see step 1). Note down any differences and similarities.**
3. **Find the Celebrations calendar on the website of Freedom 250 (official umbrella campaign marking the US 250th anniversary) and look up the “Rededicate 250” event on May 17, 2026. Watch the trailer and read about the event. Note your initial reactions to both. What is this event about?**
4. a) **Go to the website of the US National Archives and find the “Freedom 250” section. Find out and analyze what is exhibited and celebrated in the context of the 250-year anniversary. Evaluate the historical narratives: Which ones are emphasized and which ones are marginalized or absent?**  
b) **Discuss which artefacts you would include in a celebration of an anniversary in Germany or your home country. Explain how your choices address questions of inclusion, representation, and national identity.**
5. **In your expert group (E), fill in the respective column for this anniversary in the timeline grid.**

## Happy 250th birthday, USA!

	1776: the founding	1826: 50th	1876: 100th	1926: 150th	1976: 200th	2026: 250th
<b>What is celebrated?</b> (focus of the national narrative)						
<b>Who is included in the idea of the American nation?</b>						
<b>Who is missing or excluded?</b>						
<b>National ideals vs. reality</b>						
<b>Conclusion for anniversary</b>						

### Step 1

### 1776: The founding of the USA

- large, formal room; high ceilings, red curtains, green-covered tables arranged in a U-shape
  - group of men in 18th-century clothing gathered at the front
  - central table: one man signs a document, others observe
  - atmosphere: solemn and ceremonial
  - composition: focus on political leaders engaged in an important moment of decision-making
- adoption of Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, during American Revolution (colonies decided to break away from British rule), mainly drafted by Thomas Jefferson
  - contents: justification for independence; list of grievances against King George III; accusation: British government violated colonists' rights
  - core values promoted: equality ("all men are created equal"), natural rights (life, liberty, pursuit of happiness), government by consent (governments gain legitimacy from the people), right to revolution (right to change or abolish abusive government)
  - promises: new nation based on these principles, citizens will enjoy fundamental rights and freedoms (these promises were not applied equally to all people in the colonies at the time)
- represented: political leadership of the thirteen colonies – white, property-owning, wealthy, influential men, = delegates of the Continental Congress, debated and approved the Declaration
  - not represented: women (no political rights), enslaved African Americans (large part of population, denied freedom and equality), free Black people (no political representation), Indigenous nations (excluded from colonial politics, portrayed as outsiders), poor white men without property (limited political influence)
  - painting reflects political reality: founding ideals were articulated by a small, privileged group; many others were excluded from decision-making process and rights promised in the Declaration
4. See grid.

### Step 2-3

### 1826: 50 years USA

### Expert group A

- a) highly ceremonial, patriotic celebration: day begins with church bell ringing and a 50-gun salute; formal procession follows, led by Revolutionary War veterans, town officials, militia, schoolchildren with garlands and flags; public reading of the Declaration of Independence; speeches praising national virtues; communal activities: picnics, games, singing; town is decorated; atmosphere = orderly, harmonious, festive
  - b) • mood: joyful, reverent, united; emphasis on pride, gratitude, patriotic devotion
    - echoes President Adams's description of nationwide joy, a shared optimism, and national purpose
  - c) • tone: formal, celebratory, deferential toward authority; reflects early 19th-century values: patriotism, social hierarchy, civic virtue; idealizes founding generation; emphasizes order, moral character, traditional gender roles
    - suggests a society that values stability and national pride; overlooking existing social inequalities

### 2. a) Relevant phrases include:

- “indefatigable labors of the women of Flemington”
- “whose preparations lent the celebration its grace and order”
- “cakes, preserves, and other delicacies prepared with their customary skill”
- “guardians of virtue”
- “gentle instructors of patriotism in the rising generation”
- “Their influence [...] is felt not in the halls of legislation but in the hearthside cultivation of character”
- “moral keepers of our civic spirit”

→ frames women as moral, domestic, supportive, responsible for children and community values, not as political actors

b) women praised for domestic labor and moral influence; shown in supportive, background roles; are excluded from public decision-making and leadership; women’s “proper place” presented as home and community, not politics; their contributions are celebrated only when they fit traditional gender roles

c) Individual solutions.

### 3. Article excludes:

- enslaved African Americans: large part of population, no rights or freedoms
- free Black Americans: faced severe discrimination, no political participation
- Indigenous peoples: were displaced and marginalized
- poor white laborers: no property and political influence
- immigrants: not fully integrated into political life

Why absence is important:

- reveals how the harmonious, united community portrayed is a selective version of history, ignoring inequalities, exclusions, and injustices that shaped American society
- reveals who was considered part of the political nation and who was not
- exposes the gap between the ideals of the Declaration and the lived reality of many people in 1826

### 4. See grid.

## Step 2-3

## 1876: 100 years USA

## Expert group B

- a) • contradiction between founding ideals (equality, liberty) and the national rhetoric, and especially Black Americans’ reality 100 years later
  - at first: Declaration’s universal rights and brief Reconstruction gains (citizenship, voting, participation)
  - then: violence, segregation, discriminatory laws → promise of 1776 not applied equally
- b) • Reconstruction: major legal progress (citizenship for the formerly enslaved, constitutional protection, voting rights, access to public institutions)
  - historic shift, but fragile and short-lived: by 1876, white supremacist violence, political backlash, new discriminatory laws

- c) • Centennial Exposition celebrates technological innovation, national unity, a century of progress
  - this optimistic narrative ignored the worsening conditions for Black Americans
  - contrast: national celebrations present selective history: emphasizing pride, overlooking injustice
  - shows how public memory can exclude marginalized groups, creating a false/incomplete “progress story”
- 2. a) • poster story: a confident, prosperous, culturally diverse USA
  - symbolic figures in elaborate costumes, gathered in harmony: stand for different nations/continents, suggest global admiration of the US; the US at the center of world progress
  - cityscape with ships, factories, grand buildings: industrial growth, technology, economic power
  - overall: US = modern, successful, unified nation
- b) • strong national pride; the US as a beacon of progress
  - harmonious gathering suggests unity, cooperation, international respect; implies that promises of 1776 were fulfilled; US as a model of civilization and prosperity
  - optimistic, celebratory message; ignores conflict and inequality
- 3. a) • poster's message: unity, prosperity, national pride; reality for Black Americans: violence, discrimination, rights being eroded
  - Centennial celebration of “progress” vs. Black communities facing intimidation, segregation, exclusion
  - triumphant imagery hides lack of equality; celebrations can mask deep social injustices
- b) Individual solutions.
- 4. Individual solutions.
- 5. See grid.

### Step 2-3

### 1926: 150 years USA

### Expert group C

1. Signs of forced assimilation:
  - identical Western-style clothing for all students: boarding schools' policy of replacing traditional Native dress with Euro-American uniforms
  - hair controlled and styled like the white teacher's: suppression of culturally and spiritually meaningful hairstyles
  - classroom as an assimilation space: English writing on chalkboard, Western furniture and piano, white teachers; Native children forced to abandon their languages, values, and customs
  - banner “LABOR CONQUERS ALL THINGS”: focus on manual labor and vocational training over academic education; shows intention to shape Native children into low-wage workers, not empowered citizens

- Tom Torlino “before and after” images show extreme transformation he went through at Carlisle: traditional clothing, jewellery, hairstyle – replaced by suit, short hair, no jewellery; visual proof of enforced cultural transformation
- 150 years after the Declaration, Native Americans were still pressured to erase their identities and assimilate, were denied equal rights and cultural autonomy

### 2. • core racist beliefs/assumptions:

- that Native culture was inferior and thus needed to be eliminated
- that Native people would only survive in American society by abandoning their own languages, religions, traditions, identities
- narrative of the “civilizing” mission:
  - Native children were viewed as needing strict discipline, Christian instruction, English-only education, and complete separation from their families and communities
- function of this racist ideology:
  - used by privileged white Americans in power to “justify” removing Native children from their homes, and forcing them into boarding schools deliberately designed to erase Indigenous cultures
- underlying violent logic and consequences: cultural destruction framed as benevolent “saving” even though no saving was needed; caused deep trauma, loss of language and heritage, and long-lasting harm to Native communities

### 3. Zitkala Ša (1876–1938):

- also known as Gertrude Simmons Bonnin; Yankton Dakota writer, musician, educator, and political activist
- attended a boarding school; later wrote powerful autobiographical essays exposing emotional and cultural damage inflicted on Native children
- political work and activism:
  - used literature and music to preserve Native culture
  - became a leading advocate for Native American rights
  - co-founded the National Council of American Indians
  - fought for citizenship, voting rights, and tribal sovereignty
  - one of the most influential Indigenous critics of assimilation policies
  - insisted that Native peoples are modern, living communities with political rights, not relics of the past

### 4. Individual solutions.

### 5. See grid.

### Step 2-3

### 1976: 200 years USA

### Expert group D

2. a) • emotional response shaped by unresolved trauma of Vietnam War and mid-1970s political disillusionment
- veterans returned to deeply divided society, often met criticism or indifference instead of support – explains narrator's anger, bitterness, sense of betrayal
  - patriotic messages of Bicentennial celebrations ignore his suffering
  - mistrust in political leaders (Watergate) → reinforced belief that government lied and wasted his sacrifice
- b) • official celebrations: idealized, harmonious image of American history; focus on progress, unity, national pride
- diary entry: neighborhood shaped by poverty, discrimination, social unrest; protest march highlights issues like racism, sexism, economic inequality, Vietnam War legacy → problems ignored by televised celebrations
  - national narrative excludes marginalized communities and their experiences, conceals ongoing injustices
- c) • at first: draft dodgers = cowards, protesters = hostile to soldiers
- later: recognizes many opponents of the war understood its injustice earlier than he did; now sees resistance as courageous and morally justified, especially in light of government deception and the war's devastating human cost
  - growing awareness: opposition to war wasn't betrayal of soldiers, but an attempt to protect them
- d) • Bicentennial narrative: celebrates 200 years of freedom, prosperity, national achievement, progress; promotes unity, pride, fulfillment of the American Dream
- veteran's perspective: communities suffering from poverty, racism, lack of opportunity, exclusion, disillusionment, unfulfilled promises
  - key contrast: idealized national story vs. harsh everyday reality for marginalized groups; official celebrations overlook structural inequalities and ongoing exclusion
3. a) • symbolic reenactment of pioneer journeys (early colonialist expansion)
- intention: create a unifying national ritual in a time of crisis; revive ideals of courage, perseverance, and national renewal
  - each state sent a wagon with a "rededication scroll" to the Declaration, signed by citizens reaffirming commitment to its principles; scrolls sealed in a time capsule for 2076 → connecting past, present, future
  - nostalgic imagery (covered wagons, pioneer costumes, campfires, patriotic ceremonies), romanticized version of westward colonialist expansion
  - reenactment ignored violence against and displacement of Native Americans

- mixed public reception: welcomed as reminder of national heritage by some; criticized as sentimental, historically selective and exclusionary especially by Indigenous and other marginalized communities
- b) • Bicentennial Wagon Train: idealized, celebratory vision of the US; veteran's diary: fractured, painful reality
- included: mostly white Americans, pioneers; excluded: veterans, Black Americans, Indigenous peoples, women, working class communities

4. See grid.

### Step 2-3

2026: 250 years USA

Expert group E

#### 1. Booker T. Washington:

- founded Tuskegee Institute (1881), the first major institution of higher learning for African Americans, focused on training teachers and providing both academic and vocational education
- promoted vocational and industrial education as a pathway to economic self-reliance for Black Americans, shaping national debates on Black advancement
- developed self-help education model: students built campus facilities, produced food, learned practical skills
- became spokesperson for Black education, using speeches to advocate for educational and economic progress as foundations for racial uplift

#### Catharine Beecher:

- co-founded Hartford Female Seminary (1823), one of the first US schools to offer girls a broad academic curriculum including Latin, algebra, logic, natural philosophy, and physical education
- pioneered physical education for girls to improve women's health and challenge the idea of female fragility
- founded the Western Female Institute (1832) to expand women's education
- worked on the McGuffey Readers, the first nationally adopted elementary-school textbooks
- promoted equal educational opportunities for women
- founded the American Woman's Educational Association (1852) to recruit and train women teachers
- influential author of educational and domestic-science texts, shaping 19th-century ideas about women's roles as educators
- helped inspire the founding of several women's colleges in the Midwest

#### Charlie Kirk:

- co-founded Turning Point USA (TPUSA) in 2012, at age 18: an organization promoting conservative ideas (free-market principles, limited government) among high school and college students, offering a strong identity for conservative young people, often using "us vs. them" narratives ("them" = "woke elites"), functioning as an entry point into right-wing to right-conservative activism
- used social media, podcasts, and conservative TV to turn local campus conflicts into national issues, supporting political initiatives at state level

- framed schools and universities as sites of leftist indoctrination, and organized events and campaigns against “wokeness,” DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion) programmes, and certain academic fields (e.g. Gender Studies)
  - positioned himself as defender of free speech, especially for conservative speakers, against what he called cancel culture
  - created TPUSA’s “Professor Watchlist” (2016): controversial database of professors accused by TPUSA of “radical left” political bias
  - established several initiatives in order to advance conservative educational models and curricula that highlight civics, faith, and American history
  - supporters’ view: Kirk encouraged youth participation in politics and civic life influenced the modern conservative movement; built a large network of student chapters
  - critics’ view: no formal career/training as teacher, professor, or educational reformer; promoted a highly political and ideological vision of education; made highly polarizing public statements
2. • similarities: almost only white men pictured, focus on America’s founding ideals, use of patriotic symbolism, highlight leadership (of men)
- differences: group effort vs. single leader, static painting vs. dynamic video, unpolished/real scene vs. highly polished/carefully staged, looking forward vs. looking back
3. a) • emphasis on the Founding Fathers, national unity, patriotic celebration, preservation of documents, Archives as the guardian of national memory, endurance of founding ideals
- marginalized or missing: enslaved people, free Black Americans, Native Americans, women, indentured servants, Loyalists, non-elite colonists, role of France and Spain, international impacts of the revolution
- b) Individual solutions.
4. See grid.

	1776: the founding	1826: 50th	1876: 100th	1926: 150th	1976: 200th	2026: 250th
<b>What is celebrated?</b> (focus of the national narrative)	independence, birth of a free republic, liberty, natural rights	independence, liberty, continuous flourishing, harmony, family, peace, unity, virtue, patriotism, exceptionalism	100 years of independence, Union victory, unity, technological and industrial growth	150 years of “freedom and progress”; modern, industrial, “civilized” nation	200 years of revolution and freedom, patriotic parades, mass-media spectacle	250 years of independence, liberty, American heroes, democracy, education
<b>Who is included in the idea of the American nation?</b>	white male property owners, political leaders	male veterans, officers, militia, children, women only as domestic citizens	mainly white citizens, inventors, businessmen, political leaders	white society, pioneers, soldiers, entrepreneurs (“national heroes”)	Founding generation, patriotic families, “happy consumers” of the Bicentennial	selected “heroes in American education”, political leaders, national institutions
<b>Who is missing or excluded?</b>	women, enslaved and free Black people, Indigenous peoples, poor white laborers	enslaved and free Black Americans, Indigenous peoples, poor white laborers, immigrants	Black Americans losing Reconstruction rights, formerly enslaved people in the South, Indigenous peoples	Native Americans, Black Americans, many immigrant groups, women underrepresented	poor urban communities, People of Colour facing racism, traumatized Vietnam veterans, protesters	critical groups and movements (less visible in official celebrations)
<b>National ideals vs. reality</b>	liberty, equality, popular sovereignty vs. slavery, no rights for women and men without property, Indigenous land claims ignored	liberty, equality, democracy, unity, harmony vs. limitations for women, no rights for enslaved people, discrimination against free Blacks and Natives	freedom, equality, citizenship, unity, opportunity vs. racist violence, rights of Black Americans under attack, dispossession of Native Americans	democracy, prosperity, civilization, successful nation-building, colonial “discovery” vs. colonial violence, e.g. racial segregation, restricted Indigenous sovereignty	liberty, pride, progress, American Dream for all vs. poverty, discrimination, war trauma	shared history, freedom, democracy, opportunity through education vs. conflicts over representation and national memory, contested narratives
<b>Conclusion for anniversary</b>	strong myth of freedom and equality, but built on a narrow definition of “the people” and big inequalities	presents the US as a united and virtuous nation, but ignores deep social and legal inequalities	praises unity and progress, while freedom and rights remain very unequal	strengthens a triumphant story of national progress, but marginalized groups’ experiences stay largely invisible	message of freedom and progress feels hollow for many; big gap between patriotic images and everyday life	struggle over stories: celebrating unity and heroism, but deep disagreement about history and belonging