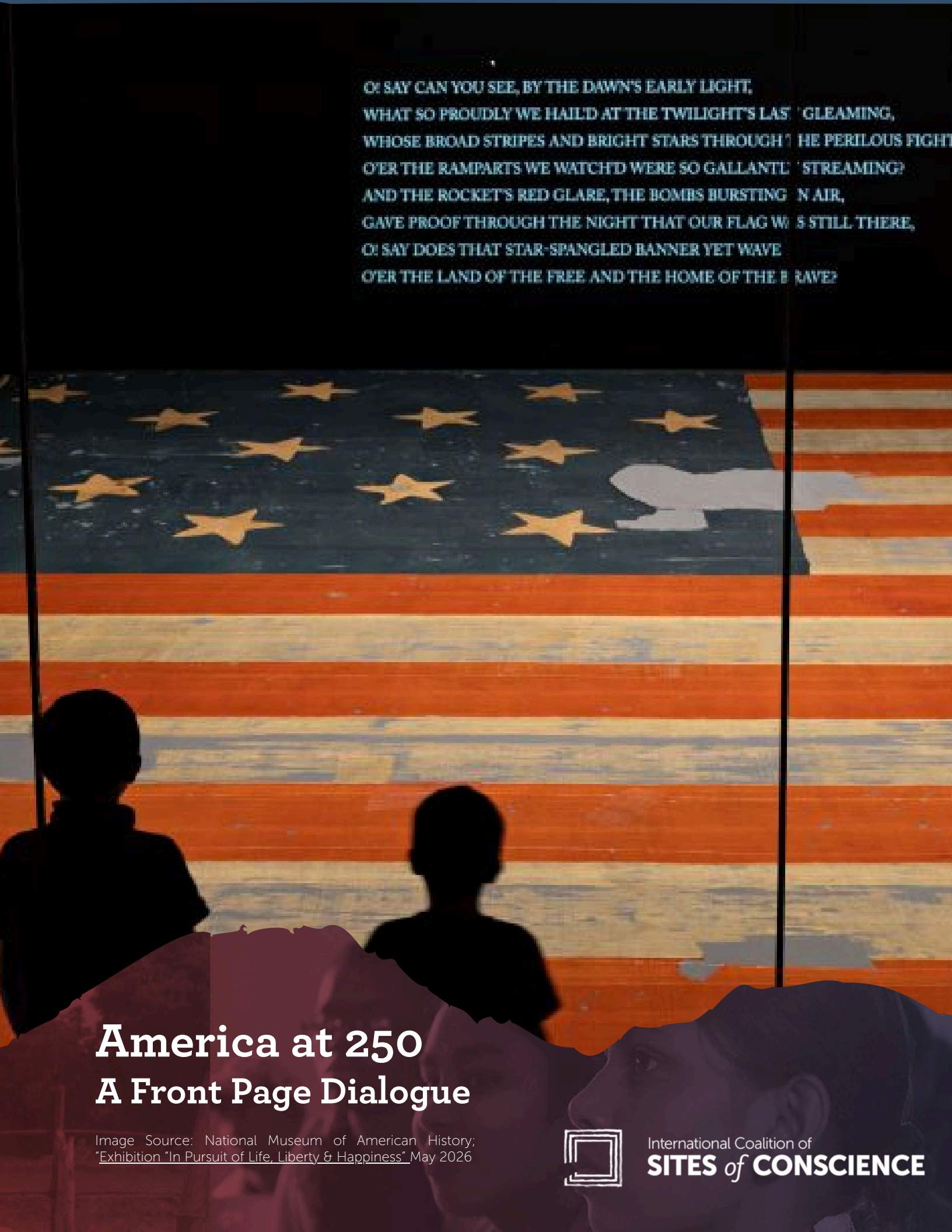


O! SAY CAN YOU SEE, BY THE DAWN'S EARLY LIGHT,
WHAT SO PROUDLY WE HAILED AT THE TWILIGHT'S LAST GLEAMING,
WHOSE BROAD STRIPES AND BRIGHT STARS THROUGH THE PERILOUS FIGHT
O'ER THE RAMPARTS WE WATCH'D WERE SO GALLANTLY STREAMING?
AND THE ROCKET'S RED GLARE, THE BOMBS BURSTING IN AIR,
GAVE PROOF THROUGH THE NIGHT THAT OUR FLAG WAS STILL THERE,
O! SAY DOES THAT STAR-SPANGLED BANNER YET WAVE
O'ER THE LAND OF THE FREE AND THE HOME OF THE BRAVE?



America at 250 A Front Page Dialogue

Image Source: National Museum of American History;
"Exhibition "In Pursuit of Life, Liberty & Happiness" May 2026



International Coalition of
SITES of CONSCIENCE



FRONT PAGE DIALOGUE: America at 250

This Front Page Dialogue is rooted in methodology developed by International Coalition of Sites of Conscience in partnership with members of a worldwide network of over 360 places of memory dedicated to remembering past struggles for justice and addressing their contemporary legacies.

Who is this dialogue for?

A Front Page Dialogue is a resource grounded in ICSC's methodology and the arc of dialogue in which participants move through the four phases of dialogue, answer dialogic questions, engage across differences and deepen their understanding around a specific topic.

This Front Page Dialogue is designed for public use by museums, historic sites, libraries, memory initiatives, schools, and community organizations who wish to engage in a dialogue and reflection around America's 250th anniversary with their communities.

Using this dialogue as a resource

Rather than using all the model questions suggested under each phase, facilitators may select questions that reflect the evolving conversation of the group they are guiding in the dialogue. We also anticipate that you will develop new questions ahead of time or during the dialogue to draw on the strengths of your particular site, organization or community, or to respond to the needs of participants. Depending on how big the group is and how deep this conversation goes, the anticipated time of this dialogue can be between 1-2 hours.

Preparation for the Facilitator

- Ensure that there is a comfortable space for all participants; welcome participants as they arrive.
- As participants arrive, work to gain an understanding of their motivations for attending; understand who is in the room.

Please note, the text in italics is for your information and is not meant to be read aloud to participants.

Resources

At the end of this document are two different resources that can be used in Phase 3 of the dialogue. Depending on your group, you may want to print out copies of the articles for several people to share together, and print out the quotes to use for participants to gather around in reflective conversation. We also encourage you to identify your own shared resources depending on your site and conversation you want to have.



Guidelines

Working together, the group can agree on a few guidelines for the conversation. Some suggestions are:

- Share the air: leave room for everyone to speak
- Acknowledge different ways of knowing all have value: intellectual, spiritual and emotional
- Recognize that all of our life experiences are different and verbal attacks on an individual's identity or beliefs are never acceptable.
- Seek first to understand—ask questions to clarify, not to debate. Suspend judgement.
- When sharing personal experiences or viewpoints, use “I” statements to avoid making assumptions about others.
- Be kind and compassionate with ourselves and others, recognizing that we are all here to learn from others and unlearning biases, beliefs

Model Introduction

(Adapt or share another introduction as appropriate)

Thank you for joining us today. We look forward to spending this time learning together from each other and other community stories.

As we get started, a few community guidelines for our conversation:

- Share the air
- ...
- ...

Can we all agree to those? Anything else people need from each other to have this conversation today?

As America marks 250 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence in July 2026, the milestone provides an opportunity for the country to reflect on its origins, its present, and to define its future. This reflection arrives in a charged moment, one marked by deepening political division and deliberate efforts to narrow which stories are told, taught, and commemorated in public life. Disagreements about America's history are never simply about the past. They reflect competing understandings of what the nation is, who belongs, how the present should be interpreted, and which values should guide the Nation's future.

State-led commemorations often promote a singular official narrative that obscures the diversity of historical experiences and perspectives, while simultaneously advancing particular political agendas. However, commemorations also provide space for broader reflection and do not belong to governments alone. They belong to all Americans and have the power to highlight more inclusive stories of who we are and how we remember, as a way to articulate a more inclusive vision moving forward. At a time when national policy limits the historical memory of America's past and future, community groups and memory initiatives are challenging this top-down, single-narrative approach that seeks to silence competing interpretations of a shared past.



Today's dialogue on America 250 provides an opportunity to engage in that fuller history; the moments of pride and the moments of pain, the voices that have been centered and those that have been pushed to the margins. Our conversation is an invitation to sit with complexity, to listen across differences, and to ask together what a more honest and inclusive account of America's past 250 years and what that might mean for the next 250 years.

Does anyone have any questions before we start?

Let's begin.

PHASE 1: TRUST BUILDING

Phase one encourages connectedness and relationship-building within the group. The work done here underpins the successful creation of a safe space where all participants can engage.

- What is one of your first memories (of July 4th / of voting)?
- What foods/traditions come to mind when you think about the US or American identity?
- Can you remember a time when you felt particularly American / un-American?
- Is there a historical fact or anecdote about America's founding you remember learning that sticks out to you?
- Is there a book, movie or TV show that influenced your early understanding of American identity?
- Have you ever visited a national historical site, monument or museum that genuinely moved you?
- How do people in your family/community express pride in their country?



PHASE 2: SHARING OUR OWN EXPERIENCE

Phase two invites participants to think about their own experiences related to the topic and share these experiences with the group. The facilitator helps participants recognize how their experiences are alike and different and why. Questions in phase two welcome each person's experience equally and place minimal judgment on responses, gathering more information than questions in phase one.

- Is there a piece of American history that you learned later in life that surprised you?
- How has your understanding of US history changed over time?
- Is being American an important part of your identity? Why or why not?
- Can you remember a moment when you felt particularly proud / embarrassed of being an American?
- What emotions do you feel most strongly when you think about the first 250 years since this country's founding?
- When you think about America 250, is there someone from your family or community whose story you'd like to share? Why is this meaningful to you?
- How would you like to see your community mark America 250?



PHASE 3: EXPLORING BEYOND OUR OWN EXPERIENCES

Phase three questions explore the topic beyond participants' personal experiences with it, to learn with and from one another. Until this point, participants speak primarily from their own experience, of which they are the undeniable expert. Phase three questions provoke participants to dig deeper into their assumptions and to actively probe underlying social conditions that inform our diversity of perspectives.

- How has your family, community or personal experience shaped your understanding of US history?
- What histories do you believe the majority of Americans don't know about?
- Why do you think these histories are not better known?
- What are the consequences of this?
- What impact does this silencing have on the social fabric of the country as a whole?
- What would an America 250 commemoration that reckoned with the full history of this country, including all of its strengths, failures, and contradictions, look like?
- How would you describe American values?
- How have American values changed or remained consistent over the 250 years since the country's founding?
- How would you like to see American values/priorities/identity change over the next 250 years?
- When you think about American society and histories as a whole, what gives you the most hope?
- When you read the [article](#) on American pride (Attachment A), what stands out to you? Is there anything that surprises you?
- Gallery Wall Quotes – Using quotes in Attachment B, The facilitator can print out the quotes and hang them around the dialogue space or pass them out as a handout. Then the facilitator will ask participants to read all of them, silently. After reading all of the quotes, participants are instructed to stand near the quote that they'd like to speak more about. Participants are then encouraged to discuss why they chose that quote either in small groups or the full group.



PHASE 4: SYNTHESIZING AND CLOSING THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

After dialogue programs that reveal differences as well as similarities between participants, it is important to end a dialogue by reinforcing a sense of community. Phase four questions help participants examine what they've learned about themselves and each other and voice the impact that the dialogue has had on them.

- Did today's conversation cause you to reconsider an assumption or belief you previously held about American history? If so, what?
- What is one thing you want to carry out of this dialogue (a question, an image, a story someone shared) that you will reflect more on?
- Who would you like to share what you learned today with?
- Based on our conversation today, what would you like to see your community do in relation to America 250?
- What would you like to do?

How did it go?

We'd love to hear from you on how this dialogue went, what came up for your group and any suggestions you'd have for future front page dialogues.

Send us an email at sfernandez@sitesofconscience.org for inquiries and more information



SHARED RESOURCES

Attachment A

- What Makes People Proud of Their Country?
<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2026/02/17/what-makes-people-proud-of-their-country/>
- 6 facts about national pride in the U.S <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2026/02/17/6-facts-about-national-pride-in-the-us/>



SHARED RESOURCES

Attachment B (printable resource)

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

— Thomas Jefferson, Declaration of Independence (1776)



SHARED RESOURCES

Attachment B (printable resource)

“American history is longer,
larger, more various, more
beautiful, and more terrible than
anything anyone has ever said
about it.”

— James Baldwin



SHARED RESOURCES

Attachment B (printable resource)

““Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"
Emma Lazarus, about the Statue of Liberty



SHARED RESOURCES

Attachment B (printable resource)

"Knowledge will forever govern
ignorance; and a people who mean to
be their own governors must arm
themselves with the power which
knowledge gives."

— James Madison, Letter to W.T. Barry
(1822)



SHARED RESOURCES

Attachment B (printable resource)

"The struggle for sovereignty is not
a struggle to be left alone, but a
struggle to be responsible — to
ourselves, our ancestors, our
children."

— Winona LaDuke (Ojibwe), activist
and author