



# YANKEE POST

Summer 2026 Edition



## *Presidents Message:*

In the early weeks of April, CCSS held an in-person board meeting at Central Connecticut State University. After a long day, a hazardous commute, anticipating the arrival of my newborn child, wrapping up a marking period, and all that comes with that I was feeling pretty exhausted. After the meeting, I was debriefing with another board member. He said, “We did a lot tonight, but more importantly, it’s a nice reminder of how much I like all of you.” And it was true.

All the weight and obstacles of the day seemed to lift in that moment, and I left energized about the direction of our organization and the quality of the people I had just shared the room with. On my drive home, I was reminded of a quote I saw years ago in a book my parents kept at home. The author was Albert Schweitzer, a theologian, philosopher, and humanitarian, who believed a life in service to others would lead to a better world for all.

“At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.”

— Albert Schweitzer

That idea has stayed with me because it captures so much of what this organization is about. In this work, there are moments when we are the ones carrying the light for others. There are also moments when we need someone else to help rekindle it for us. Every teacher knows that feeling. Every board member knows that feeling, and I think every person who has chosen to stay committed to social studies education at this moment knows that feeling. That is what CCSS does at its best.

We are a network of people who support one another, who strengthen one another's practice, who step in when the work feels heavy, and who remind each other why this work matters. That is also deeply connected to our mission: to advocate and build capacity for high-quality social studies by providing leadership, services, and support to educators. It moves us toward our vision: a world in which all students are educated and inspired for lifelong inquiry and informed civic action.

Some things I want to highlight from the year:

Our annual conference brought together over 200 educators and vendors from across the state. The day was hosted by our stalwart partner, Central Connecticut State University, and kicked off with a keynote address by Attorney General William Tong. His message was a masterclass in federalism, in standing up for the sovereignty of our state, and in fighting for ways to improve the lives of all members of our state. After the keynote, we were proud to offer a wide array of poster sessions and learning opportunities that addressed the interests and needs of practitioners. We were also able to highlight the Gilder Lehrman Connecticut History Teacher of the Year, a powerful reminder of the excellence that exists in classrooms across Connecticut.

I am also excited to share that planning for our next conference is well underway. Scheduled for right after Election Day, this year's conference will include new ways to access the day, with improved technology and a stronger participant experience. Our organization continues to be a statewide leader in professional learning and in partnering with leading national and statewide organizations in education, research, and instruction.

CCSS has been a proud grant recipient from the Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources program. Our program, Connecticut During the American Revolution: Discovering Library of Congress Resources, has bridged the vastness of the Library of Congress with place-based learning experiences at the Ridgefield Historical Society and the Connecticut Museum of Culture and History, all anchored by expert educators and Library of Congress collections. This is what high-quality social studies looks like. It is rooted in evidence. It is connected to place. It asks students and teachers to look closely, think deeply, and understand Connecticut's role in larger national stories.

We also continue to strengthen our partnership with our parent organization and stand out on a national level. At their annual conference in Washington, D.C., the National Council for the Social Studies recognized us as a Gold Status affiliate, with specific distinctions of excellence in governance and advocacy. This was my first NCSS conference, and I cannot express the pride I felt representing Connecticut in that space. At a meeting with other national and affiliate leaders, leaders from Louisiana, Minnesota, Georgia, and beyond came up and wanted to know about our organizational structures, our advocacy efforts, our bylaws, and the way our board operates. That is a testament to the committee work, the systems, and the leadership that have been built over the past half decade and beyond. We are setting an example on a national level, and that does not happen by accident. It happens because board members give their time. It happens because committee chairs take ideas and turn them into action. It happens because members step forward, support one another's visions, and help build something larger than themselves. We have also made inroads with our advocacy, ensuring that our organization has a voice in conversations about the future generation of social studies teachers.

We have forged connections with the Connecticut Educator Preparation and Certification Board to make sure our expertise can be considered as the state looks to address obstacles to certification, examine educator preparation programs, and streamline pathways into the profession. We know the solution to the teacher

shortage is not to cut corners, but to strengthen them. It is to ensure that teachers feel like content experts, armed with a strong understanding of state standards and a robust pedagogical toolkit. But every teacher in this room who has survived, yes, survived, their first year teaching knows that even the best educator preparation program is not enough to allow teachers to thrive in their early career. That is why I am proud to unveil our organization's new initiative, the CCSS Early Career Mentorship Program. Guided by CCSS's commitment to advancing social studies education in Connecticut, this year-long fellowship connects early-career teachers with experienced mentors to build strong, inclusive, and innovative social studies classrooms, and relationships, across our state. That program reflects who we are. It is the flame being passed from one educator to another. It is the belief that expertise is not meant to be guarded, but shared. It is our mission in action.

We also know that the adoption and implementation of the new state standards was a historic achievement. But we must ensure that teachers and district leaders are working in a dynamic learning environment that helps them understand, adopt, implement, and eventually master those standards. That is why we are leveraging the skills and networks of our board and membership to determine how we can continue to support teachers across Connecticut. What obstacles do teachers face? What professional learning or resources have been successful? What do they still need?

A new social studies survey, developed by our board members, will be shared early in the fall to help guide our work in the future. Modeled on the state science survey, this comprehensive questionnaire is designed to assess and meet the needs of teachers and curriculum leaders in all corners of the state. From their responses, we will design professional learning and continue to advocate at the district and state level to more fully meet their needs. Specifically, we know that elementary teachers face challenges with the amount of time they can devote to social studies, the resources they have available, and their confidence in content. As we better understand the challenges and constraints elementary teachers face, we may also uncover real opportunities to strengthen social studies education for our youngest learners. We know that elementary teachers are often faced with the quandary of, if I teach social studies, what am I giving up?

As an untested subject, it can often get pushed to the wayside. But I do not need to tell you all what I am sure you know; social studies education is literacy. It is numeracy. It is social and emotional learning. When social studies education is prioritized, learning outcomes improve. This is beyond dispute. Advocating on behalf of social studies education in the elementary classroom is a key goal of ours moving forward. I am excited that there are so many dedicated educators and partners in this state eager to speak with one voice on this issue.

All of this work is being driven by members of our organization who are relentless in their pursuit of a robust social studies ecosystem in Connecticut. From folks recently added to our board, to new members volunteering to join and support committee work, to giants who have shaped social studies in this state for decades, these programs are only possible because committed people care enough to get involved. That is what makes this organization work. Not just one person. Not just one event. Not just one initiative. It is the board members who answer emails after long school days. It is the committee chairs who keep projects moving. It is a new member volunteering to start a taskforce to bring an idea to life, or the rank and file members who decide to join a meeting, share a resource, or simply encourage someone else to join the organization. It is the collective strength of people who believe that social studies matters and who are willing to act on that belief.

While there is much to celebrate in the world of social studies, we cannot ignore the fact that, on the eve of America's 250th birthday, we are witnessing one of the most significant periods of strain on democratic life in generations. That we are living, working, teaching through a democratic backslide is unquestionable. Teachers

have been thrust into the front lines of culture wars, and our classrooms are coming under unprecedented scrutiny. All the while, public dollars are held hostage, public policy and dialed-up narratives are affecting the safety of our students and the sanctity of our schools. Teachers and social studies professionals are understandably exhausted. It can be easy to retreat into ourselves as the already heavy weight of the job feels insurmountable. But, that is exactly why organizations like CCSS matter. The new state standards provide for a full accounting of history, moments difficult and triumphant, dominant narratives and counter narratives alike. But teachers need more than standards on paper. They need people, organizations, and networks that continue to inspire them, support them, and have their back. Every day, we strive to be that for the teachers of Connecticut.

Embracing that spirit of the Revolution, in the coming weeks CCSS will be implementing a series of webinars that look at how the Revolution can be taught across grades, content areas, and through a variety of lenses, all while strengthening and supporting understanding of our state standards. Stay tuned, because they are certain to be an excellent learning opportunity. The lessons of the Revolution are more important now than ever, and an engaged, informed, and involved citizenry has never been more vital to the health of our democracy. In early March, the Governor signed into law the state Civic Seal. This new seal is an incentive for high school students to earn a mark of distinction on their diploma if certain civic learning criteria are met. Once this criteria has been established by the state, our organization has the track record of success to support districts, teachers, and students in achieving this noble recognition.

We also have the honorable distinction of being a member of the newly formed Connecticut Civic Learning Coalition. Led by our friends and partners at the CT Democracy Center, this coalition centers a collective effort of individuals and groups working to support more equitable, accessible, high-quality civic learning for Connecticut students. Bringing back civil discourse, civic engagement, and community-oriented projects can help bridge divides. Our nation was born out of conflict, but also compromise, and out of the belief that people could put the greater good ahead of personal or provincial interests. I am excited that CCSS can be part of this network.

In closing, we have accomplished a great deal this year. But the success of this organization relies on the passions and diverse strengths that each member brings. It relies on the board members who keep showing up, the partners who help light the way, and the educators who continue to carry this work forward in classrooms across Connecticut. There are times when this work is hard. There are times when the flame feels dim. But CCSS seeks to be a place where educators are strengthened, supported, and reminded that they are not alone.

We are lit by our partners, sustained by our board, strengthened by our members, and committed to lighting that flame for teachers across Connecticut. That is how we live our mission. That is how we move toward our vision, and that is how we will continue to carry social studies forward in this state. From the classroom to the capitol, CCSS has your back.

With gratitude for all of you, for this board, for our members, and for the many people who continue to make this work possible.

Thank you.

Maxwell Comando  
President, Connecticut Council for the Social Studies



*Stephen Armstrong*



*LéAnn Murphy Cassidy*

## **FROM THE EDITORS' DESKS**

### **A Nation at 250: The Enduring Promise and Unfinished Work of the Declaration of Independence**

by *LéAnn Murphy Cassidy*

In July 2026, the United States marks the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, a milestone that invites both celebration and reflection. Signed in Philadelphia amid uncertainty and rebellion, the document announced not only a break from empire but the birth of an idea: that a people could govern themselves, grounded in principles of equality, liberty, and consent.

Two and a half centuries later, those ideals remain both foundational and contested. In a time of deep political polarization, social fragmentation, and competing narratives about the nation's past and future, the anniversary raises a pressing question: What does the Declaration still demand of us?

Drafted primarily by Thomas Jefferson and shaped by contemporaries like John Adams, Roger Sherman, Robert Livingston, and Benjamin Franklin, the Declaration was revolutionary not simply because it severed ties with Great Britain, but because it articulated a universal claim: "all men are created equal."

This assertion, radical in 1776 and still aspirational today, reframed government as a human creation, accountable to the governed. It rejected the divine right of kings and replaced it with a moral framework rooted in natural rights: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Yet from its inception, the Declaration carried contradictions. Enslaved people, women, and Indigenous nations were excluded from its promises. The document's power, then and now, lies not in its perfection, but in its capacity to be invoked again and again as a standard against which the nation measures itself.

The United States of 2026 is marked by sharp divisions: political, cultural, economic, and informational. Trust in institutions has eroded. Public discourse is often shaped more by outrage than deliberation. Competing visions of freedom and equality dominate debates over voting rights, education, economic policy, and the role of government. In this environment, the Declaration serves less as a settled statement of unity and more as a contested text, a shared reference point interpreted in divergent ways.

For some, it represents a fixed inheritance: a blueprint to be preserved and protected. For others, it is a call to expansion, an unfinished promise requiring continual struggle to realize its ideals more fully. These interpretations are not new; they echo debates that have defined American history from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement. What is different today is the intensity of fragmentation and the speed at which it spreads.

Amid this division, the Declaration offers something increasingly rare: a common language. Its principles have been invoked by generations seeking justice and reform. Abraham Lincoln called it a “standard maxim” for a free society, one that should guide interpretation of the Constitution. Frederick Douglass used it to expose the hypocrisy of slavery. Martin Luther King Jr. described it as a “promissory note” to which every American was heir. Each of these figures understood that the Declaration’s power lies in its moral clarity even when the nation falls short of it.

In 2026, that clarity remains essential. At a time when civic education has declined and historical understanding is often fragmented, the Declaration can serve as a unifying entry point, not because it resolves disagreements, but because it frames them within a shared set of ideals.

Anniversaries are not just about commemoration; they are about interpretation. The 250th anniversary arrives at a moment when Americans are actively reassessing their history and debating which stories are told, whose voices are included, and how the past informs the present. This process is often uncomfortable. It challenges long-held narratives and forces a reckoning with injustice. Yet it is also deeply aligned with the spirit of the Declaration itself.

To declare independence is not a one-time act. It is an ongoing process of questioning authority, reexamining assumptions, and striving toward a more just society. The tension between unity and critique is not a weakness; it is a defining feature of American democracy. If the Declaration established the principle that government derives its power from the consent of the governed, then its 250th anniversary underscores a parallel truth: democracy requires participation.

In an era of digital misinformation, declining civic engagement, and increasing polarization, the responsibilities of citizenship are both more complex and more urgent. Voting, informed dialogue, community involvement, and a commitment to truth are not optional, they are the mechanisms through which the Declaration’s ideals are sustained.

For educators, policymakers, and citizens alike, the anniversary presents an opportunity to reinvest in civic life. Schools, in particular, play a critical role in helping students understand not only the content of the Declaration, but its relevance. The goal is not reverence alone, but engagement, an understanding that the document is both a historical artifact and a living challenge. At 250, the United States stands at a crossroads familiar in its history: a moment of division that tests its commitment to its founding principles.

The Declaration of Independence does not offer easy answers to today’s challenges. It does, however, provide a framework, a reminder that the nation’s legitimacy rests not in power or tradition alone, but in its adherence to the ideals it proclaimed in 1776. The question facing the country is not whether it will agree on every issue. It is whether it can continue to argue within a shared commitment to those ideals.

Anniversaries invite celebration, but they also demand honesty. The story of the United States is not one of linear progress, nor of unbroken failure. It is a story of struggle, of a people repeatedly returning to a set of principles and asking, anew, what they require.

As fireworks will mark the 250th anniversary, the deeper significance lies not in the spectacle, but in the reflection it prompts. The Declaration endures not because it is finished, but because it is unfinished. Within that unfinished work lies both the challenge and the promise of the American experiment.

## A Nation at 250: History in the Classroom

By *Stephen Armstrong*

It has been a “fascinating year” for all educators. There are still tensions of all kinds: but I have heard a number of teachers say that things are “getting back to normal” Many teachers are still frustrated with the number of students that are unwilling to engage in classroom activities and discussions. Of course, districts, teachers and students are still wrestling with Artificial Intelligence and how it can be used as a true learning tool. These discussions will continue into the following year and beyond.

It has also been interesting to work with school districts and individual teachers on how to teach America 250-related projects. A number of schools and students have done fantastic work on what role their own town or region has in the American Revolution. In several districts fantastic partnerships developed between students and town organizations organizing America-250 events. Educators have wrestled with a central question: should the American Revolution be “celebrated” or “commemorated”. My firm answer is both. We should celebrate the contributions of residents of Connecticut and other colonies who had major roles in the Revolution and the Founding Fathers who wrote our founding documents. On the other hand, a commemoration of the Revolutionary era is also in order. Students should delve into the history of groups who have sometimes been ignored in the study of this era, including blacks, Native Americans and women. In addition, teachers and their students should analyze the longer-term impact of our founding documents: discussions of how the ideas of Founding Fathers have been challenged during various periods of American history are critical. In addition, students might analyze what the Founding Fathers might think about the United States in 2026.

In addition, we are at the point where it is crucial to teach the presidencies of Donald Trump. Teachers have shied away from doing this, fearing political retribution or fearing that classroom discussions will get out of hand. I think it is time that students, in a completely non-partisan way, are encouraged to analyze the Trump presidencies. Social studies teachers are great-discussion leaders: hone those skills to have informed discussions about the Trump presidencies. Use documents that are as unbiased as possible. If we don't do this, I fear that teachers in the future will ask why teachers of our era didn't teach about Trump when they taught about every other president. In addition, if history and civics teachers don't discuss Trump in the classroom there are students in many classes that will have no opportunity for intelligent discussions on this topic. If teachers can construct appropriate lessons on the Trump presidency, they will be doing their students and themselves a major service.



# Considering the Declaration at 250: Indigenous Perspectives on Liberty and Sovereignty

By [Wunneanatsu Lamb-Cason \(Schaghticoke/HoChunk\)](#)

As the United States prepares to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, many Americans will reflect on the familiar language of liberty, equality, and self-determination. Educators across the country are being asked to reflect on how we teach the nation's founding and the guiding doctrines associated with it. There will be celebrations, reenactments, fireworks, and renewed conversations about the founding ideals of the nation.

For many people, this anniversary also invites a more complicated reflection. Long before 1776, Indigenous nations across this continent exercised sovereignty, maintained nuanced diplomatic and cultural relationships, governed their communities, and defended their homelands. The founding of the United States marked the birth of a new nation, but it also signaled increasing pressure on the Native nations whose homelands the new republic sought to expand into.

The Declaration remains one of the most influential documents in American history. Yet, one of the clearest examples of idealistic contradictions appears within the Declaration itself. Often celebrated as a universal statement of freedom, the document also contains language that verbalizes colonial anxieties and prejudices of the era. In a list of grievances against King George III, the document describes Indigenous peoples as “merciless Indian savages, whose known rule of warfare is undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.” This line was not incidental rhetoric or merely an indication of wartime tensions. With this language, Thomas Jefferson accuses the British Crown of unleashing these “merciless Indian savages” on colonial settlements. It reflected and reinforced a growing colonial worldview that framed Indigenous peoples as obstacles to expansion, threats to civilization, and incompatible with the emerging American project.

That language mattered.

The Declaration of Independence's portrayal of Indigenous peoples through the phrase “merciless Indian Savages” was a strategy that helped legitimize settler colonialism, influenced early U.S. Indian policy, and continues to shape American legal, educational, and cultural systems. It helped establish the ideological foundations of the United States. Many historians and Indigenous scholars have examined what it means to commemorate a document that simultaneously articulated principles of liberty while dehumanizing Native people and erasing enslaved peoples from the narrative completely. The Declaration's language provides insight into the debates over freedom and self-determination but also the desire for further territorial expansion into Indigenous homelands.

The characterization of Native peoples as “savage” erased the political sophistication of Indigenous nations throughout the Northeast and across the continent. Indigenous communities maintained complex diplomatic relationships, governance systems, trade networks, and protocols for negotiation and alliance long before the founding of the United States. The anti-Indigenous rhetoric embedded within America's founding document would reverberate throughout federal Indian policy for generations. Language shapes policy, public memory and national identity. From Northwest Ordinance and the era of Indian Removal and allotment to boarding schools and forced assimilation, Indigenous peoples were consistently portrayed as barriers to progress or populations in need of elimination, control, or “civilization.” Even policies presented as benevolent were often

rooted in the assumption that Indigenous nations could not continue to exist as distinct political and cultural entities.

And yet, tribal nations endured.

That survivance is essential to understanding America250. Too often, Indigenous peoples appear in classrooms and public memory only in the distant past — frozen somewhere before the American Revolution or briefly reappearing during Thanksgiving lessons. In reality, Indigenous nations were active participants in the political landscape of the eighteenth century and remain sovereign nations today. Tribal nations negotiated treaties, navigated alliances, and made strategic decisions in response to colonial encroachment, warfare and shifting imperial alliances that threatened their communities. Some chose to flee, some chose strategic neutrality, and some chose a side based on what they believed was best for their people. But each choice was an exercise in sovereignty.

For educators, this anniversary presents an important opportunity. Social Studies classrooms are uniquely positioned to help students examine historical complexity and contradiction. America250 should not exclusively uphold a celebratory national narrative. It should encourage students to wrestle with paradoxical topics. The American story contains extraordinary ideals about liberty and self-governance, while also containing dispossession, exclusion, and contrariety. These truths are not mutually exclusive. In fact, studying them together allows students to engage more honestly with the nation's history.

Including Indigenous perspectives does not diminish the significance of the Declaration of Independence; it allows us to understand the document more fully — both for the ideals it articulated and for the exclusions and contradictions embedded within it. While examining the promises embedded in founding documents, students should also look at who was excluded from those promises and how different communities experienced the nation's founding. They should ask difficult questions: How can a nation proclaim liberty while simultaneously expanding into Indigenous homelands? What does sovereignty mean in a country built on lands already governed by Native nations? How have Indigenous communities resisted erasure and maintained cultural, political, and spiritual continuity despite centuries of assimilative pressure and genocidal violence?

These questions are important because the work of independence, as many historians, authors and educators have noted, is ongoing. A healthy democracy requires more than patriotism; it requires continual self-examination, public accountability, and the willingness to reckon with difficult histories. Indigenous histories and perspectives challenge us to move beyond simplistic patriotic narratives and toward a fuller understanding of the American experience.

For Indigenous communities, survival itself has often been an act of resistance.

Despite centuries of warfare, removal, assimilation policies, and attempts at cultural erasure, Indigenous nations remain. Languages are being revitalized. Cultural traditions continue. Tribal governments exercise sovereignty and advocate for their communities in local, national and international spaces. Indigenous scholars, artists, educators, and youth continue reshaping public conversations about history, identity and futurity. The very existence of Indigenous nations today stands as evidence that the story envisioned by those who dismissed Native peoples as “savages” was never the final story.

As we approach the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, perhaps the most consequential remembrance invites honest reflection alongside celebration. The story of America is layered with aspiration and contradiction, resilience and injustice, survival and change. Engaging honestly with that complexity does not weaken national identity; it strengthens our collective understanding of who we are. America250 offers an

opportunity to recognize the enduring sovereignty of the first nations of this land and the responsibility we all share in telling history more truthfully.

Wunneanatsu Lamb-Cason (Schaghticoke/HoChunk) is an award-winning educator, advocate, storyteller, and author dedicated to social, cultural, and educational equity. The 2024 Gilder Lehrman National History Teacher of the Year, she now serves as Assistant Director of Native American and Indigenous Studies at Brown University and owner of Eastern Woodlands Education Consultants, LLC. She has developed Indigenous-centered educational materials for various institutions, including McGraw-Hill Education and the Library of Congress. Her bestselling children's book, *Grandmother Moon*, debuted in August 2025.

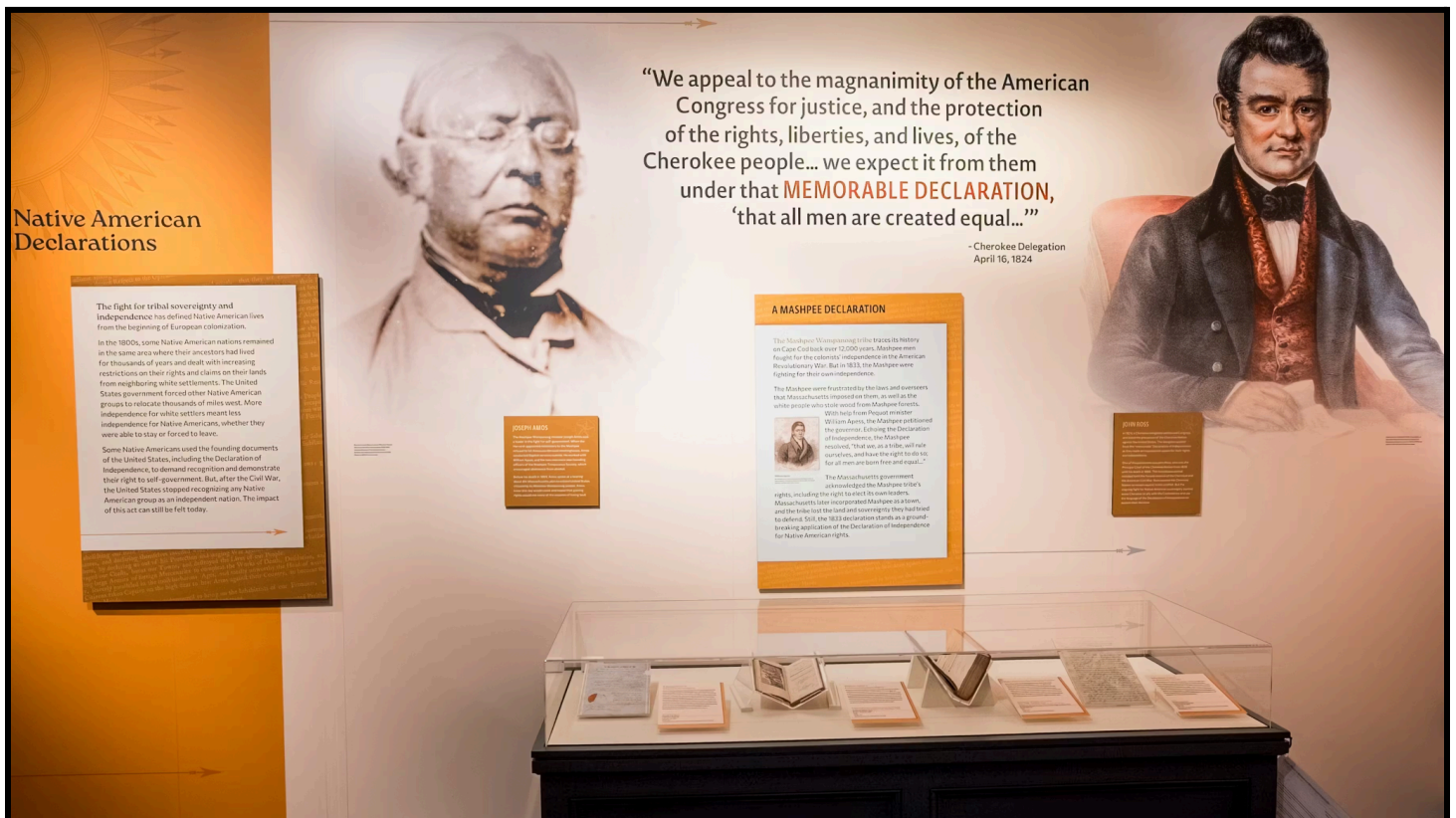


Photo courtesy of the Museum of the American Revolution

For those looking for Indigenous resources, check out:

[Native Knowledge °360](#)

## ***Museum Moments: What's New in History Halls? Connecticut Museum of Culture and History***



The Connecticut Museum of Culture and History stands as one of New England's most important cultural institutions, a place where the story of Connecticut unfolds not as a static timeline, but as a living, evolving narrative shaped by people, objects, and ideas across centuries. Located in Hartford, the museum bridges past and present, offering visitors an immersive encounter with the state's heritage and its broader role in American history.

Founded in 1825, making it one of the oldest state historical societies in the United States, the museum began as the Connecticut Historical Society before rebranding in 2023 to better reflect a broader, more inclusive mission. Its founding vision was ambitious: to collect, preserve, and interpret materials that tell the story of Connecticut and its people. Early supporters included prominent figures such as John Trumbull and William W. Ellsworth, who recognized that the young nation's identity depended on preserving its past.

Over two centuries, that vision has expanded into a dynamic institution that functions simultaneously as a museum, research library, archive, and educational center. Today, it holds more than four million objects,

ranging from manuscripts and textiles to artifacts and photographs, making it one of the most comprehensive collections of regional history in the country.

The museum's current home on Elizabeth Street reflects both its history and its evolution. Housed in the former residence of industrialist Curtis H. Veeder, the building itself is an historical artifact. Constructed in 1928, the house was technologically advanced for its time, featuring innovations like an elevator and central vacuum system, symbols of early 20th-century ingenuity.

Subsequent expansions in the mid-20th century transformed the residence into a modern museum facility, adding exhibition galleries, storage for growing collections, and a research center. The campus, situated in Hartford's historic West End, underscores the museum's role as both a guardian of the past and an active participant in the city's cultural life. At the heart of the museum's public mission are its exhibitions, which translate archival material into engaging, accessible experiences.

The museum's flagship exhibition, *Making Connecticut*, offers a sweeping overview of more than 400 years of state history. Through over 500 objects, visitors explore themes such as work, leisure, immigration, and social change. What distinguishes this exhibit is its emphasis on interaction. Visitors can simulate tasks from different historical periods, working on a World War II assembly line, sewing garments, or setting a colonial table, transforming history from abstraction into lived experience.

Another standout exhibit features one of the nation's largest collections of historic tavern signs. These artifacts, dating from the 18th and 19th centuries, offer insight into early American travel, commerce, and identity. More than decorative objects, the signs reveal how visual culture shaped communication in a largely illiterate society, where images conveyed meaning across linguistic and social boundaries.

The museum regularly hosts temporary exhibitions that connect Connecticut history to broader themes. A recent example, *Coffee: A Connecticut Story*, traced the state's relationship with global trade, industry, and daily life through the lens of coffee culture, demonstrating how even ordinary commodities can illuminate complex historical networks.

Beyond its public galleries, the museum is a major research institution. Its research center contains millions of primary sources, including diaries, letters, photographs, maps, and rare books. Genealogists, historians, educators, and students rely on these materials to reconstruct personal histories and scholarly narratives. The center's holdings, such as early American manuscripts and one of New England's largest costume collections, make it a critical resource for understanding both everyday life and major historical events.

Education is central to the museum's mission. Each year, thousands of students participate in field trips, workshops, and interactive programs designed to connect classroom learning with tangible historical evidence.

The museum also extends its reach beyond its walls through: Traveling exhibitions; community partnerships; teacher professional development programs; and digital archives and online resources. These initiatives reflect a broader shift in museum practice, from passive display to active engagement, positioning the institution as a space for dialogue, inquiry, and civic learning.

What distinguishes the Connecticut Museum of Culture and History in the 21st century is its commitment to relevance. Its mission explicitly emphasizes connecting historical understanding to contemporary life, encouraging visitors to see history not as distant or static, but as a tool for interpreting current challenges.

This approach is particularly evident in its focus on inclusive storytelling. By highlighting diverse voices, Indigenous communities, immigrants, women, and working-class individuals, the museum broadens the narrative of Connecticut beyond traditional political or military history.

As the museum approached its 200th anniversary in 2025, it used the milestone to reflect on its evolution and future direction. Special exhibitions and programs showcased rarely displayed artifacts, including items connected to pivotal national events such as the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. This bicentennial was not just a celebration of longevity, but a reaffirmation of purpose, highlighting the enduring importance of historical institutions in a rapidly changing world.

The Connecticut Museum of Culture and History is more than a repository of artifacts; it is a space where identity, memory, and community intersect. In an era marked by rapid technological change and social division, institutions like this serve as anchors, reminding us that understanding the past is essential to navigating the present.

By preserving millions of objects and stories, the museum ensures that Connecticut's history remains accessible, relevant, and alive. Whether through a child's first encounter with a colonial artifact, a scholar's deep archival research, or a visitor's quiet reflection in a gallery, the museum continues to fulfill its founding mission: to connect people to history and, in doing so, to one another.

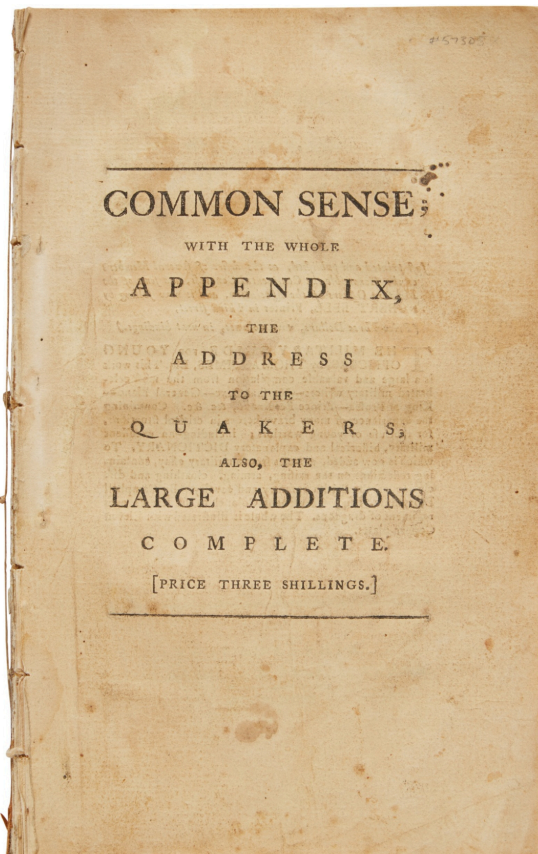


## Great Reads in Social Studies

This time, we review books about United States history that have been written across time, essentially a “250-year bookshelf.” From 1776 to 2026, blending non-fiction and historical fiction, these are works that reflect how Americans have understood their past at each moment. More than a simple reading list, this collection traces the evolution of national memory, how each generation has interpreted the founding, wrestled with its contradictions, and reshaped its meaning in light of new challenges.

Some of these works were written close to the events themselves, carrying the urgency, bias, and uncertainty of a young nation still defining its identity. Others emerge from periods of reflection or upheaval: civil war, industrialization, civil rights movements, and modern political division, revealing as much about the time in which they were written as the history they describe. Together, they show that the story of the United States is not fixed; it is continuously revised, expanded, and debated.

By placing these books side by side across two and a half centuries, we begin to see patterns: whose voices were elevated, whose were left out, and how the definition of “America” has broadened over time. This “bookshelf” invites readers not only to learn history, but to examine how history itself is constructed through perspective, purpose, and the questions each era chooses to ask of its past.



### **Common Sense by Thomas Paine (1776)**

Few works in American history have had the immediate and explosive impact of *Common Sense*. Published in January 1776 on the eve of revolution, this slim pamphlet did something extraordinary: it transformed independence from a radical idea into a broadly accepted necessity. In both tone and substance, Paine’s work remains one of the most influential political writings ever produced in what would become the United States.

At its core, *Common Sense* is a forceful case for American independence from Great Britain. Paine dismantles the legitimacy of monarchy, especially hereditary rule, and argues that it violates both reason and natural law. He calls for the colonies to break away and establish a republic grounded in representation and equality.

What makes *Common Sense* so powerful is not just its argument, but its voice. Paine writes plainly, directly, and passionately. At a time when political writing was often dense and elitist, he spoke to ordinary colonists in language they could understand. He uses vivid metaphors (famously comparing an island ruling a continent as absurd); emotional appeals; and sharp, almost confrontational rhetoric. The result is writing that feels urgent, even today.

*Common Sense* sold hundreds of thousands of copies in a population of only a few million, an astonishing feat in the 18th century. It helped shift public opinion decisively toward independence and laid the intellectual groundwork for the American Revolution. Its influence can also be seen in the language and ideas of the

Declaration of Independence, adopted just months later. Paine makes complex political philosophy understandable in its clarity and persuasion. His argument feels urgent and principled as he looks at moral conviction, and he elevates the voice of ordinary people in a democratic spirit not seen before.

From a modern perspective, *Common Sense* is not without flaws: It simplifies complex political realities; it largely ignores contradictions in American society, especially slavery and Indigenous sovereignty; and its tone can be overly absolutist, leaving little room for nuance. These limitations reflect both Paine's moment and the broader blind spots of revolutionary America.

As the United States reflects on its 250th anniversary, *Common Sense* remains deeply relevant. It asks enduring questions about government legitimacy, rebellion, and who gets to define "the people"? In a time of political division, Paine's insistence that ordinary citizens can, and should, engage in shaping their government feels especially resonant. The book is not just an historical artifact, it is a foundational text of democratic thought. Imperfect, passionate, and transformative, it captures a moment when ideas changed the course of history. It is essential reading for understanding both the founding and the ongoing "American Experiment."

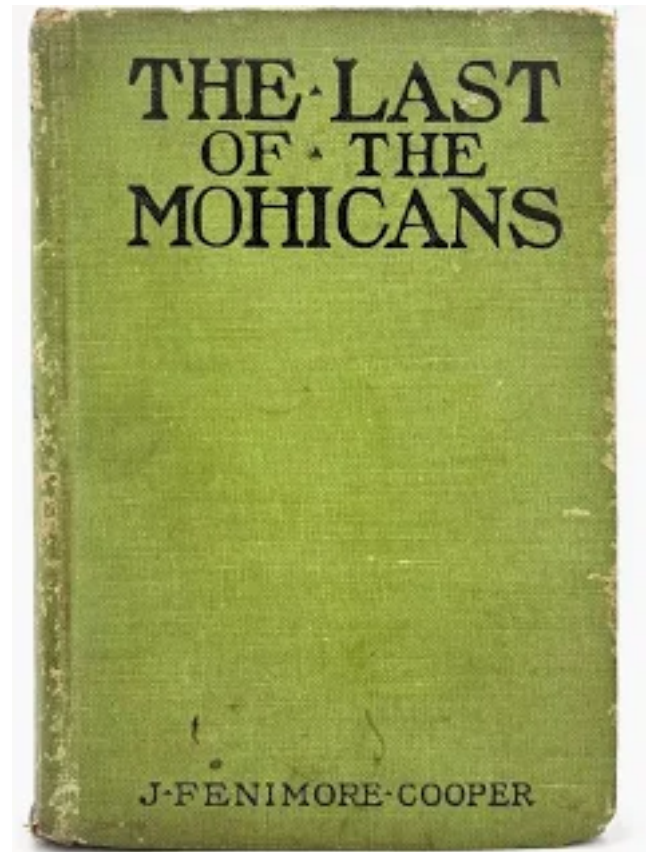
## ***The Last of the Mohicans* by James Fenimore Cooper (1826)**

Published in 1826, *The Last of the Mohicans* is one of the earliest and most enduring works of American historical fiction. Set during the French and Indian War, the novel blends adventure, romance, and frontier mythology to create a sweeping narrative that helped define how generations of readers imagined early America.

The story follows frontiersman Natty Bumppo, better known as Hawkeye, alongside his companions Chingachgook and his son Uncas, members of the Mohican tribe. Together, they navigate the dangers of the colonial wilderness while attempting to protect two British sisters during wartime. The novel unfolds across forests, rivers, and forts, immersing readers in a rugged and often perilous landscape. Cooper's America is vast, untamed, and filled with both beauty and violence.

At its heart, the novel explores several key themes: the clash of cultures as Native American, European, and colonial identities collide; the idea of the "vanishing Indian," symbolized by Uncas and widely critiqued by modern historians; and the tension between nature and civilization. The wilderness emerges as both refuge and threat, standing in contrast to European social order.

Cooper's prose is descriptive and often ornate, reflecting early 19th-century literary style. His strengths lie in vivid landscapes, suspenseful action, and a strong sense of atmosphere, though modern readers may find the

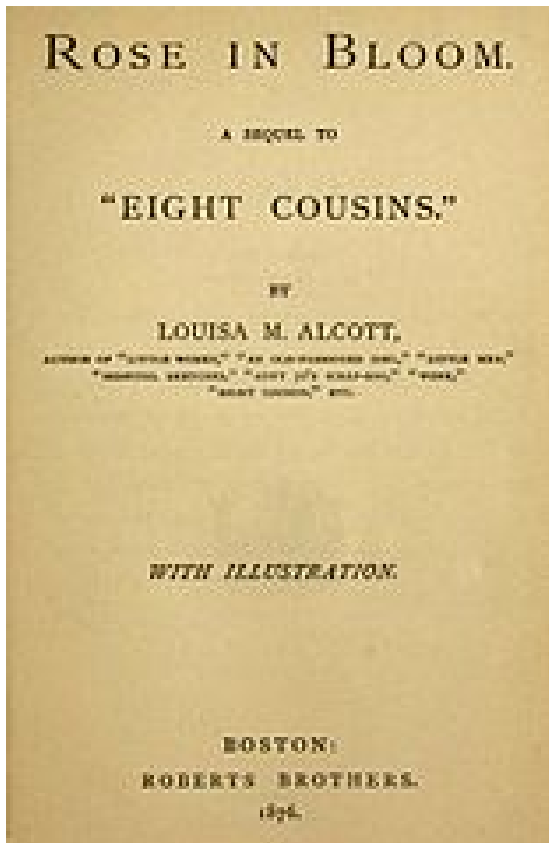


spacing uneven and the dialogue formal. Still, the novel's dramatic moments, ambushes, rescues, and narrow escapes, remain compelling.

From a contemporary perspective, *The Last of the Mohicans* is both influential and problematic. On one hand Cooper portrays characters like Uncas and Chingachgook with dignity and heroism and he attempts to differentiate between tribes and individuals. On the other hand, the novel reinforces stereotypes, promotes the flawed idea that indigenous peoples were inevitably disappearing, and Indigenous voices are filtered through a European-American perspective. These tensions make the book an important text for critical reading, especially in today's conversations about historical representation.

The novel became one of the first internationally recognized American works and helped establish a literary tradition rooted in frontier life. Its influence extends to later adventure genres and film adaptations, including the 1992 version starring Daniel Day-Lewis.

As the United States reflects on its past, *The Last of the Mohicans* is a foundational work of American literature, rich in atmosphere and historical imagination, yet deeply shaped by the biases of its time. A powerful but complex classic that is best read with both appreciation and critical awareness.



## ***A Rose in Bloom* by Louisa May Alcott (1876)**

Published in 1876, *A Rose in Bloom* represents a thoughtful exploration of women's independence, moral development, and societal expectations during the post-Civil War era. While Alcott is best known for *Little Women*, this novel engages with a slightly older audience and more complex social themes, making it a significant text in 19th-century women's literature.

The story follows Rose Campbell, a young woman who must balance her inheritance, personal desires, and society's expectations. Unlike earlier domestic-focused novels, Rose's journey highlights her financial independence, giving her the freedom to make her own choices, a bold idea for 19th-century fiction. The novel also explores how she develops virtue, judgment, and self-respect in a society that often limits women, while presenting marriage as one part of life rather than a requirement. Rose's friendships with other women further emphasize mentorship, support, and intellectual companionship.

Alcott's writing is accessible, yet rich in psychological insight. The narrative frequently pauses to explore ethical dilemmas and social expectations. Rose's growth is central, and Alcott gives significant attention to her internal life, thoughts, and choices. Though less dramatic than some of Alcott's earlier novels, *A Rose in Bloom* is nuanced in portraying social pressures on women, offering both entertainment and ethical reflection.

At the time of publication, the United States was celebrating its centennial, a period when ideals of citizenship and progress were being re-examined. For women, the novel's significance was particularly notable. By

presenting a heroine who uses wealth and intellect to shape her life, Alcott challenged norms that confined women to domestic or dependent roles. The book suggested that women's education and judgment were essential to their social and personal success. Although framed within conventional morality, the story implicitly supported women's right to choose their path, not merely follow societal prescriptions.

One hundred fifty years later, *A Rose in Bloom* resonates in multiple ways: Rose's financial and personal agency mirrors ongoing discussions about women's autonomy in careers, relationships, and leadership; modern readers can appreciate Alcott's nuanced depiction of ethical decision-making for women, which remains relevant in discussions of gender roles; and the novel provides insight into how 19th-century literature grappled with expanding opportunities for women, offering context for both historical and contemporary feminist thought.

*A Rose in Bloom* is a quietly revolutionary novel for its time, celebrating intelligence, independence, and moral courage in women. It bridges the Victorian ideals of propriety with a forward-looking vision of female agency, making it relevant both in 1876 and today. It is a thoughtful, inspiring read for anyone interested in women's literature, feminist history, or the evolution of female empowerment in America.

## ***The Weary Blues* by Langston Hughes (1926)**

Published in 1926, *The Weary Blues* is a landmark poetry collection of the Harlem Renaissance, capturing the rhythms, struggles, and spirit of Black life in early 20th-century America. As Langston Hughes's first published collection, it announced a powerful new voice, one that embraced everyday experience, musicality, and cultural pride.

At the heart of *The Weary Blues* is Hughes's commitment to portraying authentic Black life. His poems explore the influence of blues and jazz as Hughes draws directly from musical traditions. He uses rhythm and repetition to mirror the sounds of Black culture; racial identity and pride since the poems affirm the beauty, resilience, and dignity of African American life. He focuses on struggle and endurance where hardship, inequality, and emotional weariness are balanced by strength and perseverance. Finally, many of the poems are rooted in Harlem, capturing the vibrancy and complexity of city life.

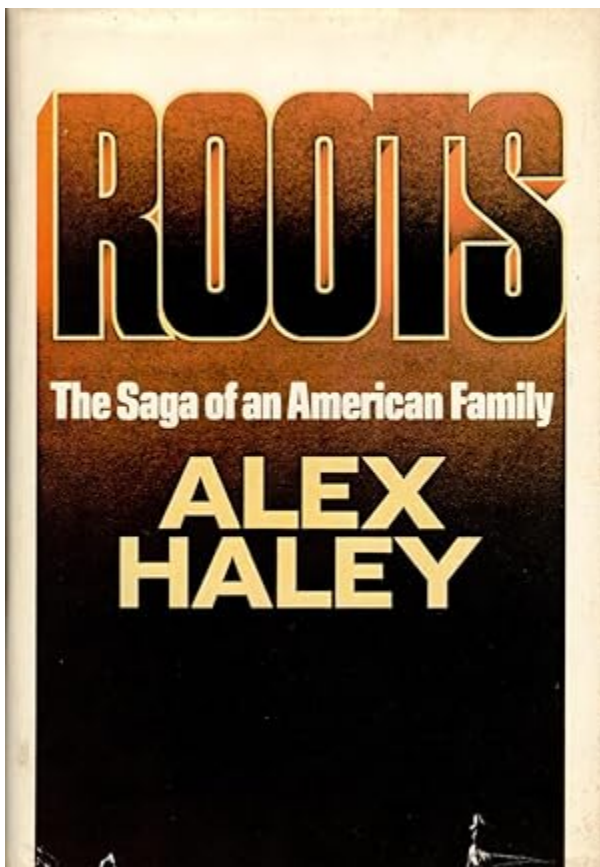
The title poem, "The Weary Blues," exemplifies Hughes's style, melding music and poetry to evoke both sorrow and artistic expression. His style is innovative, musical, and accessible. He breaks from traditional poetic forms by incorporating blues rhythms and vernacular speech. Additionally, by using free verse alongside more structured forms he emphasizes sound, cadence, and performance. This approach made poetry feel more immediate and inclusive, expanding what counted as "literary" language.



One of the greatest strengths of *The Weary Blues* is its groundbreaking voice, centering Black experiences that had long been overlooked in mainstream literature. Its musicality brings the poems to life, making them feel as though they are meant to be heard as much as read, while its emotional depth skillfully balances sorrow, humor, and resilience. At the same time, some readers may find certain poems simple or understated when compared to more formal poetry, and the strong reliance on musical rhythm may be less impactful for those unfamiliar with blues traditions.

At the time of its publication, *The Weary Blues* was revolutionary. During the Harlem Renaissance, Hughes rejected pressures to conform to white literary standards and instead embraced Black cultural expression. His work helped redefine American literature by insisting that Black voices, language, and music belonged at its center.

Nearly a century later, *The Weary Blues* remains deeply relevant. It continues to shape conversations about race, identity, and representation and its blending of music and poetry influences modern spoken word and hip-hop. Additionally, it offers a window into both the historical struggles and enduring creativity of African American communities. *The Weary Blues* is a powerful and pioneering collection that reshaped American poetry. Through rhythm, voice, and honesty, Langston Hughes created work that still resonates with clarity and purpose.



## ***Roots: The Saga of an American Family* by Alex Haley (1976)**

Published in 1976 during the United States Bicentennial, *Roots* is a groundbreaking blend of history and narrative that traces the lineage of Alex Haley's family from West Africa to the United States. Both deeply personal and broadly historical, the book reshaped how many Americans understood the legacy of slavery and the importance of ancestral identity.

*Roots* begins with Kunta Kinte, a young man in The Gambia who is captured and sold into slavery, then transported across the Atlantic during the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The narrative follows his descendants through generations, chronicling their struggles, resilience, and survival under slavery and beyond. Spanning continents and centuries, the book blends documented history with oral tradition to tell a sweeping family saga.

At its core, *Roots* explores identity and heritage, emphasizing the search for one's origins and the importance of knowing where one comes from. It presents an unflinching portrayal of the brutality of slavery and its lasting impact, while also

highlighting the resilience and survival of generations who endure oppression yet preserve their culture and dignity. The book underscores the power of storytelling, showing how oral history and memory serve as tools of resistance and connection. Haley's prose is accessible, vivid, and emotionally engaging, blending narrative storytelling that reads like a novel with historical detail grounded in research and a strong sense of place and character.

This hybrid approach helped make complex and painful history widely readable and deeply personal. One of the greatest strengths of *Roots* is its emotional power, drawing readers into the lives of individuals across generations. Its broad historical scope connects African origins to American history in a compelling and accessible way, while its cultural impact inspired many Americans to explore their own genealogy and family histories. At the same time, questions have been raised about the historical accuracy of certain elements, particularly regarding Kunta Kinte's origins, and the blending of fact and fiction can sometimes blur the line between documented history and narrative reconstruction.

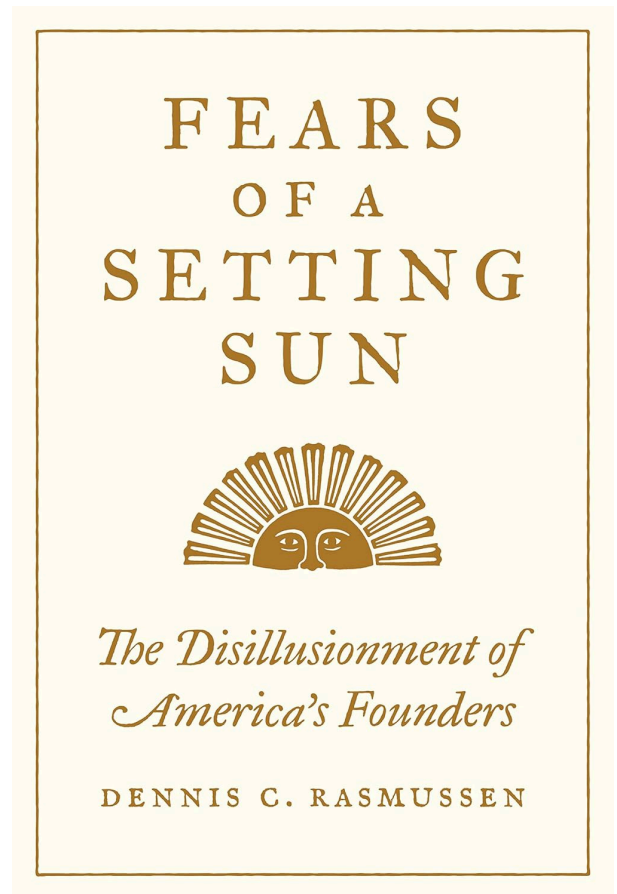
Released during the Bicentennial, *Roots* challenged celebratory narratives of American history by centering the experiences of enslaved people and their descendants. It played a major role in reshaping public conversations about slavery. It increased interest in African American history, and inspired the widely watched television adaptation, which reached millions of viewers.

Nearly fifty years later, *Roots* remains a powerful work for understanding: the lasting legacy of slavery in the United States; the importance of cultural identity and memory; and the ongoing conversations about race, history, and representation. It continues to resonate in classrooms and public discourse, especially as Americans reflect more critically on their past. Its impact on American historical consciousness is undeniable. An essential read for understanding both the history of slavery and the enduring importance of family, identity, and memory in the American experience.

## **“Fears of a Setting Sun: The Disillusionment of America’s Founders” by Dennis C. Rasmussen (2021)**

Most Americans view the Founding Fathers only as the giants who created our founding documents; Americans are oftentimes not aware of the fact that during their deliberations substantial disagreements took place; the Founding Fathers sometimes changed their minds, and reluctantly admitted that the document that they had created was an incomplete one (especially on the topic of slavery). By putting the Founding Fathers on a pedestal, many Americans are also unaware of the thoughts and writings and letters that Jefferson, Hamilton, Washington, John Adams, and James Madison wrote in their later years. In this book by Dennis Rasmussen, a political scientist at Syracuse University, we learn about the doubts that many of these men had about the system of government that they had created; several expressed doubts that the system they had created would last more than a generation.

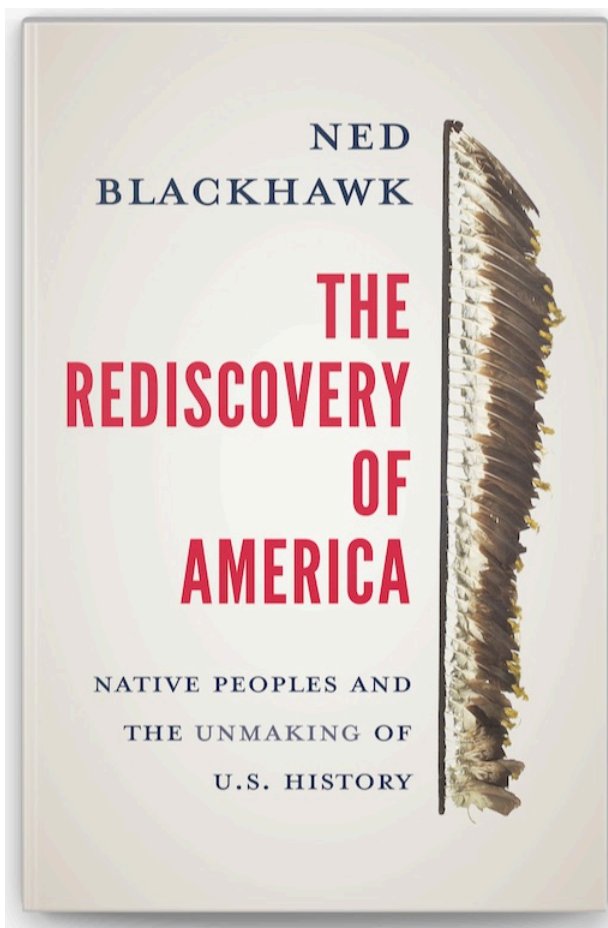
According to Rasmussen, George Washington's major fear was the fear of “factions”; he lamented the growth of political parties and the impact these parties had on the political system. In 1798 Washington told Jefferson: “I had no concept that parties would, or even could go, the length I have been witness to”. Alexander Hamilton continually



expressed doubts that the federal government was strong enough to successfully negotiate with European powers; he also worried that the federal government would not be able to withstand efforts by state governments to seize power. As our founding documents were being written Thomas Jefferson was incredibly optimistic about the “American experiment”. In his later years, he feared that the issue of slavery would tear the United States apart; he worried about the conflicts that would eventually take place about the expansion of slavery into American territories. John

Adams worried that voting Americans would have the “civic virtue” necessary to make our “democratic experiment” work In 1816 Adams wrote to Jefferson concerning his observations that “If there is anything serious in this world, the selfishness of our countrymen is not only serious but melancholy, foreboding ravages of ambition and avarice which never were exceeded in this selfish globe”. The one Founding Father who remained optimistic throughout his life was James Madison. In his final public speech, he declared “I have never despaired, notwithstanding all of the threatening appearances we have passed through. I have now more than a hope, a consoling confidence that we shall at last find that our labors have not been in vain”.

“Fears of a Setting Sun: The Disillusionment of America’s Founders” is an incredibly important book. It suggests that the Founding Fathers should not be ossified: they continued to have important debates until the end of their lives. Equally importantly, they continued to debate how long the “American experiment” would last and if the system of government they established would stand the test of time. These are debates and fears that have existed throughout American history and continue to exist in America in 2026.



## ***The Rediscovery of America: Native Peoples and the Unmaking of U.S. History* by Ned Blackhawk (2023)**

In *The Rediscovery of America*, Ned Blackhawk delivers a sweeping and necessary reexamination of American history by placing Native peoples at the very center of the national story. Winner of the National Book Award, the book challenges long-standing narratives that have marginalized Indigenous experiences and instead reveals how Native nations have shaped the political, cultural, and territorial development of the United States from the beginning.

As the United States approaches and reflects upon its 250th anniversary, the way Americans interpret their past has become increasingly complex and contested. Traditional narratives that once centered on founding fathers, political documents, and westward expansion are now being reexamined in light of voices long excluded from the national story. In this context, *The Rediscovery of America: Native Peoples and the Unmaking of U.S. History* by Ned Blackhawk emerges as a profoundly important work, one that challenges readers to reconsider not only what they know about American history, but how that history has been constructed.

Blackhawk's central argument is both direct and transformative: the history of the United States cannot be fully understood without placing Native peoples at its center. Rather than portraying Indigenous communities solely as victims of colonization and expansion, he presents them as active agents, diplomats, strategists, and leaders, who shaped the political, cultural, and territorial development of the nation. This reframing fundamentally alters the narrative of American history, shifting it from a story of inevitable expansion to one of negotiation, resistance, and survival.

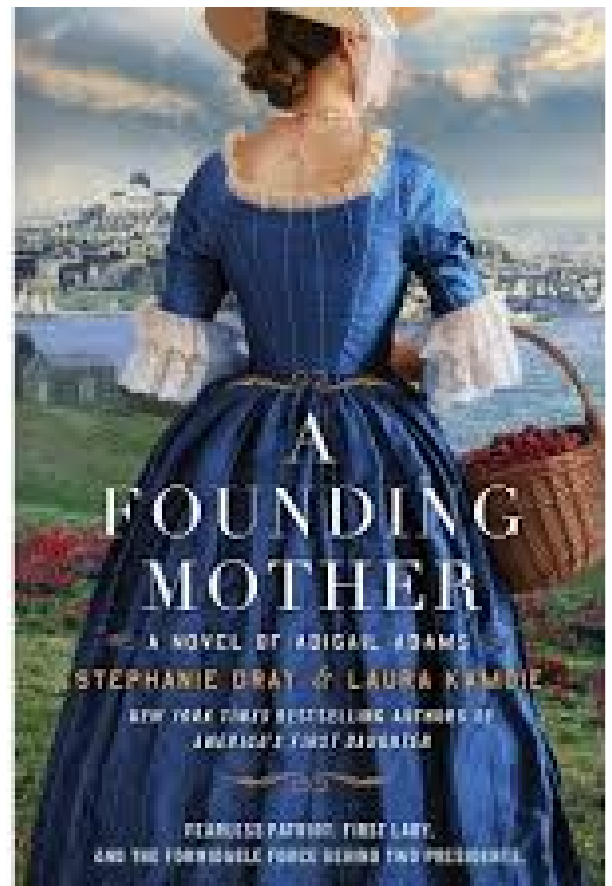
Spanning centuries, Blackhawk's work traces Indigenous presence and influence from pre-colonial societies through key turning points such as European contact and the American Revolution, and into modern struggles for sovereignty and recognition. His writing is both scholarly and accessible, drawing on a wide range of sources, including treaties, legal records, and Indigenous perspectives. While the breadth of the book is one of its strengths, offering a sweeping and cohesive reinterpretation of American history, it can at times limit deeper exploration of specific communities or events. Nevertheless, the scope reinforces the book's central claim: that Indigenous history is not a sidebar, but a continuous and integral thread in the American story.

In the context of America's 250th anniversary, *The Rediscovery of America* carries particular significance. Anniversaries often invite celebration, but they also create opportunities for reflection and reassessment. Blackhawk's work aligns with a broader historiographical shift toward recovering overlooked voices and challenging simplified or celebratory narratives. It encourages readers to grapple with the contradictions embedded in the nation's founding ideals: liberty, equality, and democracy, alongside the realities of displacement, violence, and exclusion experienced by Native peoples. A must-read for anyone seeking a fuller, more honest understanding of American history.

## ***A Founding Mother* by Stephanie Dray & Laura Kamoie (2026)**

Released during the 250th anniversary of the United States, *A Founding Mother* offers a vivid and emotionally compelling portrait of Abigail Adams, one of the most influential yet often overlooked figures of the Revolutionary era. Building upon their previous historical novels centered on women of early America, Dray and Kamoie bring Abigail Adams to life not simply as the wife of John Adams, but as an intellectual force, political confidante, mother, and survivor whose influence helped shape the young republic.

Set against the backdrop of the American Revolution and the turbulent founding years of the nation, the novel follows Abigail through wartime hardships, political upheaval, personal tragedy, and the demanding responsibilities of family life. While John Adams travels across the colonies and Europe, Abigail manages the family farm, raises their children, oversees finances, and provides sharp political insight through her extensive correspondence. The novel highlights her famous plea to "remember the ladies," emphasizing both her progressive thinking and the contradictions within a nation founded on liberty while denying full equality to women.



One of the novel's greatest strengths is its ability to humanize a towering historical figure. Dray and Kamoie craft an intimate, character-driven narrative that draws readers into the emotional realities of Abigail's life. Their prose is engaging and accessible while remaining grounded in extensive historical research, particularly Abigail's letters and correspondence. The authors balance historical detail with narrative momentum, creating a story that feels both educational and deeply personal. Rather than portraying Abigail as a flawless icon, the novel presents her as intelligent, ambitious, resilient, and occasionally conflicted, a woman navigating enormous expectations in an era that limited women's public roles.

Thematically, *A Founding Mother* explores women's voices in history, marriage as intellectual partnership, sacrifice, resilience, and the tension between revolutionary ideals and social realities. Abigail's relationship with John Adams is portrayed as one of mutual respect and intellectual equality, even amid long separations and emotional strain. At the same time, the novel reminds readers that the founding of the nation was not shaped solely in legislative halls or on battlefields, but also in homes, farms, and private correspondence maintained by women whose contributions were rarely acknowledged publicly.

In the context of America 250, the novel carries particular significance. As the nation reflects on its founding and legacy, *A Founding Mother* represents a broader effort to recover overlooked voices and broaden traditional narratives of the American Revolution. Rather than focusing exclusively on famous male founders, the novel argues that women like Abigail Adams were essential participants in the American experiment. Its themes of equality and civic responsibility resonate strongly in contemporary discussions about democracy and national identity.

Like much historical fiction, the novel necessarily imagines dialogue and private thoughts that cannot be fully documented, and readers seeking a strictly academic history may prefer more traditional nonfiction works. However, the emotional immediacy of the storytelling is precisely what gives the book its power. By blending historical research with compelling narrative, Dray and Kamoie make the founding era feel immediate and relevant to modern readers.

Ultimately, *A Founding Mother* is a thoughtful, timely, and engaging work of historical fiction that re-centers the American founding through the experiences of one remarkable woman. As the United States marks 250 years of independence, the novel serves as both a celebration and a reconsideration of the nation's origins, reminding readers that the story of America has always been larger, more complicated, and more inclusive than traditional histories often suggest.



# Join in the fun this summer celebrating America from 1776-2026!

## The 250-Year Bookshelf: How America Has Told Its Story

This quarter we are including a 250-year bookshelf of Great Reads. Read one or read them all! Take time to engage in a literary study of our nation's history through historical-fiction and non-fiction. Wonderful vacation reads!

### Founding Era & Early Republic (1776 - 1820s): Creating the National Story

- *Common Sense* - Thomas Paine (1776)  
A revolutionary call to independence: urgent, ideological, and immediate.
- *Notes on the State of Virginia* - Thomas Jefferson (1785)  
A vision of America's promise and its contradictions, especially on slavery.
- *The Federalist Papers* - Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, John Jay (1787-88)  
A blueprint for governance and early constitutional interpretation.

### Early National Identity & Mythmaking (1820s-1850s): Romanticizing the Past

- *The Last of the Mohicans* - James Fenimore Cooper (1826)  
Frontier myth, Native erasure, and the birth of American historical fiction.
- *Democracy in America* - Alexis de Tocqueville (1835 - 40)  
An outsider's influential interpretation of American democracy and character.

### Civil War & Reconstruction (1850s - 1870s): A Nation Divided

- *Uncle Tom's Cabin* - Harriet Beecher Stowe (1852)  
A moral argument against slavery that reshaped public opinion.
- *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant* - Ulysses S. Grant (1885)  
A soldier's sober reflection on war, union, and reconciliation.

### Gilded Age & Progressive Era (1870s-1920s): Industrial Power & Reform

- *The Gilded Age* - Mark Twain (1873)  
Satire of corruption and inequality in postwar America.
- *The Souls of Black Folk* - W. E. B. Du Bois (1903)  
A profound reframing of American identity through the lens of race.

### Interwar & WWII Era (1920s - 1940s): Disillusionment & Democracy Tested

- *The Great Gatsby* - F. Scott Fitzgerald (1925)  
The American Dream under scrutiny - illusion vs. reality.
- *The Grapes of Wrath* - John Steinbeck (1939)  
Economic hardship and resilience redefine national values.

## **Postwar America (1940s - 1960s): Consensus & Challenge**

- *The American Mind* - Henry Steele Commager (1950)  
A mid-century attempt to define a unified national identity.
- *The Feminine Mystique* - Betty Friedan (1963)  
Challenges the postwar ideal and expands who belongs in the American story.

## **Late 20th Century (1970s - 1990s): Revision & Inclusion**

- *A People's History of the United States* - Howard Zinn (1980)  
A bottom-up reinterpretation centering marginalized voices.
- *Beloved* - Toni Morrison (1987)  
Historical fiction confronting the enduring trauma of slavery.

## **Turn of the 21st Century (2000s-2010s): Synthesis & Storytelling**

- *Founding Brothers* - Joseph Ellis (2000)  
Humanizing the founders while acknowledging contradictions.
- *Team of Rivals* - Doris Kearns Goodwin (2005)  
Leadership and unity through the lens of Abraham Lincoln.

## **Recent Interpretations (2010s-2020s): Reframing the Narrative**

- *These Truths* - Jill Lepore (2018)  
A sweeping synthesis emphasizing ideals vs. reality.
- *The 1619 Project* - Nikole Hannah-Jones (2021)  
A reframing of American origins centered on slavery.
- *The Rediscovery of America* - Ned Blackhawk (2023)  
Re-centers Native American history as foundational to the American story.

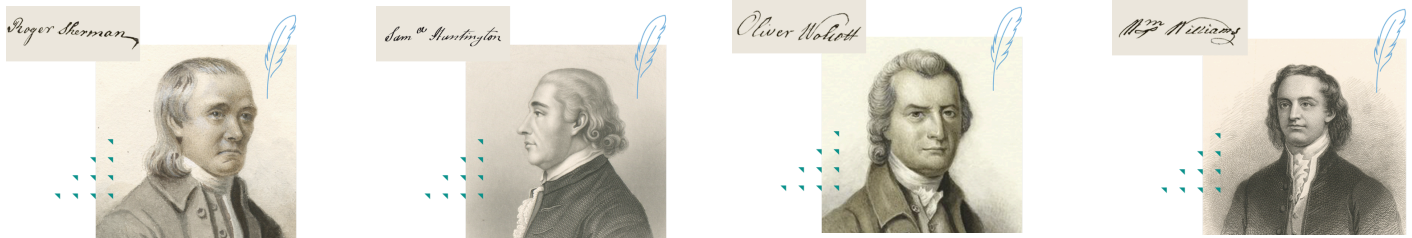
## **Toward 2026: The Semiquincentennial Moment**

- *A Founding Mother* (2026)  
Represents the current shift toward inclusive, gender-aware interpretations of the founding era.

**1776★America★2026**

# Connecticut's Role in the Independence of the United States

Connecticut played a meaningful, though sometimes overlooked, role in the creation and adoption of the Declaration of Independence. While the document is most often associated with figures like Thomas Jefferson, who drafted much of its language, and John Adams, who strongly advocated for independence, Connecticut's contributions came through its influential delegates, its political traditions, and its early commitment to breaking from Great Britain.



Photos Courtesy of the National Constitution Center

## Connecticut's Signers of the Declaration of Independence

At the time of the American Revolution, Connecticut was represented in the Continental Congress by a group of capable and respected leaders, including Roger Sherman, Samuel Huntington, Oliver Wolcott, and William Williams. These men were not merely symbolic representatives; they were active participants in the debates that shaped the colonies' decision to seek independence. Their presence ensured that Connecticut's voice was part of the larger conversation about liberty, governance, and the future of the emerging nation.

Among them, Roger Sherman stands out as particularly significant. Sherman was a member of the small committee tasked with drafting the Declaration, working alongside Jefferson, Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and Robert R. Livingston. Although Jefferson took the lead in writing, Sherman contributed to the editing and refinement of the document, helping to shape its final form. Known for his practicality and steady judgment, Sherman played a key role in building consensus among delegates who did not always agree. His importance in the founding era is further underscored by the fact that he is the only individual to have signed all four of the nation's foundational documents.

Connecticut's influence extended beyond individual contributions to the drafting process. The colony brought with it a long-established tradition of self-government rooted in the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut. This early framework for representative government helped shape the political thinking of its leaders and reinforced their belief that authority should come from the people rather than a distant monarch. By 1776, Connecticut was already functioning with a strong sense of independence, which made its delegates more willing to support a complete break from British rule.

When the Declaration was finalized and presented for signatures, Connecticut's commitment was clearly demonstrated. Sherman, Huntington, Wolcott, and Williams all signed the document, formally aligning their colony with the revolutionary cause. Their signatures represented not just personal conviction but the will of a colony that had already embraced the idea of independence.

In the end, Connecticut's role in the writing of the Declaration of Independence was less about crafting its most famous phrases and more about ensuring its success. Through the efforts of its delegates and its tradition of self-rule, Connecticut helped transform the Declaration from a bold statement into a unified decision backed by all thirteen colonies.



## Connecticut in the American Revolution: The “Provision State”

When the American colonies declared independence in 1776, the small colony of Connecticut played an outsized role in the fight against British rule. Though it saw fewer large-scale battles than some other colonies, Connecticut became essential to the Patriot cause through its leadership, resources, and strategic location. For this reason, it earned the nickname “The Provision State.”

By the mid-1700s, Connecticut’s people were already accustomed to a significant degree of self-government. Operating under a colonial charter that allowed unusual political independence, many residents developed a strong sense of autonomy. When tensions with Britain increased following measures like the Stamp Act, support for resistance spread throughout the colony. Leaders such as Jonathan Trumbull emerged as strong advocates for the Patriot cause. Trumbull was the only colonial governor to openly support the Revolution, and he worked closely with George Washington to ensure the Continental Army had the resources it needed.

Connecticut’s most important contribution to the war effort was its ability to supply the army. Its farms, mills, and workshops consistently produced food, weapons, ammunition, and clothing for soldiers. This steady flow of provisions helped sustain Washington’s forces through some of the most difficult periods of the war, including the harsh winter at Valley Forge. Because of this critical support, Connecticut earned its lasting nickname as “The Provision State.”

Although Connecticut did not host many large battles, it was still deeply affected by the war. In 1777, British forces led by William Tryon marched into the colony to destroy American supplies in Danbury. Patriot troops, including Benedict Arnold, confronted them in the Battle of Ridgefield. While the British eventually withdrew, the encounter demonstrated the determination of Connecticut’s defenders. Along the coastline, British raids brought destruction to several towns. In 1779, Fairfield and Norwalk were attacked and burned, leaving residents to rebuild their communities amid the ongoing conflict.

One of the most tragic events in Connecticut occurred in 1781 at Fort Griswold in Groton. British forces overwhelmed the American defenders after a fierce battle, and many soldiers were killed even after surrendering. This event shocked the colonies and underscored the brutality of the war.

Connecticut also contributed influential leaders to the Revolutionary cause. Figures such as Nathanael Greene and Israel Putnam played key roles in military campaigns, while Roger Sherman helped shape the new nation politically. Sherman remains notable as the only individual to sign all four major founding documents of the United States.

For everyday people in Connecticut, the Revolution brought significant challenges. Many men left their homes to serve in the army, forcing women and children to take on new responsibilities. Supplies were often scarce, and prices rose as the war continued. Despite these hardships, communities remained committed to the cause, supporting soldiers and maintaining production on farms and in workshops.

By the end of the war in 1783, Connecticut had proven itself essential to the success of the American Revolution. Its resources sustained the army, its leaders guided the fight for independence, and its citizens endured the sacrifices required for victory. Today, Connecticut’s role in the Revolution is remembered through historic sites, monuments, and the enduring legacy of its contributions to the founding of the United States.

# Travel to Connecticut's Revolutionary Sites for the 250th

## “From Encampments to Coastlines: Connecticut's Revolutionary Story”

Nicknamed “The Provision State,” Connecticut supplied food, weapons, and manpower to the Continental Army throughout the war. From inland encampments to coastal fortifications, the state formed a critical bridge between strategy and survival.

Discover the people, places, and pivotal moments that made Connecticut one of the most important colonies in the fight for American independence. Walk in the footsteps of George Washington, Nathan Hale, and the Continental soldiers who shaped the future of the nation. Travel Connecticut's Revolutionary War story through: Encampments, command centers, spying networks, and coastal defenses

Participate in the lived experience of revolution where local landscapes became national history.

### PLANNING THE REVOLUTION

- **Old Wethersfield Historic District**  
A colonial river town that served as a political and supply hub during the war. Its streets preserve the rhythm of 18th-century life.
- **Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum**  
A command center of history where **George Washington** met with French allies in 1781 to plan the Yorktown campaign.
- **Putnam Memorial State Park**  
Known as “*Connecticut's Valley Forge*,” this encampment site reveals the hardships of Continental soldiers during the winter of 1778-79.
- **Battle of Ridgefield Site**  
Location of the only inland Revolutionary War battle in Connecticut (1777).
- **Shaw Mansion**  
Served as Connecticut's naval headquarters during the war.
- **Governor Jonathan Trumbull War Office**  
Coordination center for Connecticut's war effort.

### HEROES, SPIES & SACRIFICE

- **Nathan Hale Homestead**  
Birthplace of Connecticut's famed patriot spy. Hale's legacy, “I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country,” continues to define American sacrifice.

**1776** ★ **America** ★ **2026**

## CAMPS, ROUTES & ENCAMPMENTS

- **Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route**  
120-mile National Historic Trail used by French troops marching to Yorktown.
- **Revolutionary War Campsite**  
Archaeological remains of a 1778 Continental Army encampment.
- **Old Wethersfield Historic District**  
Important staging and meeting location during the war.

## WAR ON THE COAST

- **New Haven Green**  
Site near the 1779 British raid that brought war directly to Connecticut's shoreline communities.
- **Fort Trumbull State Park**  
A coastal defense installation protecting one of the colony's most important ports.
- **Fort Griswold Battlefield State Park**  
Site of the 1781 Battle of Groton Heights, one of the war's most devastating conflicts in Connecticut.

## UNIQUE & NOTABLE SITES

- **Old New-Gate Prison and Copper Mine**  
Used as a prison for British soldiers.
- **Connecticut Old State House**  
Political center during the Revolutionary era.
- **The Griswold Inn**  
Opened in 1776 and served soldiers and shipbuilders.



## Childhood in Revolutionary Connecticut

Life for children in the Connecticut Colony during the American Revolution was shaped by both the rhythms of daily colonial life and the disruptions of war. While adults debated independence and fought in battles, children experienced the Revolution in quieter but equally meaningful ways, through their work, education, family responsibilities, and exposure to the growing spirit of patriotism.

Most children in Connecticut lived in small farming communities where daily life required hard work from an early age. Boys and girls were expected to contribute to their households by tending animals, planting crops, fetching water, and helping with cooking and cleaning. When war broke out in 1775, these responsibilities often increased. Many fathers and older brothers joined colonial militias or the Continental Army, leaving children to take on greater roles at home. Young boys might help manage farms or apprenticeships, while girls often assumed additional domestic duties, essentially helping to keep families and communities functioning during uncertain times.

Education remained important in Connecticut, a colony known for its strong emphasis on literacy and religious instruction. Many children attended local schools when they could, learning to read, write, and understand religious teachings, often from the New England Primer. However, the war sometimes interrupted schooling. Teachers left to serve in the military, school buildings were repurposed, or families simply needed their children at home. Even so, the spread of revolutionary ideas meant that children were often exposed to political discussions. They heard adults talk about liberty, taxation, and independence, and many grew up with a strong sense of what it meant to be part of a new nation.

Children also contributed directly to the war effort in small but meaningful ways. They carried messages, gathered supplies, and helped produce goods needed by soldiers. Some girls participated in spinning bees, making homespun cloth to support the boycott of British goods. Boys sometimes served as drummer boys or assistants to soldiers, gaining firsthand experience of military life. Though they were young, their efforts supported the broader Patriot cause.

The presence of war could also bring fear and uncertainty. While Connecticut was not the site of many major battles, it was affected by nearby conflicts and British raids, such as those in coastal towns like New London. Families worried about safety, and children sometimes witnessed soldiers passing through their towns or heard stories of violence and destruction. These experiences left lasting impressions, shaping how they understood the cost of war.

Despite these challenges, childhood in Revolutionary Connecticut was not without moments of normalcy. Children still played games, went to school, attended church, and participated in community life. Seasonal events and family traditions continued, offering stability during a time of upheaval. Yet the Revolution inevitably changed them. Many children grew up quickly, taking on adult responsibilities and absorbing the ideals of independence that would define the new United States.

In the end, children in the Connecticut Colony were not just bystanders to history. Their labor, resilience, and exposure to revolutionary ideas made them part of the larger story of American independence. Though their contributions were often less visible than those of soldiers and political leaders, they played a vital role in sustaining their families and communities during one of the most transformative periods in American history.

# Children's Bookshelf: Growing Up with America's Story

This collection of books shows young readers that American history is not just a timeline, it's a growing story. From the Revolution to today, these books reflect how each generation has: told its story; questioned its past; and worked to make the nation more inclusive.

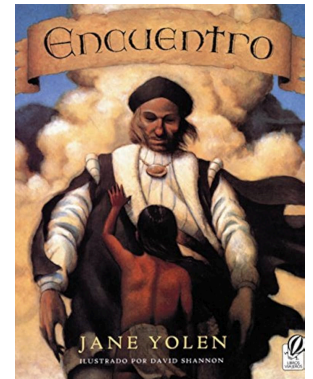
## Founding Era & Early America

- *If You Lived at the Time of the American Revolution* - Kay Moore  
Explains daily life and big ideas of the Revolution through kid-friendly questions.
- *George vs. George* - Rosalyn Schanzer  
A lively, balanced look at George Washington and King George III.
- *Ghost River- The Fall and Rise of the Conestoga* - Lee Francis IV, Weshoyot Alvitre, & Will Fenton  
A graphic novel that is part of Redrawing History: Indigenous Perspectives on Colonial America



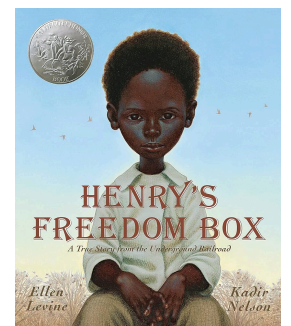
## Expanding Nation & Diverse Voices

- *Follow the Drinking Gourd* - Jeanette Winter  
A poetic introduction to the Underground Railroad and the hope for freedom.
- *Encounter* - Jane Yolen  
Reframes early contact through a Native American perspective.



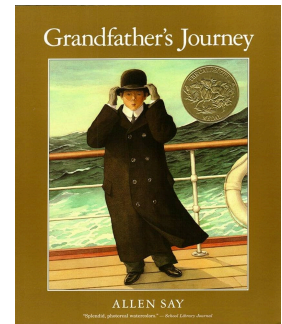
## Civil War & Freedom

- *Henry's Freedom Box* - Ellen Levine  
A powerful true story of one man's escape from slavery.
- *Pink and Say* - Patricia Polacco  
Friendship and sacrifice during the Civil War.
- *A Is for Abolitionist* - Innosanto Nagara  
An introduction to the ideas and people behind abolition, connecting past struggles for freedom to ongoing movements for justice.
- *Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom* - Carole Weatherford  
A story of Harriet Tubman and her courageous leadership on the Underground Railroad.



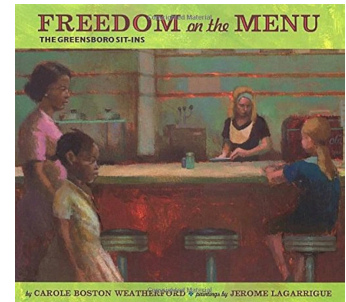
## Immigration & American Identity

- *Grandfather's Journey* - Allen Say  
A quiet reflection on immigration, identity, and belonging.
- *Coming to America* - Betsy Maestro  
An accessible overview of immigration across U.S. history.



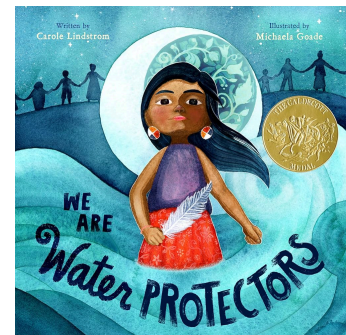
## 20th Century Challenges & Change

- *The Story of Ruby Bridges* - Robert Coles  
A young girl's courage during school desegregation.
- *Freedom on the Menu* - Carole Boston Weatherford  
The Civil Rights Movement through a child's eyes.



## Modern America & Expanding Narratives

- *We Are Water Protectors* - Carole Lindstrom  
A contemporary Native-led environmental story rooted in activism.
- *Separate Is Never Equal* - Duncan Tonatiuh  
The story of school desegregation through the Mendez family case.



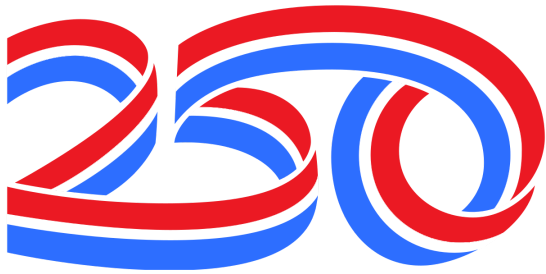
## Biographies That Shape the Story

- *Who Was Harriet Tubman?* - Yona Zeldis McDonough
- *I Am Martin Luther King Jr.* - Brad Meltzer
- *She Persisted* - Chelsea Clinton

These biographies introduce young readers to individuals who expanded the meaning of American freedom.

This collection of books shows young readers that American History is not just a timeline, but it's a growing story. From the Revolution to today, these books reflect how each generation has told its story, questioned its past, and worked to make the nation more inclusive.

# AMERICA



As you all know July 4, 2026 will be the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the United States. There is an America 250 Commission in Connecticut that is planning statewide events; many communities in Connecticut have local commissions that are planning events for their cities and towns. The statewide America250 Commission has an education subcommittee; Steve Armstrong has the honor of serving as the chairperson of that group.

If you go to the Connecticut America250 website (<https://ct250.org/>) you will find many resources that will assist you in the teaching of this important topic. We have determined that four major themes can guide schools and towns as they approach July 4, 2026:

- Tell Inclusive Stories
- The Power of Place
- Doing History
- For the Common Good



The statewide commission has also spent much time on how to approach this topic: should this be a “celebration” or a “commemoration” of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Revolutionary War. The answer is both! We should celebrate the founding of our nation and the ideas in our founding documents. At the same time, students and teachers should analyze how the concepts emerging from our founding documents have developed over time and how, in fact, during certain periods of our history these ideas have been challenged.

What can districts, schools, teachers and teachers do regarding the study of July 4, 2026:

- Study the events and the impact of these events in classrooms. What was the role of Connecticut and your own community in this revolutionary era? In all probability, your community was involved, in some way, in the American Revolution. We are developing a way that research that classes and students do can be published so that Connecticut residents can see the work that students have done.
- Reach out and have students work with local historical societies and local America250 commissions. Many of these organizations would love to collaborate with local students; many would welcome the input of students in planning community events.
- For teachers: we are planning a number of podcasts and webinars that are related to America250: these will be publicized in various ways. We will also be producing curriculum materials that will be distributed to all districts.
- For teachers and students: note that the new Ken Burns series on the Revolutionary War is now available. Get engaged in this series!

We are greatly looking forward to having students and teachers involved in these important topics. If you want more information, contact [Stephen.Armstrong@ct.gov](mailto:Stephen.Armstrong@ct.gov)



For those of you who are looking for resources and information you can use in your classrooms, check out the [CCSS Website!](#)

### ***Get Civically Involved:***

Join the Connecticut Council for the Social Studies Today! Help us to promote the study of social studies across the state. This [link](#) will take you to the membership page where you have the option of joining online, or printing out a hardcopy form to complete and mail in.