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Thought Action Paper: "Celebrating The Declaration Of Independence Key Lessons For 2026 From The Big Four In 1826, 1876, 1926, And 1976"

by

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Thought Action Paper: "Celebrating The Declaration Of Independence--Key Lessons From The Big Four In 1826, 1876, 1926, And 1976"

The major four celebrations of the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence had a clear imprint. The 50th anniversary in 1826 was about the **people** from the Revolutionary era, some still living. The 100th anniversary in 1876 elevated Philadelphia as a **place** for celebrating independence and progress. The 150th anniversary in 1926 was a **re-place,** taking the celebration back to Philadelphia and with a national-global theme. 1976's 200th anniversary of the Declaration was a **reverse** to an emphasis on people, involving and including men, women, and children of daily life from all aspects of the American nation.

Strategic Lessons To Help The 250th Anniversary In 2026:

First—The celebrations are AT a particular time.

- The current year's public events affect commemoration.

Second—The celebrations are OF a particular time.

- A public mood from the prior 3-6 years creates channels of public action for the Declaration's remembrance.

Third—The celebrations look BACKWARD.

- The most defining aspects of the story of the Declaration of Independence and the American Revolution will be found.

Fourth—The celebrations will look FORWARD.

- The future will be framed from the Declaration's current state of understanding.

Fifth—The celebrations will turn INWARD.

- The nation's domestic condition will be examined in new light.

Sixth—The celebrations will turn OUTWARD.

The nation's place in the world will be re-explored.

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"Celebrating The Declaration Of Independence--
Key Lessons For 2026 From The Big Four In 1826, 1876, 1926, And 1976"

Welcome and Introduction

It's often said that we should learn from history. It's also often said that we fail to learn from history. With both points in mind as we approach the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 2026, I have sought to find history's key lessons and takeaways in how Americans have understood the Declaration at four major junctures in the American past—the 50th anniversary in 1826; the 100th anniversary in 1876; the 150th anniversary in 1926; and the 200th anniversary in 1976.

Below are the Big Four.

Celebration One: The 50th of 1826

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 1826 was to look at a face you knew, to hear a voice you recognized, to be in the presence of a real person. The face, the voice, and the presence all belonged to a living survivor of the original struggle of 1775-1776 and the broader Revolutionary War that ended in 1783. In their late 70s, 80s, or early 90s by 1826, a small number of these people were still alive and, if not, a larger number of people had known someone from that generation who had only recently died.

The 50th celebration was about people first and foremost. It was about embodied memories that could walk and talk and share real stories from their youth. They had lived it: fought in a famous battle, been in the space where a crucial speech was made or had given the speech themselves, or pitched in to make some other contribution at a pivotal moment in time. Whether known across the nation or known across their community, they were the Founders and they did the Founding.

This fact emerged in every corner of the celebration.

The celebration lasted, essentially, for more than two years. A unique beginning marked the 50th with its unofficial launch two years early in 1824. Nearing the end of his life, the Marquis de Lafayette arrived in fall 1824 to tour the United States. Lafayette was known as an intimate of George Washington's, having joined the Revolutionary War from France at age 19 and launching a son-like relationship with the nation's Father who no sons. It was Lafayette's first return to the United States since the end of the Revolutionary War. The tour of Lafayette took him to all twenty-four states of the union, starting in the northeast, proceeding down the east coast, inland toward the Tennessee River valley, and back north and east through the Ohio valley. In an era where travel was both slow and physically dangerous, Lafayette's national tour was a stunning tribute to the power of the 50th celebration. In a very real way, he was Tocqueville before there was Tocqueville.

At every stop along the way, in large cities by the hundreds and in small towns by the score, Americans turned out to attend special dinners, dances, and welcoming events in honor of Lafayette. Emotions were raw as well; Lafayette and the people he met cheered and wept and prayed, clasped hands and waved, bowed heads and saluted. Somberness marked each celebration, seriousness marked each occasion.

At the events members of the crowds brought relics to Lafayette. These relics were guns, uniforms, flags, and swords from the war. They wanted him to see the items, each holding a story and a meaning. They also wanted him to hold the items, a sort of secularized shaman or wise man offering santification through touch and acknowledgement. When he handed the items back to their owners, they left in silent contemplation. The special article they possessed had gained even greater meaning.

Crowds watched Lafayette from a shared perspective. They saw his aging, frail condition and recognized that the nation's youthfulness and the Founders' waning years had a mysterious connection to each other. Every passing month included the burial of another dead Patriot, the starkest of reminders of time's relentless beating against the shores of the young American republic. As people, the Founders and the Founding generation were slipping from sight during the 50th celebration.

Some of the sentiments of Lafayette's tour are not as difficult to recapture as we might first assume in the onset of the mid-2020s. We have our own versions of Founders from the 50th anniversary—the generations of World War II, the Korean War, and inevitably, the Vietnam War. Each year's arrival of a key anniversary within these wars motivates us to reflect on the dwindling numbers of surviving military veterans of D-Day, Chosin Reservoir, or the Tet Offensive, respectively. In addition, "Honor Flights" transport many of these military veterans to specific war memorials and monuments in Washington DC. Annual commemorations occur for Memorial Day and Veterans Day. Aspect of these events harken back to Lafayette's tour in the run-up to 1826.

Our modern-day versions also involve living people who carry us back to a specific and dramatic moment in the American past. Media coverage shows us aging men and women standing in ill-fitting uniforms, wrinkled hands in the position of saluting, music and speeches made in their honor. In many such instances we hear and read of latent post-traumatic stress disorder among these aging survivors. The scenes remind us of our mortality, the fleetness of life, and ceaseless march of generation to generation. We wonder and worry over who can fill their shoes.

The difference is that Americans from the era of the Declaration's 50th anniversary were seeing elderly people who served in the Founding as well as in war. Military service was secondary to the purpose of their military service—that is, the effort to make the aspiration of independence into a reality of nationhood went beyond specific geopolitical circumstances for war. For us today, other political aspects of war-making come into play; the various causes and circumstances that necessitated military service may or may not promote unity and solidarity. Independence and the birth of nationhood were far more encompassing and inclusive than latter-day armed conflicts. And the memories of independence and nationhood attached to the people who embodied them.

The implication of the difference is tied to people. The 50th celebration was about people living in local places. Living and breathing examples of people from 1776 and the Founding were accessible centerpieces of celebration, memory, and meaning. People of the era and the places they called home were the distinctive aspects of the "Jubilee", the moniker of

the 50th anniversary.

Some of these people were in the crowd gathered near Boston in 1825 to honor the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Bunker Hill in the first year of the American Revolution. Daniel Webster was the keynote speaker for a ground-breaking event of an obelisk to be built to commemorate the battle. The site and monument were viewed somehow as the nation's first formal honoring of the Founding in memory.

Like Lafayette's series of speeches, Webster's address was part of a two-year run-up to the Declaration's Jubilee, its 50th anniversary. Webster stated "We see before us a probable train of great events; we know that our own fortunes have been happily cast; and it is natural, therefore, that we should be moved by the contemplation of occurrences which have guided our destiny before many of us were born, and settled the condition in which we should pass that portion of our existence which God allows to men on earth."

After reciting the early history of British America, Webster urged the crowd to marvel at "modern" times. "We live in a most extraordinary age. Events so various and so important that they might crowd and distinguish centuries are, in our times, compressed within the compass of a single life." But then he wrenched the audience out of the current day and rooted them fifty years into the past, on the day of battle, with heroic commanders and heroic soldiers. Webster expounded on the political aspects of that June day in 1775 as well.

Webster framed the closing section of his speech with a rendering of life's progress and successes since the great battle. The advancements proved the worth of the grand experiment in self-government, in a republic, and the world was continuously watching its results. Webster pointed to recent revolutions in South America as signs of the global change. "Let our object be," he concluded, "Our Country, Our Whole Country, and Nothing But Our Country. And, by the blessing of God, may that country itself become a vast and splendid monument, not of oppression and terror, but of Wisdom, of Peace, and of Liberty, upon which the world may gaze with admiration forever."

Webster's speech was rushed into print. Indeed, every major celebration of

the Declaration of Independence in 1826 also depended on the written and printed word as the most important form of communication. Specifically, books and pamphlets like Webster's speech were the primary type of public and civic communication in the 50th anniversary of the Declaration. The printed word reflected the unique setting of the 50th Jubilee.

The role of books and the printed word in the 50th celebration deserves further analysis for a moment longer. The use of reading material guaranteed that the celebration extended outside of arranged events. People who purchased hardbound or soft-cover books brought the 50th celebration into their own homes, social spaces, and workplaces. They added to whatever themes and messages defined formal or public events held in their communities.

The private time in reading Declaration or Revolution-themed writings amounted to a vibrant strain of people's understanding of the moment and its meaning. To stand in a crowd listening to a speech as part of a planned agenda is one thing. Though participatory, it is still largely passive, aside from the decision to travel and stand (or sit) for a brief time. This use of time was a welcome respite in life in 1826 when so much of one's existence was devoted to hard work and basic survival.

But to sit absorbed in the written story unfolded by an author is something entirely different. A person who buys or borrows a book written within the mood of the 50th anniversary commits hours of mental concentration to the task. The hours also include pauses for reflection and imagination, making reading an active exercise of thinking, learning, and knowing. We must recognize another hidden fact: reading was an innovative and increasingly fashionable use of a person's time in the mid-1820s. Books (and newspapers) were becoming a sought-after improvement to quality-of-life, exposing people to a flow of information, amusement, and enrichment more available than one or two generations ago. Moreover, and this is concealed in plain sight, a more available marketplace of light-producing candles and lanterns was accessible by people in the mid-1820s. Comparing 1826 to 1776 in the areas of space illumination and household readerships, the Founding happened in the dark while the 50th celebration of the Founding unfolded in the light.

Thus, in 1826, a person who buys or borrows a book written within the

mood and attitudes of the 50th anniversary commits hours of mental concentration. Books written within the spirit of the 50th anniversary were a source of people's embrace of the celebration itself, either in creating expectations what they would see or hear in a celebration or serving as standards in judging the celebrations after their conclusion. Private reading affected public knowledge.

A sample of these books tells us much. A prediction might be that George Washington as the Founding's national symbol would dominate the literary scene in 1826's outpouring of written work. As it happened, intriguingly, the prediction proved untrue. Other people emerged as subjects alongside Washington. William Wirt was a zealously ambitious political operative who kept in constant awareness of public tastes. Wirt chose to write a biography not of Washington but instead of Washington's Virginia neighbor, Patrick Henry. Wirt's narrative of Henry's life fixed the Founding-era Virginia legislator and governor as a central and overlooked Patriot and Founder. Wirt's choice of Henry was all the more powerful in that Henry was also known for his opposition to the US Constitution when drafted. John Sanderson was another author who, like Wirt, decided to write for the marketplace of 50th anniversary-themed books. Sanderson took an even broader view of the era with his nine-volume "Biography of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence" that was sold from 1823 to 1827. He wanted the entire group of signers to receive recognition during the 50th anniversary.

Women were active as authors as well. Thirty-two year-old Eliza Cushing wrote and published a pair of novels connected to the Declaration and the American Revolution, "Saratoga" and the two-volume work "Yorktown: An Historical Romance". Both books featured the Founding as their framing plot and theme. Cushing dedicated her second novel to Marquis de Lafayette.

The most influential author who wrote in the year of the Declaration's 50th anniversary was James Fenimore Cooper. In 1826 Cooper released his hallmark book, "Last of the Mohicans." His book's subtitle, "A Narrative of 1757", contained an important message to people celebrating the 50th anniversary.

Fenimore's book was set in the French and Indian War of 1754-1763 rather

than the years of the Declaration and the Revolutionary War. Neverthless, his primary character, Natty Bumppo—who also had the name Hawkeye given to him by Native—was a cultural symbol of the new American and the new American nation. Bumppo/Hawkeye was the same person who occupied two worlds, one of practical survival and hard work from the Old World and the other of nature and natural living from the New World. He was unique, the perfect expression at that time of the world's first self-governing republic.

Cooper's book and its major character rooted the Declaration's 50th celebration in more than the parchment paper and its signatures. Cooper showed Americans of 1826 that the celebration was of a type of people along with a type of document. As Jefferson had done in assembling the Declaration's words from ideas and phrases in the air already around him, so too had Cooper drawn on deeply existent images in the narrative role he created for Bumppo/Hawkeye. Cooper offered up a unique person in the American, new and natural at the same time. Like Bumppo/Hawkeye holding a map of trail-blazing paths in the woods, the Declaration held in the hands of an American was a map for the future.

The actual events of the 50th anniversary were scattered throughout the United States in mid-1826. No single city dominated the remembrance and no organized entity directed activities. Communities with sites that had been significant in the Revolutionary organized separate activities at those locations, including Bunker Hill near Boston, Independence Hall in Philadelphia, City Hall in New York City, and the White House in Washington DC. Several events involved the opening of formal monuments or historical markers. Nationally or regionally-known speakers delivered speeches or published remarks, ranging from Daniel Webster to John Quincy Adams. In many of the crowds attending ceremonies were people who'd been named after famous men and women from the era of the Declaration and war, such as George Washington, John Adams, Samuel Adams, James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Martha Washington, and Betsy Ross. Both the era's survivors and the namesakes of the era's most famous people intermingled at the events of the Jubilee.

People displayed a combination of exuberance and seriousness in celebrating. An editor at the Ohio Oracle declared, "no government upon

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the earth is so safe as ours...(and) no other people are so well-informed." A public announcement in New York City asserted: "To celebrate the return of epochs important in the affairs of a nation, has the sanction of the remotest antiquity, and the period of 50 years has a high solemnity attached to it from an ordinance of the Deity himself. No era in the affairs of the world has been of more importance than the Declaration of Independence by the United States, it was the dawn of Freedom to mankind, and its beams are now illuminating and enlightening the world."

The most stirring aspect of the 50th anniversary was entirely unplanned. Both Thomas Jefferson and John Adams died on July 4, the moment of death separated by only a few hours over hundreds of miles. Their twin deaths prompted an outpouring of amazement for the next several weeks. Writers and speakers took to eulogies of the two Founders to offer both secular and spiritual insights into the deaths. By dying on the same day of the same document each had helped produce, the two Founders were viewed as providential twins in death, a divine tribute to the 50th anniversary of the Declaration. No one had anticipated it, and nothing could match it for symbolism and meaning.

Organizers in Boston capitalized on the coincidence. They again turned to Daniel Webster, asking him to deliver a eulogy which became the most widely-read oration of the Jubilee's special events. With providential timing and psychological insight, organizers of the ceremony to honor Jefferson and Adams scheduled the event for August 2, the actual day of signing of the Declaration in Independence Hall. At Fanueil Hall in Boston, hundreds of people gathered to hear Webster's tribute to Adams and Jefferson as the capstone of the Declaration's Jubilee. It was the same space where people had gathered in 1773, 1774, 1775, and 1776 to launch resistance, protest, war, and independence.

Webster started with a confession: "This is an unaccustomed spectacle." It was so because Fanueil Hall was shrouded in black, where people had cheered and clapped for independence. But now, "Adams and Jefferson are no more." Webster repeated this phrase throughout the rest of his lengthy speech. They are no more.

Webster said that the timing of their deaths, together on Independence Day

in the Jubilee, was one more instance of God's touch on the American landscape, "proofs that our country and its benefactors are objects of His care." The two men shared much of life together in work, thought, and dreams. Webster described in detail the task they shared in conceiving the Declaration.

They have given us a great gift of an independent people and republic, Webster continued. He called to the audience as a minister might call to a congregation: "The blood of our fathers, let it not have been shed in vain; the great hope of posterity, let it not be blasted." "With America, and in America, a new era commences in human affairs." "Our own firmament now shines brightly upon our path. Washington is in the clear, upper sky. These other stars have now joined the American Constellation; they circle round their center, and the heavens beam with new light. Beneath this illumination let us walk the course of life, and at its close devoutly commend our beloved country, the common parent of us all, to the Divine Benignity."

Webster's speech on August 2 was the unanticipated culmination of the Jubilee.

The Declaration's 50th anniversary celebrations, whether public or private, planned or unplanned, were set alongside three national actions. Like rockets before launch, the trio of actions aimed at the future.

First, the Erie Canal, an explosive innovation in travel, opened in mid-year nearly in tandem with July 4th. The canal joined one major region of the nation to another and suggested a new opening of other canals across the nation. There was no more fitting honor to the canal than that which occurred in Ohio in 1826, where Ethan Allen Brown—born on July 4, 1776 and named after a Revolutionary War hero—called for the state to build and promote canals as a sign of both the glorious 50th and the glorious future that awaited the nation.

Second, pointing in a starkly different direction, was a public mood still suffering from the shocks of a chaotic and divisive presidential election of two years prior (1824). Charges of corruption, double-dealing, and back-room cheating by establishment figures had taken root in the American

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mind. Political leaders like John C. Calhoun perceived a degree of danger and convulsion in American political life that had not been present before. A presidential candidate named Andrew Jackson who claimed the powers-that-be had stolen the election from him was running again for the next presidential election two years away. Jackson was already hammering at President Adams as the hapless leader of a rotten elite. Jackson's unabashed campaigning and rhetoric energized his supporters and appalled his detractors.

The Constitution was a sub-target for this public distress. A constitutional amendment was in public debate in 1826 that would have allowed for local-level distribution of electoral college votes instead of the winner-take-all, state-level arrangement (still operative in 2023). It was an effort to avert a repeat of the previous presidential election, with the assumption that the American nation could be torn apart by another poisonous clash between the same pair of presidential contenders.

And third, public unease and anxiety remained in place after the acceptance of the Missouri Compromise, setting a nervous precedent of allowing one free state and one enslaved state to enter the American national union together, thus striking a tenuous balance of power in Congress. It was fitting that the deceased Jefferson had referred to the controversy as a "firebell in the night", a term that resonated with people who on a daily basis feared fires in communities dominated by wooden structures.

The upshot of the 50th celebration in 1826 was a deeply serious outlook for the days ahead. Life was marching forward, both with and without public knowledge, toward the moment when the cherished Generation of '76 would be here no more. The future was entirely on our own and we were, in fact, a light to the world but a light that, like all others, cast shadows and would never stop the darkness.

If we had been there for the Declaration's 50th anniversary...we would have seen raw emotions on top of a sense that the nation was on a perilous mission to save self-government for the world. They existed together in an event that made the people of the Founding era the highest priority of remembrance.

Celebration Two: The 100th of 1876

It was the opportunity to shine, to look back for a moment but only so long as it could equip us a far more powerful and energetic projection into the future. The 100th celebration of the Declaration of Independence in 1876 may as well have occurred on a different planet than the one known fifty years before in 1826. The 100th meant more than doubling the 50th—it was a transcendance of generations now living a life that verged on the unprecedented, the unrivaled, the unknown.

In 1876, the places of the Declaration took prominence over 1826 and its emphasis on the people of the Declaration. Further, in 1876, both the people and the places had one function—to serve as telescopes pointed toward a glowing future.

In the real-time of the year 1876, the 100th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence was instantly known among Americans as "the Centennial". The term hinted of something that blended classical history and fabled tales with with a futuristic life and way of living.

The 100th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence stood atop three gigantic pillars. One was centralization. The second was capitalism (note the "a"). The third was capitolism (note the "o").

Centralization came in the form of a powerful committee organized for the sole purpose of designing and executing the Declaration's 100th year. Planning began in 1866, a decade before the celebrated event—indeed it was pre-planning in its vision and energy toward a future goal. The origination of the controlling committee was a coalition of business, civic, and political leaders in Philadelphia. Within the coalition was a driving force made up of Pennsylvania Railroad executives and shareholders as well as wealthy merchants and entrepreneurs in the state's largest city and one of the nation's most prominent and influential economic centers.

The city-based group evolved into a nationally-oriented group known as the Centennial Commission. Though still heavily influenced by the Philadelphia members, the Centennial Commission gained and wielded

power in Congress through senators and congressional representatives. This group agreed on a target event for the 100th anniversary, the Centennial International Exhibition of 1876, or CIE. The CIE adopted a more public name, the World's Fair of 1876.

Alongside centralization stood the "ism" of capital and capitol. One form was "capitol"ism, the location of the World's Fair of 1876, which was Philadelphia as a community. Because of the role of Independence Hall in the creation of the Declaration of Independence—written, debated, adopted, and signed in a main room of the elegant building—the overlay of the World's Fair on top of the celebration of the document's 100th birthday meant that Philadelphia would become the nation's magnet for American celebrations of July 4th in 1876. Philadelphia exerted the equivalent of a cultural gravitational pull, drawing to itself much of the American nation's attention on celebrating the Centennial of the Declaration.

The context of the 50th and 100th anniversaries helps illustrate the point. Where in 1826 a variety of communities conducted activities that produced emotional expressions of the event, in 1876 these same occasions left a smaller imprint on the national consciousness of this uniquely American remembrance. Boston, New York, Washington DC, and a dozen other communities held ceremonies of celebration on both anniversaries; indeed, with a much larger national population in 1876, a significantly greater number of cities and towns did so in comparison to fifty years before.

The gatherings offered local flavor. In Chicago, Illinois the celebrations included Catholic worship services, German-language speeches and songs, and military units marching through downtown streets. In Anaheim, California "flag fever broke out", as a newswriter phrased it, with every building in the town displaying American flags, young children setting off fireworks throughout the day, and a hotel ball serving as the centerpiece for adult celebrations. In Atlanta, Georgia things were more subdued as residents remembered war from only a few years before and community leaders made "all necessary arrangements for spending a most enjoyable evening" where the Declaration would be read aloud. In Hartford, Connecticut the celebration consisted of four segments lasting from sunrise to late evening, with long speeches, songs, and a reading of the

Declaration. A delegation of Chinese visitors received special accommodations in Connecticut's state capitol.

But these gatherings always occurred beneath a larger and more sprawling force, the Centennial celebration in Philadelphia. In addition, there were numerically many more communities outside Philadelphia that hosted speeches, rallies, and other activities—after all, the nation's population was vastly larger than in 1826 with thirty-eight states and their capital cities. The demographics didn't matter, for they also were bodies orbiting around the central star. Philadelphia was the blazing sun blotting out everything else. Philadelphia acted as the official and unofficial capitol of the year's events in a depth and degree not seen five decades earlier. This was part of "capitolism" in the 1876 event.

Swapping the letter "a" for the letter "o", capitalism was the other form as a pillar in the 100th anniversary had an economic cast. The effect of commerce, trade, and industrialism on the Centennial in Philadelphia weeks before July 4th. In true capitalist style, the word "Centennial" was stamped on anything that could be made, boxed, stacked, and sold to consumers—shoes, cigars, matchbooks, note paper, dishes, neckties, ink pens, ink bottles, robes, and on and on. A newspaper reporter sarcastically, "How long human nature can stand up under this load is doubtful, for we live in daily expectation of being assured by the poultryman that he has a Centennial turkey that he will send home in a Centennial basket for a Centennial dinner."

This commercial aspect of the 100th celebration became a separate engine with its own force. Newspapers, magazines, and printed boards and handbills featured advertisements for Centennial-flavored products and services. Mercantile stores built displays for Centennial sales. Children stood on street corners shouting slogans toward potential Centennial consumers. Through the Centennial's commercial activity the 100th celebration of the Declaration of Independence circulated into the American body politic to an extent unseen five decades before. It was relentless, unavoidable, and attached to an endpoint, a great momentum accelerating into a national funnel.

At the bottom of the funnel was the World's Fair, the largest such public event and community experience in American history up to that point.

Almost ten million people came to the 450-acre site of the World's Fair. Newspapers throughout the United States ran article after article about how their state's residents could plan for their travel to Philadelphia. Requests for display space for fine arts exhibits far outpaced expectations and planners scrambled to accommodate them.

Yes, there were remembrances of the Declaration's content and signing, but they diminished in the light of dozens of exhibits and displays from foreign nations across the world. American attendees and American media rushed to see the exotic nature of these sights, paying more attention to which foreign head-of-state was in attendance than either the nation's Founding President Washington or its current occupant President Grant.

A showmanship quality could be detected in the Philadelphia spectacle. A plaster cast featured George Washington riding on the back of an eagle flying upward into heaven. The public reading of the Declaration on July 4th—meant to be the heart of the day's recognition of the 100th anniversary—consisted of an altered historical scene: event coordinators selected a re-enactor to portray Richard Henry Lee reading the Declaration to a crowd. The choice had a strangeness all its own; Lee had been influential in the shaping of the Declaration as an act of the Continental Congress but his selection for the 1876 re-enactment had nothing to do with historical accuracy. His family name, Lee, served nicely as a counterweight with the recently deceased Robert E. Lee who had led Confederate military forces trying to secede from the American nation. Richard Henry Lee was the symbol of unity carved for contemporary purposes.

Perhaps the most talked-about and visited display of all was the enormous hand and torch of the still-under-construction Statue of Liberty. These behemoth figures had been shipped over from France to help boost fundraising for the project. The other-worldly shapes helped drive fundraising among Centennial attendees to record levels for the French project.

However awe-inspiring the Statue's hand and torch, and it was overwhelming, the greatest reaction of the Centennial and World's Fair was not about the Declaration of Independence or the era of the Revolutionary War. No, the draw of powerful public interest was the Corliss machine.

The Corliss steam engine had existed for almost thirty years before the Centennial. Engineers at the company in Rhode Island designed a special version of the engine that would be capable of providing power to nearly the entire 450-acre campus of the Centennial and World's Fair. The engine featured an engine standing seventy feet in height, a flywheel spanning thirty feet in diameter, weighing 650 tons and cranking 1,400 horsepower, or 1,000 kilowatts of power. Ignition of the behemoth was the literal start of the six-month event, with President U.S. Grant and Emperor Pedro II of Brazil yanking the levers to start the engine. It shut down when the event ended in November.

The Corliss of 1876 was the Erie Canal of 1826 multipled by a thousand.

Nicknamed and branded in the public mind as "Corliss", the machine excited Centennial's visitors from across the United States. People watched in awe, some in stunned silence and some inspired to wild gestures of gasping, shouting, pointing, waving, and clapping. It was a demonstration of a world no one had seen before despite the appearance of similar equipment for the past generation. The difference was that Corliss was now viewable by thousands, in formal display, and in a new context or story. Thus transformed, the machine acted as a brawny beast, harnessed if not tamed, connected if not controlled. As a source of power built by human hands, there was nothing like it in the civic and cultural experience of most Americans touring these 434 acres in Philadelphia.

It was Corliss that set 1876's 100th anniversary apart from 1826's 50th anniversary. Fifty years earlier the celebration spoke of hope and promise. Now, fifty years later and one hundred years since the Declaration, the celebration roared with power and force. The great machine typified the entire nation's sense of celebration—bigger, louder, brassier, all frontal confrontation and very little quiet contemplation and somberness. With Corliss, anything seemed possible and no obstacle seemed likely to resist its power. For the American people, Corliss became the companion to Centennial in name and in spirit.

Amazingly, Corliss was not the only first at this main celebration of the Declaration's 100th anniversary. Americans saw the telephone for the first time, ate bananas for the first time, chewed popcorn for the first time,

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tasted Heinz ketchup for the first time, and saw, as a first anywhere in the world, a monorail train in operation. They saw and heard the clack-clack-clack of typewriters, a new business office machine of Corliss-like impact and disruptive opportunity in workplaces.

The event was more than a celebration of American independence and its Declaration document, it was a vast challenge tackled, subdued, and willed into a shape of chosen design. This outlook was evident leading up to the Centennial and World's Fair, with newspapers tracking in dot-like detail the amount of money spent, the number of halls and exhibits prepared, the hotels and boardinghouses available for visitors' use, the transportation methods ready to be booked and boarded. The challenge resembled more of an engineering, logistics, and administration feat than an expression of the public ideas and ideals. And not least, the co-existence of Centennial and World's Fair occurred in the midst of the quest to finish the first transcontinental railroad. Both were record-setting achievements.

The reality of bigness had downsides. Early in 1876 there were squabbles and disagreements over public funding for the official celebration in Philadelphia. These occurred in congressional debates as well as state and local settings. When the spigots of funding opened up, people grumpled over who did and did not benefit from special financial arrangements. An example was the awarding of an exclusive to newspaper printer George Rowell. He secured the rights to print and distribute newsprint coverage of the Centennial across the nation despite a reputation for fraud and deceptive practices. His competitors were outraged.

Regardless of the bumps and grinds over money, an obvious pride ran through much of the American public's discussion of the World's Fair. The event revealed a type of globalism that was alive in 1876, a collective sense of the newly nationalized United States, post-civil war, taking a major role on the world stage. The willingness and eagerness of thirty-seven foreign nations to actively participate in the event was further proof to Americans of their new international status. The scale of the Centennial and World's Fair also indicated a world-class ranking for the United States, a massive thing successfully "pulled-off" in front of the eyes of the world.

The cover of Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly, one of the nation's most popular and culturally revealing periodicals, captured the global spirit of

the 100th anniversary. The cover artist sketched figures meant to represent parts of the world, ranging from Africa to Asia to Europe to the Americas. Their faces looked into the distance from atop a high cliff. Doubtless it was the future they were seeing as they scanned from heights named "Centennial Exposition."

Significance attached to how Americans arrived to celebrate in 1876. They weren't simply celebrating the Centennial as individual citizens but also in organized groups. Nearly every imaginable group could be found raising money and arranging details for their attendance at Philadelphia's Centennial and World's Fair. Brewers, bankers, tailors, miners, farmers, production laborers, social clubs, and scores of crafts and tradesmen gathered up group by group to go to Philadelphia during the May-November extravaganza.

There was irony here, of course. The Declaration's stirring words of individual rights seemed at odds with the emphasis on group participation in this 100th anniversary. And yet, the Declaration had also referred to individual people banding together—in a group—to form governments and, when necessary, dissolve them. The itemized list of grievances were further hints of violations of individual rights violated within group experiences. Still, such nuances were not explored amidst the noise, flash, and bustle of the Centennial and World's Fair. When Corliss growled and Centennial gleamed, it was hard to hear or see much else.

Two groups stood out at the six-month event in Philadelphia, one openly and the other more subtly. The group with shining visibility were, interestingly, three hundred Natives, representatives of fifty-three Native tribes. They encamped within the Centennial acreage and assisted with Native exhibits within the World's Fair. They draw large crowds of onlookers, many of whom had not seen Native villages, customs, or culture. An organizer stated, "The object of the encampment is to show, in as perfect a degree as is now possible, the original inhabitants of this country and their mode of life." "They were," the onlooker concluded, "the very aristocracy of the Indian nation."

The more subtly visible group were officers and soldiers from the American military, nearly all of whom had served in the Union Army back in the Civil War. Indeed, the opening remarks of this official celebration in

Philadelphia had been made by four-star general U.S. Grant, now President of the United States. Besides Grant, other officers in conspicuous attendance included William Tecumseh Sherman, Joseph Hawley (chief executive officer of the Centennial and World's Fair), Philip Sheridan, and James Garfield. Hundreds of former lower-ranking officers and soldiers visited as well. These military veterans of the Civil War made a special sight at the event, while the event left an especially deep imprint on them who had fought to hold the nation together. The poignancy of their appearance, whether there in uniform or in talk of times past, was not to be ignored.

In another key difference between 1876 and 1826, the President of the United States had the opportunity to give a formal speech at the start of the nation's official and central celebration. Grant kept his remarks brief, at fewer than 450 words, not much longer than Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Grant's speech was yet more compelling in that he was the first POTUS who fought and led in a nation-saving war to give a speech in a key Declaration celebration. Not even George Washington, who'd fought and led in the nation-making war, had done such a thing.

Grant's words were telling.

He began with a recognition of the broad array of skills, goods, and devices of American handiwork that were on display. He then went on to acknowledge the international flavor of the event. Grant inserted this statement into a surprising context: "That we may the more thoroughly appreciate the excellences and deficiencies of our achievements, and also give emphatic expression to our earnest desire to cultivate the friendship of our fellow-members of this great family of nations."

Grant continued, "One hundred years ago our country was new and but partically settled. Our necessities have compelled us to chiefly expend our means and time in felling forests, subduing prairies, building dwellings, factories, ships, docks, warehouses, roads, canals, machinery, and more." Grant was explaining the American emphasis on practical applications.

That was before. This, Grant implied, was now, and things had changed.

"Burdened by these great primal works of necessity, which could not be

delayed, we yet have done what this exhibition will show, in the direction of rivaling older and more advanced nations in law, medicine, and theology; in science, literature, philosophy, and the fine arts. While proud of what we have done, we regret that we have not done more. Our achievements have been great enough however, to make it easy for our people to acknowledge superior merit wherever found."

Grant concluded with the humble request that he hoped foreign visitors would find the event "both profitable and pleasant to them."

Significantly, the speech did not include his thoughts on the meaning of the Declaration. The only hint of his outlook was the reference to the reality of living and its advancements over a century's time. Beyond that, he did not go.

Curiously, a week before July 4th, Grant issued an executive order calling for Americans to devote part of the Independence celebration to prayers of gratitude and thanksgiving. Again, farther than that, he did not go.

Nor did he attend the official celebration of July 4 at the Centennial and World's Fair and its the re-enactor portraying Richard Henry Lee reading the Declaration of Independence. Grant missed what was regarded at the the time as the highlight of the ceremony, writer Bayard Taylor's recitation of his special poem for the occasion, the "National Ode." Four thousand people stood and listened to Bayard's three hundred lines of poetry.

The scene shifted when the protestors came.

They belonged to another defining aspect of the 100th celebration. Women's rights were a flash-point of cultural pressures and tensions in 1876. An incident at the opening of the Centennial and World's Fair showed the strains. When the American President and Brazilian Emperor started Corliss to open the six-month event, the wife of the emperor was then permitted to perform a ceremonial adjustment of levers; First Lady Julia Grant was denied the same opportunity because of a perceived affront to American female roles.

The incident enflamed protestors who advocated for women's rights and

suffrage. They existed in two groups, both of which found further zeal from the incident with Julia Grant. The first group worked within the Centennial's organizational system and were led by the great grand-daughter of Founder Benjamin Franklin, Elizabeth Duane Gillespie. She led the Women's Centennial Committee within the event's overall structure. Gillespie herself was a display of leadership worthy of study, observation, and emulation. She used amazing energy, savvy political instincts, and an intuitive sense of timing and pace for knowing when to push for change and when to hold back. She communicated to her followers, forged alliances with allies, and showed a deft touch with analysis as well as motivation. An inspiring leader, her ancestor Benjamin would have been proud of her.

Gillespie and her committee worked quietly but separately with another more radical and freewheeling women's group, the National Women's Suffrage Association, whose leader was Susan B. Anthony, a veteran of the women's rights movement. Anthony shocked the Centennial event when, on July 4 at the main ceremony in Philadelphia where Taylor read his poem, she and four other female leaders walked onto the speaker's platform and shouted slogans for women's rights. They then descended from the platform and proceeded to pass out pamphlets about their cause, the "Women's Declaration of Independence." The Women's Declaration shaped their protest in the mold of liberty sought in 1776. It was Susan B. Anthony and her four co-leaders who had pushed the hardest to bring the event's spotlight back to the Declaration and to the Declaration's place within the living American generation.

Anthony's tactics sounded a call of remembrance in a different way as well. An environment of chaos and turbulence surrounded the 100th anniversary's gaudy expression in Philadelphia and its more modest showings in hundreds of communities around the nation. Once again, a presidential election would affect the public mood. As the official Centennial event closed in November, 1876, a bitterly controversial presidential election was coming to a close as well, or so it was assumed. Instead of a clear winner, however, candidates Rutherford Hayes, a Republican, and Samuel Tilden, a Democrat, along with their respective campaign staffs, supporters, and stakeholders, argued over contested vote counts in several states. A lengthy stalemate ensued in Washington DC that

only ended in a formal electoral commission awarding disputed electoral votes to Hayes. An informal and semi-secret private meeting helped induce Tilden and his campaigners to accept the outcome. In the opague "Wormley House bargain," Southern states received funding grants and an agreement to withdraw federal troops from the formerly Confederate South. A divided nation inaugurated Hayes as President, who then pledged to serve only a single term.

And this was the cloud that always seemed overhead.

The 100th anniversary of the Declaration in 1876 was only eleven years after the end of the Civil War. The Centennial's organizers understood that fact and aimed to forge an American unity spirit in Philadelphia with "no north, no south, no east, no west." The motto contained an invisible insistence on this point which paradoxically revealed the depth of disunity. An imposing statue of Revolutionary War-era black minister Richard Allen was supposed to be unveiled at the Centennial; black activists had eagerly awaited its public display. They had to be satisfied with the strangely persistent delay that was finally resolved late in October. Organizers quietly removed the statue immediately after the Centennial's closing in early November. It was if Allen's legacy didn't matter.

That removal expressed the cost of disunity. Large segments of the American public—black men, women, and children who were formerly enslaved and now legally free—suffered in misery and despair. Anti-black groups had re-organized in southern states to re-fight the war in a different manner, making readmitted states into hostile zones of violence and bloodshed. On the same day that Taylor and Anthony left their memorable mark on the July 4th event, violence had erupted in a small town in South Carolina. Injuries and fatalities ensued, with the incident making its way to the desk of President U.S. Grant by July 8. Grant exploded in rage as he read the report. It was a display, of sorts, that testified to the boundaries of the ongoing pursuit of the American Revolution. Dozens of comparable incidents would be recorded across the south in 1876.

Frederick Douglass had captured this reality in his own type of 100th anniversary speech in Washington DC. Douglass didn't receive a request to speak in Philadelphia but instead was the keynote presenter at the

ceremony held in April for the first major monument erected in honor of Abraham Lincoln. He spoke plainly and eloquently about white people, black people, and Abraham Lincoln. His recounting of Abraham Lincoln's actions, attitudes, insights, and results illustrated both the hope and truth of the Founding as few others had done. He depicted the river of time flowing from the Declaration through the Civil War to the 100th anniversary.

Strangely, the Centennial and World's Fair found a tragic similarity to 1826. As the three hundred Natives worked at their exhibitions on the Centennial grounds, George S. Custer and the 7th US Cavalry lost a bloody battle at Little Bighorn in Montana Territory. Reports of Custer's defeat blazed via the telegraph into Philadelphia and every other July 4th anniversary celebration in the nation. Within a few hours, Custer's death evolved into a martyrdom that served as the 100th anniversary's version of the 50th anniversary's deaths of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. The debacle at Little Bighorn extended the period of reflections on the nation's position in time and posture in meaning. In its variety of forms, tragedy had re-entered the celebration.

It was, perhaps, the editorial writer of the Hartford Courant who best sensed the enduring spirit of the 100th anniversary. "Doubtless the historian of 1976," wrote the writer, "will be called upon to write of changes as important, of progress as surprising, as he who today reviews the story of the past century. Doubtless trials and dangers are in store for us, but we have faith that the nation is sound at heart, and will be given strength and uprightness to make the coming century, as the past has been and more, a triumph for liberty with law, for intelligence and civilization, for the cause of human rights and human progress."

The echoes of the Centennial had already begun in its emphasis on displays of invention and innovation. Each display pointed to a bright future, a better life, and evidence of further ingenuity and cleverness to come. These exhibits were set within the context of individual freedom marked by the location of the centennial nation's first capitol. The lesson was clear—this was the most promising way of life, a notion that famed evolutionary scientist Thomas Huxley, a British visitor, was quick to observe.

Had we been there for the Declaration's 100th anniversary...we would have been shocked at the starkness—on one side a joy and hopefulness in progress made and progress to come, while on the other side a dark set of grievances and resentments from past efforts and nervous futures. Remembrance celebrated the former but could not ignore the latter.

Celebration Three: The 150th of 1926

In 1826 it was the people still living—they were the basis of celebration. In 1876 it was the places and the progress evident there—they were the basis of celebration. In 1926 it was...

...uncertain.

From the start, the purpose of the 150th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence seemed unclear and undefined aside from the obvious fact of marking a notable number of years. The source of the problem was not hard to fathom. Americans in 1926 had difficulty celebrating an increasingly distant past because they were having difficulty dealing with a painfully immediate past.

In the run-up to 1926, a chain of traumatic experiences had beset Americans over several prior years. Prominent among them was the World War of 1914-1918, which had involved Americans directly in 1917-1918. It was the first global war that had taken Americans into battle in Europe, drawn into the vortex of trench warfare and its horrific rates of death and destruction. The cause of American involvement had been "to make the world safe for democracy" but that goal proved elusive. Combat for American soldiers had scarcely begun when bitter divisions erupted within the United States and fierce suspicions toward non-Americans rose up in state after state, city after city, town after town. Americans serving in the war returned home where a chasm of doubt, confusion, and anxiety had opened up in the nation's daily life.

The war was thought to have brought something else, too. An influenza pandemic tore into the United States as it did in scores of nations around the world at the same time that the World War was entering its final phase in 1918. Dubbed "Spanish flu" because Spain was one of the few European

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nations not affected by war-induced censorship—coverage of influenza appeared from Spain and thus the conclusion was Spain had caused it—the pandemic ripped apart the fabric of American society. Masks, lockdowns, social distancing, harsh laws on hygiene, and more were features of daily life. People died while standing in line waiting for medical care that held little chance of addressing the illness. The only response medically was to wait, stay in bed if sick, and hope for the best. Many died, many survived, and no one had any clear answers as to why in either case.

The existence of "warfluenza" (my coined term for the combined World War and influenza) linked the mood and attitude of Americans in 1926 to Americans in 1876. In both instances the nation lived in a collective state of post-traumatic stress. A tragedy of sweeping proportions—which included deaths, suffering, and displacement by the hand of human sources—had wrenched the American people out of the ordinary course of life. The memory of conflict beyond imagining marked a common ground for the Americans of 1876 and 1926.

To them, for as long as the conflicts lasted, the sense and feeling was that everything had changed in ways that destroyed daily living, from work to love, from day to night, from physical vibrancy to physical decay. People's relationships to each other were altered, especial. Furthermore, the aftermath of warfluenza combined with the fading away of a long stretch of governmental efforts to improve daily life through greater regulation, order, and control. The American people verged on the edge of exhaustion.

These were the burdens thrown onto the nation's understanding of itself—and its understanding of the nation's birth and founding—and which became a test of strife, of crisis, of whether the experiment would continue and if the nation had either reached its end or gone wildly astray from its origins. The onset of such a notable anniversary for the Declaration of Independence, the 100th and the 150th, arrived to these Americans in their mutual state of post-traumatic stress from the Civil War and Warfluenza.

Finally, on top of it all, both sets of Americans had shared the fate of a dead president. The Americans of 1876 had managed to bandage its wound over the eleven years since the murder of a president; nevertheless, the scars were fresh. The Americans of 1926 had less time to heal, with

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Warren Harding's death from a heart condition only three years before. Harding was a popular figure in nation that welcomed his handsome appearance, regal bearing, and overall management of a steady "return to normalcy," a phrase he created. His death rattled a public only recently calmed down from its host of anxieties.

The place of the presidency in the minds and hearts of the American people reflected the post-conflict periods of 1926 and 1876. War-making is a function of the executive branch of American government—the president is commander-in-chief of the nation's military—and the experiences of civil war and global war had elevated the presidency to unprecedented heights in the American view. The unsettled quality of the presidency with two dead presidents added to public nervousness as the Declaration's anniversaries approached.

In 1926, the nation's anxieties were a quarter-inch below the surface of mood and outlook. The shock of an unprecedented scale of war and pandemic—a plague of "warfluenza"—along with Harding's death uncovered a broad range of problems affecting Americans. Most problems had a root in attitude and world-view. New social conditions suddenly appeared: divorce, liquor consumption driven underground by Prohibition, changes in sexual practice, art forms that emphasized chaos and disorder, youth rebellion, radical social and economic theories, an unsatiable drive for pleasure and profit, and more. The reaction was equally intense with vigilante groups, an anti-modernist rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan, anti-immigration societies and laws, and harsh social policies built around scientific theories. To survive it all was to escape into a pursuit of enjoyment, pursuit of wealth, or pursuit of isolation with one's own kind. From islands of self-isolation, Americans ridiculed each other for being too poor, too rich, too much of this race or too little of that race, too urban, too rural, too educated, too uneducated, too hedonistic, too righteous, and on and on.

This was the environment in which the 150th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence unfolded. One commentator surmised that Americans would view the anniversary through these filters and that, as a result, their mood might be gloomy and subdued.

Not surprisingly, a concealed sense of alarm and despair had an early effect well ahead of the 150th anniversary. John Wanamaker was a wealthy mercantilist and retailer in Philadelphia. He was also the city's only surviving member of the 1876 Centennial and World's Fair. Philadelphia had fallen behind other major American cities in national stature and civic stability. Graft and corruption was viewed as especially prolific in Philadelphia. In the midst of the World War, in 1916, Wanamaker believed the city's only chance to pull itself out of the mire was to replicate the commemorative events of 1876, including the World's Fair. For the six years from 1916 until his death in 1922 Wanamaker led the charge to plan for the 150th anniversary of the Declaration as a remodel of the 100th anniversary event in the city.

The assurance of following an established model took hold. On the surface, the concept seemed good. A national commission was formed, like before. Ten years would span planning to implementation, like before. Philadelphia was the chosen spot of celebration, like before. The celebration would combine a significant yearly honoring of the Declaration wrapped inside a World's Fair, like before. And the probabilities were that the event, centrally planned and centrally organized, would dominate the nation's approach to celebrating the Declaration, like before.

But unlike before, hardly anything else went right.

The formal commission to design and execute the Declaration's 150th celebration formed in late 1925. Within weeks the event received a nickname—the "Sesqui", short for sesquicentennial, or 150th. Arguments started over funding. People in high-ranking positions of organization and administration quit their jobs, creating turnover in the Sesqui's hierarchy and contributing to uncertainty over direction. Long stretches of bad weather slowed down construction of the acreage and campus in Philadelphia. Low morale among local groups and entities in Philadelphia hindered decision-making and adaptability in project implementation. Among the delays in assigned tasks was the distribution of formal invitations to foreign governments.

As evidence of indifference arrived, event planners convened in

Philadelphia to discuss what to do. They argued over whether the event should be held or postponed a full year into 1927. A grumbling consensus emerged for the event to proceed as scheduled for June 1 to December 1, 1926. No one had any solution for the issue of the lack of foreign participation.

A decision to schedule Sesqui activities on Sundays in Philadelphia created an uproar. With feelings running hot about assaults on traditions and rituals in the post-warfluenza period, many people viewed Sunday as religiously sancrosanct, a nod toward preserving the old ways in a turbulent time. It was an issue that continued to stir resentment and undermine the celebration. A problem internal to contemporary society became a factor that complicated the historical anniversary.

A measurement of the Sesqui's condition flashed a warning sign for the Philadelphia event. By spring 1926 and the opening of the event, only nine foreign nations had agreed to attend and participate, less than a quarter of the number that had joined the celebration in 1876; the number would climb but the indifference was obvious. Given the Sesqui's identity as a World's Fair, the decline in foreign participation was a knife in the heart. It was, as one newspaper put it, "The Great Powers Shunning the Sesqui." Readers who were fresh from the disappointments of American involvement in the World War knew the negative overtones of the phrasing.

More warnings appeared. State-level organizers spoke more about "adequate representation" in Philadelphia rather than genuine enthusiasm over active contributions and involvement. A black activist organization stated that the best way to honor the Declaration's 150th anniversary was to end racial segregation in the United States; segregation had regained popularity and the group's call for reform was a direct hit at the passivity of the Sesqui. Other activist groups pointed to apathy over the Sesqui as proof of political indifference to reform and positive change. They denounced political leaders for lacking the energy to use the celebration to reinvigorate public citizenship. In addition, Presbyterian groups remained unhappy with Sunday scheduling; they organized a boycott of the event. Other people were critical of Harding's successor as president, Calvin Coolidge, for his overly active role in Philadelphia's six-month gathering.

Anything other than the president's echoing of their displeasure with the Sesqui left them upset. He couldn't please anyone, much like the Sesqui's position itself.

Scattered successes could still be found. Businesses around the nation advertised with images and phrases from the Declaration and Sesquicentennial themes. Physical aspects of the celebration drew praise. An $800,000 replica of Gian Lorenzo Bernini's "Fountain of Sea Horses" received acclaim; that the piece was a gift from Italy's Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini, whose nation was viewed as a model of aggressive public reforms, hinted at the tenor of the moment. So did the 70,000 seat Municipal Stadium built for the event. Boxing champion Jack Dempsey—a key mass-marketed sports icon in an era that had developed the idea of mass-marketed sports icons—agreed to participate in a fight organized for the celebration. Dempsey's boxing match injected a dose of energy into the Sesqui that was made more conspicuous for the lack of energy elsewhere in the event.

There was also a structure that resembled the 1876 Corliss engine for the impact on visitors. A gigantic replica of the Liberty Bell loomed eighty feet in the air, weighed forty-two tons, and was covered with 26,000 light bulbs. "It forms a magnificent spectacle at night as one enters or leaves the grounds," according to one report.

The structure seemed like a beast or creature with two massive legs and no head. That it was a replica was a fitting product of the decade with the emphasis on mass, brawn, and jaw-dropping scale. Unlike the Corliss, though, the Replica Bell had no other purpose; it powered nothing and proved nothing. It was enormous, the quaint and charming original blown up to proportions of the obscene. With no insight into what was symbolically important, the default was simply to make it bigger. The physical grounds of the celebration had, it seemed, a monster bell as guardian of the gates.

In contrast to the Bell was the Sesqui's greatest achievement of the six months. Few recognized it at the time because the creator of the achievement was a slightly-built man with a thin mouth, thinner smile, and thinning hair, the accidental-but-now-purposeful president, Calvin

Coolidge.

President Calvin Coolidge accepted an invitation to speak at the Sesqui campus in Philadelphia on July 4th. Coolidge, who had won election outright in 1924 after succeeding the fallen Harding, ordered that the speech be delayed until the following day. The 4th was a Sunday and he didn't want to offend those people who wanted the day protected. The delay was a decision as a signal.

Written by himself, Coolidge's speech had a vital context to it. Coolidge saw the speech as an occasion to address what he believed were the excesses and wrong turns made by the American federal government in recent years. He opposed the ideas and policies of he and Harding's predecessor Woodrow Wilson, architect of the expanded national government and activist regulatory role of the nation-state. In particular, Coolidge wanted to re-establish the prominence of the American Founding that he regarded as dismissed and disdained by Wilson and Wilsonians who'd sought to usher in a new international order and system.

In addition, Coolidge wanted the chance to respond to remarks made a few weeks earlier by former Secretary of War Elihu Root, an influential figure in the Republican Party. Root had delivered blunt words about the 150th anniversary. After acknowledging the importance of the Declaration and 1776, Root asserted "all the Fourth of July orators who have ever spoken cannot make the Declaration of Independence accomplish anything but for the Constitution." Root explained, "It is of no use to cry 'Liberty' when no one does anything to secure liberty." Root listed the ways in which the content of the Constitution addressed the generalizations of the Declaration. "Chaos followed close upon the Declaration of Independence," Root said, "and chaos continued until the Constitution of the United States was adopted." "The Constitution was adopted," he added, "and we gradually came to enjoy liberty regulated by law." Root's speech was a lightning bolt in the Declaration's 150th year.

Coolidge's speech on July 5th in Philadelphia occurred in the shadows of Root's remarks and Wilson's presidency. He began by invoking the birth of a child and the natural joy it brings. Coolidge linked such joy to the occasion of the nation's birth on this day in this city in 1776. "At the end of 150 years the four corners of the earth unite in coming to Philadelphia as

to a holy shrine in grateful acknowledgement of a service so great, which a few inspired men here rendered to humanity, that it is still the preeminent support of free government throughout the world."

There is difficulty in knowing how to judge the length of time in the life of a nation, Coolidge admitted. A sufficient period has passed to show that the institutions and rules of American government "have met, and met successfully, the test of experience."

Coolidge pointed to both the Declaration and Constitution as "those two great charters of freedom and justice" to which "every American can turn for solace and consolation" in a world of political partisanship, political tensions, and political hostilities. The two documents were unity papers.

Turning away from the documents, Coolidge noted in stirring words that people everywhere "consider Independence Hall as hallowed ground and revere the Liberty Bell as a sacred relic." "The world looks upon them, because of their associations of one hundred and fifty years ago, as it looks upon the Holy Land because of what took place there nineteen hundred years ago."

"Through use for a righteous purpose they have become sanctified."

With Wilson firmly in his mind, Coolidge skipped past the list of reasons for the American Revolution so that he could narrow his view to a single point: "A new spirit had arisen on this side of the Atlantic more advanced and more developed in its regard for the rights of the individual than that which characterized the Old World." On this "a separate establishment was ultimately inevitable...decreed by the very laws of human nature. Man everywhere has an unconquerable desire to be the master of his own destiny."

Individual. Human nature. A mastered destiny.

Coolidge continued. "We are obliged," he said, "to conclude that the Declaration of Independence represented the movement of a people. It was not, of course, a movement from the top." It was the people, "the great body of the people (who) were accustomed to privations, but they were free from depravity." "The American Revolution represented the informed

and mature convictions of a great mass of independent, liberty loving, God-fearing people who knew their rights, and possessed the courage to dare to maintain them."

The American president guided the audience through the actions of specific colonists in the Continental Congress as the day of independence drew near. "It was not because it was proposed to establish a new nation, but because it was proposed to establish a nation on new principles that July 4, 1776 has come to be regarded as one of the greatest days in history," offered Coolidge.

Then, turning without attribution to Elihu Root but with Root's speech in his sights, Coolidge suggested that the Declaration had to be won through public support and military action before it became a reality. From that reality the Constitution was brought forth "with all that it has meant to civilization."

Doubling-back in his speech, Coolidge returned to a description of people and writings who had propounded the ideas contained in the Declaration, encompassing the sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteenth centuries. He paused to elaborate on the special role of theologians and church ministers in the generation of principles, values, and ideals.

As the end of his remarks came into view, Coolidge injected a refreshing point. "About the Declaration," he stated, "there is a finality that is exceedingly restful." He said progress had been made in the world but that "this great charter" did not seek progress. None was possible: equality in creation, rights that could not be given away, requirement of consent of the governed, these things were progress itself and those who wished to change them or deny them were "reactionary."

Coolidge confessed his lack of interest in only listing successes and positive results. He preferred "sources and causes that I believe is even more necessary constantly to contemplate." Yes, failings had occurred through the generations. Those failings were not of the principles but of the people carrying the responsibility to put them into practice. People had acted wrongly, principles had stayed true.

Coolidge was almost finished with his remarks. Standing in a thousand-acre campus that celebrated modern advancement, Coolidge chose to end his speech with thoughts about the Founding generation: "They were a people who came under the influence of a great spiritual development and acquired a great moral power." He warned Americans not to think of wealth first, of possessions first, "we must not sink into a pagan materialism."

There was no Corliss here.

"We must follow the spiritual and moral leadership which they showed. We must keep replenished, that they may glow with a more compelling flame, the altar fires before which they worshiped."

Coolidge stepped away from the podium, leaving behind the most insightful public exposition of the Declaration ever given by a major American government official.

The Sesqui completed the scheduled six-month run, closing in early December. Not quite five million people paid to attend, a sharp drop in comparison to the ten million of 1876 (with a smaller national population). Organizers lost $20 million and sold exhibit items and other inventory to avoid bankruptcy. Nineteen foreign nations finally participated, half the number of 1876. Variety magazine renamed it "America's Greatest Flop."

Perhaps the faltering Sesqui did its most important service in giving room to the nation at large to celebrate the Declaration's 150th anniversary with greater energy and flair. The Oklahoma State Fair sponsored a group of re-enactors to portray famous Founders, including Paul Revere galloping on a horse. Newspapers in North Carolina printed exhaustively detailed accounts of the colony and state's pivotal role in the Founding. Newspapers in most states had weekly "Sesquicentennial History Sketches" about important stories from the American Revolution. A nationwide "Patriot Week" in February sought to raise money for the purchase and protection of Thomas Jefferson's home at Monticello, while a nationwide "Independence Week" in June consisted of school essay contests, speeches, artwork, and music. The Grand Army of the Republic, a Civil War veterans association, depicted not a re-reading but a re-signing

of the Declaration of Independence. The sight of people writing their names signaled a more active sort of display than listening to the document read aloud.

The entirety of the 150th anniversary in 1926 was the culmination of a movement called "Americanism." This set of practices, attitudes, and outlooks embodied the nation's attempt to restore something other than normalcy or a return to the pre-warfluenza status quo. It was an effort to re-engage an American spirit rattled and loosened by a world war, by a pandemic, and by an onslaught of changes that outpaced the ability of many people to absorb, understand, and build upon.

Americanism had good and bad sides. The celebrations were examples of the good, as were Warren Harding's creation of the term "Founding Fathers", the collaborative restoration of Colonial Williamsburg by John D. Rockefeller and Reverend William Goodwin, and the distribution of a million copies of the Declaration to deepen the public's understanding of the founding document.

The bad sides were there, too, with menacing immigration laws, racial violence, and a brutish hyper-intolerance of unconventionality. An editorial writer in the Omaha World-Herald, like Coolidge, joined the Declaration and Constitution together but observed "The Constitution has become an idol instead of an ideal. It has become something of which men speak sonorously, with quavering voice, at banquet tables and upon the hustings, and in all places of formal constitution worship, but a something which the same people rend to pieces with complacency in their private or everyday life as soon as the ceremony of worship is ended." A counter-reaction to Americanism had already begun to permeate the nation's colleges and universities, making the zealously anti-Founding Father writings of Charles A. Beard a dominant voice in the classrooms of higher education. Beard and his peers blasted the very idea of Founding Fathers and proved as narrowly focused and intolerant as the people they criticized. The pendulum had indeed swung.

A striking end to the 150th anniversary came on December 30th, 1926 when President Calvin Coolidge again stood behind a podium to speak about the bonds between 1776 and 1926. He was in Trenton, New Jersey to speak on

the 150th anniversary of Washington and his ragged army crossing the Delaware River in a surprise pre-dawn attack on the enemy. As he'd done in Philadelphia on July 4th, he spoke at length on his insights for the occasion. He concluded this speech: "This is the holy season. All humanity has laid aside the burdens of the day that they might rejoice in the glad tidings of 'Peace on earth, good will toward men.' Remembering the sacrifices that Washington and his patriot army endured for us, we ought not to shrink from sacrifice to make that inspired vision a practical reality."

Back into the dark New Jersey night went the President. Coolidge was the last American leader to speak about the 150th anniversary in its actual year. The recognition of the event ended with nightfall on December 31 and 1926 as a year began its quiet slide into the past.

Had we been there for the Declaration's 150th anniversary...we would have recognized much of the desire to enjoy and find pleasure in a replication of fifty years ago. We would also realize that a new sort of America was now possessor of the founding document and its ideas.

Celebration Four: The 200th of 1976

A good time had by all? Not a chance. A pleasant outcome? Not happening. A meaningful experience? Never in a million years. These were the expectations of the American nation's 200th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Everything pointed to discourgement and disappointment.

Amazingly, the opposite proved true.

For the third consecutive time, the arrival of a major anniversary for the Declaration of Independence would begin when the American nation faced turmoil. Only the 50th in 1826 escaped the condition, though anxieties of its own were readily evident. For the other three major celebrations, the 100th, the 150th, and now the 200th it was a shared story of trouble and strife.

Planning and envisioning began early, as in 1876 and 1926. In 1966, in the midst of the Vietnam War, President Lyndon Johnson created a

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governmental organization to start work on designing the celebratory events of the Declaration's 200th anniversary in 1976. Johnson sprinkled the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration (ARBA) with members from various sectors of American life, such as business and industry, elected officials from federal and state offices, and civic and community representatives. Johnson and his advisors also included a significant proportion of ARBC members from the history departments of universities and colleges.

This fact is a key point. Like Coolidge, Lyndon Johnson was president-by-death, in his case, having entered the presidency 1963 after the murder of John F. Kennedy and then winning an election in 1964 to continue as president. Johnson's victory in 1964 was historic in size and scope. He seized upon that outcome as a mandate to implement a sweeping expansion of federal governmental power and authority; he saw his presidency as a second "New Deal" and himself as a second "FDR." Thus, the "Great Society" and "LBJ" were the defining imprints in the American condition of 1966.

Johnson planted his American Revolution Bicentennial Administration in the soil of his overall "Great Society" agenda. As a host of new laws and agencies had done in education, civil rights, healthcare, social programs, and more, Johnson, along with his advisors and activists, viewed the ARBA as one more example of using federal govermental power to improve and enhance American life. The ARBA would begin conceptualizing ways in which their latest expression of the American experiment had seen itself born in 1776. This latest agency of the Great Society had a calling to lodge government in the heart and soul of American life, the government founded long ago and first expressed in the Declaration.

But—and this is crucial—Johnson's Great Society faced a harsh fact. Life gets a vote. The reality of human nature, events, decisions, actions, trends, consequences, and a thousand other things will affect plans and visions. They may even alter or disfigure them into shapes unrecognizable to the planners and visionaries. Life votes, and for Johnson's Great Society the vote of life was to smash headlong into the reality of the Vietnam War, the unpredictable direction of cultural changes for women, youth, sexual

relations, and religion, and the fracturing struggle of black Americans and other minority populations to secure economic prosperity and social status. The Great Society collided with life, and life won.

The Johnson Administration suffered a severe election setback in the congressional election of 1966, the year the ARBA was born. Fascinatingly, the ARBA's chief decision was to repeat the repetition, the 150th anniversary's mimicry of the 100th anniversary. Through the smoke and haze of the election's outcomes, three "yes"s beamed like a light.

Yes, first, Philadelphia would be the nation's centerpiece for marking the "bicentennial" (the term was already becoming the brand). Yes, second, the celebration would be wrapped in a broader World's Fair-like event. And yes, third, all of it would fall under the eyes of a nationally centralized entity, in this case, the ARBA. It was 1926 as 1876 all over again in 1966.

But the ARBA couldn't escape the nation and the world it was in. Meetings of the group couldn't achieve much beyond the initial decisions. The federal organization met on fewer and fewer occasions. Attendance, even then, was uneven and lacking in energy and inspiration. Dialogue meandered and attendees avoided clear-cut decisions beyond itemizing the spending of public money. The group became a reflection of both the Johnson Presidency's philosophy and waning fortunes.

Republican Richard Nixon won the presidential election of 1968 and promptly reorganized the group. Effects resulting from the change were negative. By 1970 the ABRA published a report on the Bicentennial event. A firestorm of protest ensued. Nixon's group, it was said, had sold itself to corporate bidders and translated the celebration into a sales event. The Nixon Administration retaliated by interpretating the opposition as proof of the Johnson political coalition's zeal and political agenda-making. Not surprisingly in the context of the people involved, Nixon's advisors tightened the connection between the ABRA and the president's re-election efforts. The animosity in meetings intensified.

Almost personifying and affirming the outlook of the president's members on the ABRA, a countergroup formed outside of the entity, calling itself the organizing force behind a "Bicentennial Without Colonies." Puerto

Rican activists, Black Panther party members, and followers of the American Indian Movement were at the core of this group. They fed the firestorm of indignation over the ARBC's work and deepened the scorn from Nixon Administration officials.

In addition to the radical group, the People's Bicentennial Commission formed in Boston. Consisting of Ivy League graduates and other members, the group advocated for a localistic and anti-capitalist model of the anniversary. "Common Sense II" was the call to action and the basis for remembering the Declaration in a blend of populist and non-conformist attitudes. Nixon appointees reacted predictably.

At the same time, however, signs of something else were visible, too. The musical "1776", which portrayed the writing, debating, and signing of the Declaration in a even-handed and dramatic way, held a successful run of showings on Broadway and other venues. The musical emphasized the humanity of the men in the Continental Congress of 1776 and also the risks and trade-offs they faced in their decision-making. The show's popularity hinted at the possibility of things to come.

For the ABRA, the difficulty was in how to address the two broad camps of remembrance, the bicentennial's pro- and the anti-celebration sides. The outside pressures, then, created a circular dynamic within the ABRA: with every push from the outside, an equally stronger push from a faction on the inside occurred, and round and round the wheel went. As the months went by, a gridlock stopped advancement. Mutual antagonisms served as fuel. Once again, the life outside the ABRA affected the internal work of the group. Celebration of the 200th anniversary, it seemed, would happen under severe duress.

President Nixon's response by 1973 was to disband the ABRA and replace it with something else—the ABRC. Yes, C, which stood for "Commission." That was the change.

Nevertheless, the change had a unique importance. If Johnson's group reflected the spirit and then declining morale of his presidency and if Nixon's hold-over and re-make of the group reflected his own need to settle a score and seek a political edge, then a further truth was evident as

well: the ABRA/ABRC itself reflected the era's vast governmental sprawl and bureaucracy. The new ABRC's written documentation was filled with the worse jargon and stiltedness found in any governmental manual, rule, or regulation. The political philosophy and members faces may have changed from one presidency to the next, but the nature of an encompassing governmental identity had not. Seamlessly, it was on to the Bicentennial of 1976 and nothing else mattered. The wheel ground on.

The problem was that the ARBC was as ineffective as the ARBA had been. In that sense nothing changed and continuity took an awful form. By 1974 with its potential impeachment and likely conviction of President Nixon, the group sank deeper into feuds, arguments, and rivalries. Progress measured by inches on a project that needed rapid decisions and fast execution. On some days even an inch seemed a success. An ominous sign.

In the gesture of a dying man, the ABRC decided to kill the original plan of the ARBA. No Philadelphia-centered event. No World's Fair. No centralization from Washington DC. No more ABRC or ABRA or A anything (unless you count the rock-music group, ABBA, which was widely popular at the time). Overnight, the celebration changed.

As much out of frustration as anything else, a further decision was to adopt a "Bicentennial Communities" approach. All during the debacle of the centralized approach—and indicated with the popularity of the musical "1776"—bands of Americans had emerged alive and well on countless neighborhood, town, city, county, and state levels as well as in an equal abundance of private groups and associations that would have made Tocqueville proud. These bands of Americans wanted to celebrate the 200th anniversary of 1776. These "Bicentennial Communities" would receive various amounts of grants and donations. With that, the federal government-led 200th anniversary of the Declaration was over. Fittingly, the king was dead.

Taking stock is always helpful and so it is here. Take stock of the situation as things stand in 1974, just two years away from the 200th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. A war in southeast Asia has descended into a humilating defeat that is still unraveling before the public's eyes. A president resigns in disgrace, the first in American history. The reputation

of government, especially federal government, is in shambles. A combination of energy emergencies and crises is at hand. Authority in the form of institutions and traditions are under assault at nearly every turn.

To live in America 1974, on one hand, is to sport long hair and gauzy colored clothing and bras burning in a pile while, on the other hand, it is to wear short hair and narrowly cut suits and girdles encasing body shapes. From both directions, however, the feeling is powerful that it's the American nation turning on itself and the American people turning against themselves. Trauma, traumatic, traumatizing. The New York Times stated that with "a shifting mood, widespread public and Congressional lack of interest, partisan politics and long inaction have resulted in a considerable scaling down of the nation's plans to cemmorate its bicentennial." Here it comes, limping and wheezing, the Declaration's 200th anniversary.

How different is the environment of anxiety, really, from 1926 and 1876? And what, if anything, and who, if anyone, could shift the trend of the times for the oncoming bicentennial? Consider this:

A presidential election was underway in 1976 between president-by-accident Gerald Ford and his man-of-the-people challenger Jimmy Carter, all of it occurring in the shadow of Nixon's resignation and Ford's pardon of Nixon.

A scare over a swine flu pandemic was also underway, with talk of vaccines and public health emergencies.

A formal surrender in South Vietnam was only a year old as the bleeding open wounds in the American public are yet to scar.

A number of domestic terrorist incidents continued to unfold, showing the fact of Americans terrorizing each other and placing state police forces and federal law enforcement on high alert as July 4, 1976 neared.

A film opened featuring Robert De Niro as a partially insane Vietnam War veteran who drives a taxi cab.

And yet, the death of the ARBC proved a blessing. Decay can enrich, and

a seed can flourish all the more in enriched soil. So it was with the 200th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence which, by last count, produced almost 13,000 entities that earned the description of "Bicentennial Community." And from Time Magazine, on the eve of the celebration: the Bicentennial Communities "led to the creation of thousands of new museums, historical societies, and history programs that shared a more complete story of the American past."

Imagine that. 13,000. That number by itself—13,000—is enough to show the success of the 200th Bicentennial of the Declaration. Still again, as we are in the taking-stock mode, the question must be directly put: what needed to be true for 13,000 to be real in such an environment?

Everything built above the ground-level of zero needs a foundation. The number 13,000 was obviously above ground level and thus it is true that it stood on a foundation. In this case, the foundation was trust.

But trust of what or of whom?

Trust in the American people—not per se the American nation or the American public or the American system. It was the American people who, in turned out, could be trusted in 1976 and the immediate years before it to know the best course of action to take in designing and delivering the celebration of the Declaration's 200th anniversary that they wanted and that they needed. The American people of 1976 rose to Coolidge-esque levels of worthiness.

The American people formed together in ways they understood were best for them to carry out the task they willingly accepted to do. These forms were often existing groups to which they belonged, although pre-existence wasn't mandatory—new groups were made. Whichever the case, pre-made or new-made, the groups had a direct connection to what they wanted to accomplish in the spirit of the 200th anniversary event. They might coordinate with other groups or they might not. More important than the outcome was the fact that they decided for themselves on this and a range of other matters.

In finally receiving that trust, the American people acted on an intuition

and an instinct. They intuited that the best thing for them in the moment was to seek support, comfort, stability, and inspiration from the past—from two hundred years in the past, to be precise. The moment demanded the decision. It wasn't about messages or narratives or signals. It was about reaching back to the past for the sources of steadier footing in the present. Given the litany of events leading up to 1976, it's easy to understand their intuition.

Their instinct was also at work. The 200th anniversary of the Declaration had a magnetic quality sensed by their instinct. A celebration would have meant little in 1973 or 1974 or even 1975. The bicentennial number of 200 subtracting back to 1776 was the perfect moment for attaching to a fixed point in American time. The moment of birth in the Declaration meant all the more to people flailing about, seeking balance and surefootedness as the winds of chaos howled around them. The Founding moment had the right stuff for the mission as understood by the American people.

On New Year's Eve, 1975, President Gerald Ford spoke to the American people. He noted that the next day would begin a very special year, the 200th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. He observed that the coming year could either be nothing more than "the fanfare of a gigantic birthday party (or)...a time that sparks a renaissance of the American spirit." It was, he said, "the very central question." He asked that "each of us, in the days ahead, consider what answer we shall give in our own personal lives."

The examples of how Americans answered that questions in 1976 are legion. The 200th anniversary of the Declaration swept across every facet and into every corner of American life.

Consider.

An American watching television during the year was likely to see several programs devoted to the 200th anniversary. Documentaries, Saturday morning cartoons, films, interviews, panel discussions, and special shows were common. At night CBS featured the "Bicentennial Minute", a series of one-minute stories drawn from real life and events in 1776. The "Minutes" were understated, dramatic, and intense.

Car and truck drivers in sixteen states could choose 1776-themed license plates for their vehicles. In every state drivers would often see passing train locomotives painted in red, white, and blue with patriotic designs. An "American Freedom Train" contained multiple cars with historical displays inside. The train traveled to all forty-eight states in the continental US, enabled more than seven million people to see the displays.

The pockets and purses of Americans held items of the 200th anniversary. The US Mint produced a series of pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters with Bicentennial motifs and designs. Letters arrived in the mail with stamps that highlighted men and women as well as places and events of the American Revolution.

The coins and currency didn't stay in the pockets of consumers for long in 1976. That's because every kind of small article imaginable was sold with 1776 colors and patterns—shoes, coats, shirts, quilts, cups, glasses, cut-off shorts, scarves, coasters, tablecloths, canned goods, soda pop bottles, beer cans, and on and on. If an item could be bought or sold, the chances were good that a Bicentennial motif would be on it.

Throughout the year, sports fans and athletes saw the 200th anniversary in games of all kinds. It was Jack Dempsey's boxing match in 1926 multiplied by a thousand, as major professional sports leagues adopted the Bicentennial theme in such championship venues as the Super Bowl and held special ceremonies at selected games of professional baseball, basketball, and hockey. Some teams adopted 1776-themed uniforms, while sports venues displayed banners and large posters with Bicentennial images. A professional tennis team was named the "Philadelphia Freedoms." Philadelphia was the site for all-star games in baseball, basketball, and hockey, along with hosting the "Final Four" of the NCAA collegiate basketball tournament.

Schools in countless towns and cities sponsored writing contests, painted walls with patriotic themes, and organized debates and speeches by students. Social clubs also contributed to the year-long celebration. They either held events of their own design or selected an event in their community to support and supplement. A wagon-train crossed the nation in honor of the 200th. Not far behind it was a counter-exhibit called of Native

Americans in the "Trail of Self-Determination Caravan."

The film "Rocky", set and shot in Philadelphia, was an enormous success with its story of an underdog boxer of Italian-American heritage. Marvel Comics unveiled a comic book series entitled "Captain America's Bicentennial Battles." Sears Company published a retail catalogue packed with images from the Bicentennial. Individual families and neighborhoods did the same thing with photos and drawings.

These examples of daily life, pop culture, and commerce resembled both 1926 and 1876. Commerce-based products and services used themes from the celebration of the Declaration. The uniqueness of 1976's version was the pervasiveness and depth of its spread; an American would have to choose to try to ignore these items and even then would still fail to avoid them. It's tempting to dismiss this swath of remembrance as schlock and crass commercialism devoid of meaning. Maybe and maybe not.

A subtle message existed within each item. The message was one of positivity and optimism about the natue of the 200th anniversary. It was a thing that brought a smile, a good feeling, an upbeat sense that celebration and commemoration of the Bicentennial were worth doing. The popularity of the message was in the proof of purchase. These items and articles not just on shelves but on daily life's display by the choice of the man, woman, or child who bought them.

And then there were those dramatically important moments when, apart from any planned event or ceremony, a raw expression of emotion revealed much about American attitudes in 1976. Such a moment happened in Los Angeles during a baseball game at Dodger Stadium in April, 1976. The Dodgers and the Cubs were playing when two fans jumped the barricades and sprinted into the outfield. They carried an American flag and a container of flammable liquid. Stopping near centerfield, they knelt down, soaked the flag, and began to set it on fire. Before they could ignite it, Cubs outfielder Rick Monday ran at them, seized the flag, and took it to safety. Security guards grabbed the protesters. In the stands, thousands of people cheered and for the next several days on television and radio, Americans praised and lauded the heroics of Rick Monday. The genuine emotions hinted at a powerful strain of American support for the 200th anniversary.

The official ceremonies on July 4th were memorable. Major American cities organized activities around their particular traits and characteristics. New York City was port-of-call for a fleet of "tall ships", three-masted vessels from around the world. Elegant, graceful, and timeless, the wind-powered ships sliced through the harbor waters beneath a brilliant blue sky. The sight harkened a vanished era of travel and craft that belonged to the Founding moment.

Outside Detroit, Michigan, Greenfield Village and Henry Ford Museum was only one of hundreds of public history sites that offered 1776 parades, re-enactments, and special exhibits.

In Boston, aside from welcoming the tall ships, a re-enactment of the Boston Tea Party with a modern anti-corporate theme involving containers of oil instead of tea existed alongside an evening performance of the Boston Pops symphony conducted by Arthur Fiedler. Looking like a restoration of Albert Einstein wielding a baton stick, the gray-haired and elderly Fiedler led the orchestra in a series of patriotic-themed music while 200,000 people danced and swayed under a canopy of fireworks.

In Washington DC, Johnny Cash was the grand marshall of the Bicentennial parade with such audience members as Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip of Great Britain. Prior to the parade, the royal couple had dedicated the unveiling of a replica of the Liberty Bell, cast in its original shape and material, a direct and symbolic contrast to the monstrosity of a half-century before. In addition, the Smithsonian Institute had sponsored events that featured the works of historical scholars as well as a trimester's worth of historically-themed displays by artisans and folk artists. The new Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum also opened and quickly became a popular destination.

In Los Angeles, Disney World and Disneyland began an "America on Parade" event that emphasized treasured moments from the American past. Similar events occurred at the Los Angeles Coliseum and Knott's Berry Farm.

International participation occurred. Japan sponsored construction of the

Kennedy Center in Washington DC. The royal family of Spain unveiled a statue of Bernardo de Galvas from the Revolutionary War. Norway's monarch King Olav V erected the Vinland National Health Sports Center in Minnesota. Valery d'Estaing of France led an official delegation to join in the celebration.

In Philadelphia, President Gerald Ford was the keynote speaker of the city's celebration at Independence Hall. Ford's speech has been overlooked as a significant exposition of the Declaration and the 200th anniversary.

With the iconic building of red brick and white woodwork behind him, Ford recalled the story of Lincoln's visit to the same spot in early 1861 when the nation teetered on the brink of civil war. He pointed to "the great bronze bell" in front of him, upon which was a Biblical inscription about liberty's proclamation through the land. Ford remarked that the inscription was from the Jewish Jubilee and its 50th year celebrations.

Ford reminded his listeners that "the American Revolution was unique and remains unique in that it was fought in the name of the law as well as liberty." He described the lives of the fifty-six men who signed the Declaration, emphasizing their risks and sacrifices. He was careful to point out the equal importance of ordinary men and women and their contributions to independence, an indirect connection to the ordinary men and women who were today, in 1976, making such valuable contributions to the 200th celebration.

Ford expanded his remarks and shifted to the Constitution. "The Constitution was created to make the promise of the Declaration come true," said Ford. He stated that, then as now, Americans in the Founding era feared a central government of excessive strength and a central government of excessive weakness. He briefly outlined the Constitution's making and defended the role of government in defending the rights of people, their safety and their happiness. "In modern society," Ford note, "no individual can do this all alone, so government is not necessarily evil but a necessary good."

And in a single sentence about a "tragic, fraternal war", Ford shifted into the challenge of applying the Declaration and Constitution, generation-by-

generation. "Liberty is a living flame to be fed, not dead ashes to be revered, even in a Bicentennial Year."

He asked questions of challenge—are our institutions still sound?—are our foundations still strong?—are our rights and liberties protected? The very act of questioning, Ford maintained, was cause for confidence. With that confidence, further goals can be pursued. "As we achieve one goal—a longer lifespan, a literate population, a leadership in world affairs—we raise our sights."

Ford listed the challenges of the Declaration's third century. Individual independence, privacy, protection of nature, public safety, a stable global order, improvement of health, space exploration, and enrichment of the quality of life needed to be addressed by the Declaration's nation. Such issues needed action, and action had been taken by Adams and Jefferson who had died in the Jubilee year of 1826. Action again was needed, now, heading into the third century, for it is the American responsibility as "the most successful realization of humanity's universal hope."

Ford ended with God. He asked the crowd to join him in a moment of silent prayer in gratitude "for all the we have received and to ask continued safety and happiness for each of us and for the United States of America."

A few hours later, at the designated time of 2pm, tens of thousands of bells rang in unison across the United States. Rather than the gigantic bell of 1926 guarding the gates in Philadelphia, a universe of sound came in 1976, one by one, across the nation in celebration of the Declaration's 200th birthday.

And like 1926, the year's final month produced a parting moment of remembrance. Then, President Coolidge had spoken at Trenton in honor of George Washington and his army's crossing of the Delaware River en route to victory. Now, in 1976, after bureaucratic wrangling between Congress and the Pentagon, George Washington received designation as "General of the Armies of the United States", returning him to the highest level of command in the American military.

The circle was complete.

Had we been there for the Declaration's 200th anniversary...we would have been encouraged and uplifted by the fruits of trusting the American people and their potential. Remembrance meant more than nostalgia—it meant remembering, through a myriad of ways, the strength and resilience of touching and feeling the founding document as something deeply rooted yet vividly alive.