

Dr. Megan Springate:

So, hi everyone. Welcome to America250's community conversation with LGBTQ+ community members. With these conversations, we're engaging with communities across the United States and around the world. So panelists or participants have the opportunity to share what the U.S. Semiquincentennial means to them and their communities and their hopes for the America250 commemoration and celebration. I'm Megan Springate, I'm the director of engagement here at America250. And I'm one of your co-moderators for today, I'm very glad to be here. Our other moderator is Dr. Carleen Carey, America250's director of public outreach and inclusion. So a little bit of housekeeping just before we get going. The conversation is being recorded and will be available on the America250 website soon after we're done. Please use the chat to ask questions or make comments to the panel. We're monitoring those and we definitely want this to be a conversation. Just a reminder to folks that all America250 and these conversations are nonpartisan and bipartisan and a shout out to Stephanie, Mary, and Kara for keeping anything running behind the scenes. And thank you also to our ASL interpreters for joining us this evening. Before we meet our panelists, I'd like to give a brief overview of what America250 is to help set the stage for our conversation. But first I am very honored to introduce to you Semiquincentennial commissioner, Rosie Rios. Rosie, take it away.

Rosie Rios:

Thank you so much, Megan. Hello. My name is Rosie Rios, 43rd Treasury of United States, and currently an executive committee member for the U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission. As we look towards 2026 and 250 years since the declaration of independence, America250 is committed to facilitating the largest and most inclusive commemoration in our nation's history. As part of meeting this goal, we are hosting regular community conversations like this one. These are opportunities for people across the country and around the world to help us shape the commemoration.

Rosie Rios:

We want to know what America250 can look like, how to connect with and be meaningful to all Americans and what its legacy can be. Members of LGBTQ+ and allied communities have, and continue to play such an important part in our nation's history. Today, we'll have an open conversation that highlights these diverse narratives sharing and honoring some of the many histories and experiences of LGBTQ+ people in America. When I was asked if I would do this introduction, of course, my immediate answer was yes. I'm honored to welcome our panelists and all of you attending our Community Conversations with the LGBTQ+ community and their allies. Thank you for your support and for engaging with America250. Now I'll turn the conversation over to our director of engagement, back to you, Dr. Megan Springate.

Dr. Megan Springate:

Thank you, Rosie. I am so glad you could join us, your support is right. There's no words, thank you.

Rosie Rios:

Always, thank you.

Dr. Megan Springate:

So I want to give a brief overview of America250 and who we are and what we're up to. What you can see on your screen right now is just a summary of our purpose, mission, vision, values, and themes. The

purpose is a lofty one, but a necessary one. And it is the thing that we have always been working towards, right? Regardless of how we do it, it is to catalyze a more perfect union, that is always what we have all been working towards regardless of what direction that takes us. We are always trying to make this a better place for all of us. Our mission, to commemorate our 250th anniversary by designing inclusive programs that inspire Americans to renew and strengthen the daring experiment in our democracy.

Dr. Megan Springate:

This has always been an experiment, this democracy business, and right from the beginning, it was recognized as an experiment. And it is an experiment that is long lived and ever changing. I want to just sort of highlight our values and the themes of America250 commemoration. Our values are service, diversity, collaboration, respect, integrity, optimism, and imagination. And our themes are to invite, to involve, to imagine, and inspire. So as you can tell from just those words, we have a very broad approach to what this commemoration is going to look like. So now I'm going to turn it over to Dr. Carleen Carey to talk about slide number four, Carleen.

Dr. Carleen Carey:

Thanks Megan. To guide our conversation, we have included some America250 initiatives that highlight and support the LGBT community. The DEI toolkit that we've been working on frames the journey toward greater inclusion by defining the A250 perspective on belonging, providing resources for further self-study to develop an individual and collective practice, and by giving guidance for individual and systemic activation of sustained policies.

Dr. Carleen Carey:

The advisory council actually has a really great representation for LGBTQ+ folks. We understand that this is a special occasion and we don't want to leave anyone out. We really want to highlight the service on our advisory council by folks like Amit Paley, who is the CEO of The Trevor Project, which is the world's largest suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning young people. Trevor serves on the, or Amit serves on the youth engagement advisory council. We also have David Johns, who is the CEO of the National Black Justice Coalition, which is a civil rights organization dedicated to the empowerment of black, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and same gender loving people, including people living with HIV and Aids.

Dr. Megan Springate:

So yes, also, we have several engagement initiatives and in all of those, we are looking to be as expansive in the history that we tell in the time periods that we represent and in the communities and histories that are highlighted. So the article series, which will launch mid-October just a couple weeks from now will include one of our first articles out of the gate is on Pauli Murray. And if you don't know who Pauli Murray is, we should all know who Pauli Murray is. It was one of those people that was like, I know why I don't know who Pauli Murray is, but why have I never learned who Pauli Murray is?

Dr. Megan Springate:

So absolutely there will be LGBTQ+ inclusion in the stories that we're telling. And one of the questions we have for later, but I'll invite y'all to think on it is what are the stories that are out there that need to be told, right? We don't know what we don't know. So we're really relying on the public to share those with us. So I hope you engage with us, ask us questions, send your ideas, we're here for it.

Dr. Megan Springate:

So I'd like to now invite the panelists to introduce themselves, give their affiliations and give just three words about other national commemorations or commemorations in general, about what is the impact they've had? What were the feelings that you walked away from? I'm thinking something like the bicentennial or the 400 years of African American history or any other commemoration, those are just like jog your mind examples. So Free, would you like to begin?

Jeffrey Harris:

Sure. My name is Jeffrey Harris, and I always say that in the preservation world, I'm known by my nickname of Free. I am a Hampton, Virginia based historian and historic preservation consultant. I also sit on the board of historic resources here in the Commonwealth of Virginia, where I'm vice chair, I'm board chair of the Rainbow History Network, which is a national organization that advocates for the preservation of LGBTQIA plus historic places. I'm also really excited to be a part of this panel. And to answer your question, Megan, I'm from Hampton, Virginia.

Jeffrey Harris:

So I would be remiss not to say that the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first Africans in what became English America has certainly had a profound impact on me. I'm a multi-generational Hamptonian and it was just important to me and to most of the folks that I know here, that that recognition, that date, that time was misrecognized as it was.

Jeffrey Harris:

And I certainly also remember the 2007 commemoration of the founder of Jamestown. So that was another, that was profound for me in that. And again, don't want to take too much time, but I happened on that weekend to be at Acoma Sky City in New Mexico. And to have that experience of being in a place that was established around 1100. But to know that back in my home state, they were talking about the magnificence of the 400th anniversary, it was not lost on me that the way that that history was taught to me was a bit short, if you will. So that was certainly an important date. And obviously the 50th anniversary of the civil rights is one that sticks out, certainly in my mind, looking at the modern LGBTQIA rights movement.

Dr. Megan Springate:

Thank you, Hannah.

Hannah Malvin:

Hi, everyone really happy to be here. Like Free, I wear a few different hats. I am founder and director of Pride Outside, which is the main hub for LGBTQ+ outdoor inclusion efforts with Congress, federal agencies and conservation nonprofits. I'm also a coaching consultant at the intersection of equity and wellbeing and I'm project manager for the Bridge Project, a new equitable hiring pathway for the environmental sector focused on people of color and underrepresented communities. And in terms of reflecting on some of these commemorations, trying to come up with three words to... I was thinking situate, learn, and reimagine. So sort of orienting ourselves in time and considering how we want to show up and what we want to work towards in the world.

Dr. Megan Springate:

Great. Thank you, Tracy.

Tracy Baim:

Hi, my name's Tracy Baim. I'm co-publisher of the Chicago Reader and co-founder of Windy City Times, an LGBTQ+ newspaper started in 1985 when I was 22. And I've written or co-written 13 books on LGBTQ+, mostly on LGBTQ+ history nonfiction. I'm really excited to be part of this today. I remember that when I was 13 years old, but bicentennial, I felt red, white, and blue, but not much else to me as a 13 year old. It wasn't very diverse from my limited perspective at age 13. I attended the 25th anniversary of Stonewall in 1994 in New York city. And I think that was one of the most impactful events of my life. Exciting, important, vital to both your internal structure as a LGBTQ+ person to see so many people like you, but also externally to the world.

Dr. Megan Springate:

Thank you, Richard.

Tracy Baim:

Oh, wait, can I say one more thing?

Dr. Megan Springate:

Yeah.

Tracy Baim:

Happy Bisexual Visibility Day. Friends of mine said this is on Bisexual Visibility Day so I wanted to make sure I shouted out that.

Dr. Megan Springate:

It is Bisexual Visibility Day. My Facebook told me so this morning. Kai and Richard. We're here as a team, but on different screens today.

Richard Baldwin:

Hi everybody. My name is Richard Baldwin. He, him pronouns, I'm a trans, queer guy just doing his thing here in Santa Cruz, California. An employee of the University of California, Santa Cruz and co-host of Closet Free Radio here on our campus radio station. And have been doing Closet Free Radio, which is public fair is queer programming for over 20 years. So I've kind of had a figure on the pulse of what's been going on in the queer universe for that amount of time. And I got to say that similar to our previous speaker here, I was six years old or not quite when the good old 1976 Bicentennial came along.

Richard Baldwin:

And yeah, I can't help but think of the Bicentennial and the celebrations that occurred around that time. When I think about the anniversary of this country, be it 4th of July or going to the post office or just being at the ballpark and having the National Anthem being sung. So I've always kind of been aware of concept of this country isn't a grand experiment. And really, I think at the core of that is our ability to course correct, and to do the things that help make our country more inclusive and democratic.

Dr. Megan Springate:

Thank you, Kai.

Kai Azada:

Hi, I'm Kai Azada. I'm a lot of things. I'm a queer, trans, Filipino, disabled army vet. And I do a lot of volunteering for the queer community at large. But primarily for the last 20 years, I have been a co-host of the Closet Free Radio show, which has been going on since 1975. But Richard and I have been a part of that since 2001. And we're just rainbow colored glasses kind of vision of what's going on in the world. It's not just about the news, it's about also the community and our community is one of many, many, many communities.

Kai Azada:

And I think radio really helps us to reach out in ways that other forms of media don't. And as for the celebration, I remember the Bicentennial best, I was 12 and really you couldn't miss it. It was everywhere. And though I had read history books and gone to classes and whatever, I didn't really have a feeling as being a part of a line of history that preceded me by a lot of years. And that I was now a part of just by being here. And so I think I felt a little more American if I can put it that way. I certainly felt more of a connection to our history and yeah, history, I think I've said it.

Dr. Megan Springate:

Great. Thank you, Kai.

Kai Azada:

Thanks.

Dr. Megan Springate:

Before I turn it over to Dr. Carey to begin the conversation, I want to give a shout out in the chat, Daniel McKay or Mackey or McKay. I apologize for the pronunciation. I just wanted to mention "Richard, your perspective on America's unfinished business is most welcome." And also invite folks who are attending and watching this to please put your comments and questions in the chat so that we can engage with you as well. Dr. Carey, turning it over to you.

Dr. Carleen Carey:

Excellent. Thank you, Dr. Springate. So first question of the evening. What do you see as the most significant opportunity that America250 presents for the LGBTQ+ community? Feel free to unmute your mic to share your thoughts?

Tracy Baim:

I'll go first. I would say that it has an opportunity here to be truly nationwide. So much of what the LGBTQ+ community has seen in the mainstream world is one coast or the other, and very rarely throughout the whole universe of the United States. And I know Dr. Springate's work is very inclusive nationally from the parks work project you did. And I would look to see that this was all the nooks and crannies of the country and all elements of that LGBTQ+ two spirit, all the elements of all those alphabet letters. You have enough time now out to do this right and I think there'll be a huge focus lens on you in doing this. It will be thankless sometimes, but there is a lot to find. And I look forward to seeing that complexity.

Dr. Carleen Carey:

Great. Thank you, Tracy.

Richard Baldwin:

I think that what this really calls to mind for me is the message that you're a part of us. That the queer community, though we may be challenging for a lot of people on many levels, we're here and we always have been. And that this gives us an opportunity to, like the historic articles that are going to be available, to have America reexamine or learn for the first time about some of those people that have contributed to where we're at that are LGBTQ+. And so I think that really is something that I find really important that there's full enfranchisement. And while there hasn't been in the past, this is an opportunity for us to kind of speak to those areas where there's still work that needs to be done.

Jeffrey Harris:

As have said as well, I think that this does present a wonderful opportunity to remind the world that we've been here the whole time. Those who were indigenous were part of this community, those who arrived in chains were a part of this community, those who arrived as colonists were a part of this community. And by virtue of making sure that for the 250th, if people understand that, is a wonderful opportunity for those who say that I was eight during the Bicentennial. But I also knew I was gay at that same time to have been able to have had those stories available as a part of our Bicentennial celebration would have been wonderful for me at that time, because I would have been able to see myself both from a past perspective, from the present and then guided myself toward whatever the future could have been. So this, I see as the opportunity for the eight year old in 2026, to be able to have that sense of self and see him, her or themselves in our history and our past, in our celebration of it.

Hannah Malvin:

Yeah. I agree with everything that's been said. I think there's a lot of opportunity here. There's the chance to, coming from an institutional voice, to acknowledge that LGBTQ+ history as a part of American history that can help promote empathy and inclusion and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community for folks who aren't immersed in hearing about LGBTQ+ history all the time, I think that's a great opportunity. I think when it comes to LGBTQ+ folks, seeing ourselves represented that can be validating and meaningful coming from this angle. And with such a broad audience and really seeing our heritage reflected back to us, understanding stories that we may have never heard before. It's a horizontal identity instead of a vertical one. So you don't necessarily share your identity with your parents, have the same identity as your parents and the folks in your immediate community.

Hannah Malvin:

So you don't necessarily grow up knowing all of these stories or being connected to it. So you go through your self discovery, and then this can be a chance to deepen it when there's more resources and stories available to you. So I think that kind of connection and seeing that heritage can be really powerful for people. And I think the chance to engage people with it, to help it can be such an uncovering, such an exciting thing to find LGBTQ+ history and stories and how it's connected to the places near you, the people near you, how it's so connected to your world. So I think there's so many ways we can explore how each of us is a part of LGBTQ+ history. And there could be ways for telling your story, sort of practicing writing your story or connecting intergenerationally and interviewing older folks.

Hannah Malvin:

Or my girlfriend thought this was very sappy, but a modern love kind of thing. There's just so many stories out there that can really be so meaningful for people to connect to. We've found that with Pride Outside, those have been some of our most special events when we partnered with the Park Service LGBTQ+ employee group during the pandemic and had 30 events of bringing people together around LGBTQ+ history. And just to have that community to feel connected to one another, or going on an LGBTQ+ history, walking tours in DC, we'll have 70 people show up on a Tuesday night just to feel connected to it. So I think it's really powerful stuff. And just lastly I think it's also, there's the opportunity to uplift such great work that's going on in this space. So there's so many people who have been collecting and sharing and really taking care of these stories. And so the chance to sort of invest in them and their work and uplift what's already there is a great opportunity.

Kai Azada:

I just want to underscore, I say this all the time during our radio show representation matters. And when I was a 12 year old experiencing the Bicentennial festivities and celebration, I did not yet know that I was queer. And I did not know that it would be okay because I did not see people reflected in well, pretty much of anything in 1976. So representation does matter, not just showing up, but also telling the stories, because people really connect to stories. You can spew stats till the cows come home or whatever, but people are really going to get hit right here when they hear a story. And there's just even a granule of something they can relate to. And all of a sudden queer people are not the boogiemans anymore, we're real life humans who have stories and histories.

Dr. Carleen Carey:

Kai, I think you've hit on a really awesome point that Megan was making about expansive histories. I can't wait to read what she writes about Pauli Murray. But there's also the story of Bayard Rustin. So not only are queer people not the boogeyman, they're some of the architects of the civil rights movement and some of our largest and most important political leaders. And what do we lose from the story when we leave them out? Or when we forget to say, hey, this was a person that's a part of the queer community and was out and proud in the 50s. And I think there's a lot that we can learn as Americans about building bridges across communities when we allow people to fully show up as who they are. And so that question of stories is a really good one to think about. I want to stick on that one for a second. Are there any historical moments or stories you think that we should highlight especially?

Tracy Baim:

Well, I'll go first. It would be helpful to get us call done, because we seem to be a very humble and differential group of people. I think wide swath wise, I think there's whole sections of the community whose stories have not been told very well, especially indigenous people and people who were forced here into this country, the diversity of all of that. There are definitely individual leaders within rural and urban areas, who's stories like Henry Gerber who founded what's believed to be the first known gay rights group in the United States, in Chicago, in the 1920s. Which will almost be like the hundred and first anniversary of that I think around the time of the celebration. And also Frederick Von Steuben, one of the fathers of the Continental Army, for example. We have a high school named after him in Chicago.

Tracy Baim:

But I do think there's great source material now compared to 1976. And it feels like there experts here, but I think one of the most important thing is to not isolate the LGBT channel in this sense. I think Dr.

Carey, you mentioned that LGBT people are very well represented in various areas. But just I think in the disability community, you can't just have a disability channel for this, right? People who are disabled need to be part of the whole and so having LGBTQ+ people on the military panel and all the other groups is going to be key because you could never get it all in one channel. So luckily the breadcrumbs are there, but those would be some of the folks I would say.

Dr. Carleen Carey:

Excellent. Thank you, Tracy. Kai.

Kai Azada:

I know you've addressed this already with the modern military group, but the story of gays in the military to shorten it is really something that needs to be told for a lot of reasons. And it's being told, this is the 10th anniversary of the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell. But a lot of people don't get that there were policies possibly even worse than Don't Ask, Don't Tell that existed before, way before. And that's detailed in a lot of really good books. One of my favorites is Conduct Unbecoming by Randy Shilts.

Kai Azada:

There are so many stories of people who like any American for similar reasons would join the military and wanted to serve their country. And what we found was that we weren't really all that welcome and furthermore, we didn't belong. And so it's been a long journey from that point through Don't Ask, Don't Tell and to this point where we're looking at 10 years behind us, since the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell. And it's taken story after story after story and there's more stories to be told. And that beyond the military, in a broader sense, it brings this background of stories and the power of storytelling and telling your own truth.

Dr. Carleen Carey:

Excellent. Thank you, Kai. Jeffrey.

Jeffrey Harris:

Sure. I will always advocate for making sure that the stories of non-whites be included in these discussions. So one of the things that I certainly noticed in terms of doing historical research on LGBTQ+ issues is that you do see as with the coastal dominance, you also see the white dominance and the white male dominance. And knowing that even in some of those stories where you would see those in the individuals, that there were people of color in the mix always, but we don't necessarily know their names. So Henry Gerber, the organization which of course leaves my mind at the moment. I think society for human rights had an African American president in Chicago at the same time that we're taught that people all talk about the Harlem Renaissance. But we know the Harlem Renaissance participants, many of them, but we do not know this individual, which again, his name is leaving me.

Jeffrey Harris:

I don't get that, that's not fair. But the point being that you think of there are many instances when you do have people of color in the mix of all of these places, stories, points of significance in LGBTQ+ history, but they don't emerge into the spotlight. So I think that bringing those stories forth, I think are particularly important. Because so many communities of color, I think in many ways, need to at least see

that... see for the world that we were a part of this broader history, that we were a part of these larger stories that have been told about LGBTQ+ history.

Jeffrey Harris:

So that there is, again, I always go back to eight year old me that there was... I know Bayard Rustin now, would've been nice to know that when I was living in DC during the Bicentennial or anything that came up related to the March on Washington. So to have those stories included, those non-white stories included is a learning tool, both for those communities of color, but for the white communities as well. So that it isn't one or the other, everybody can benefit from having a greater and broader diversity of the stories told.

Dr. Carleen Carey:

Well put. Richard.

Richard Baldwin:

Well, when I think about stories, I think of it in kind of two ways here in the context of LGBTQ+ history. One, is the kind of long line of civil engagement and the people we know about because they try to politically or civically change the system, Harvey Milk comes to mind, of course, and Bayard Rustin. And and all too often, this is paired or overshadowed by the histories and stories of violence against our communities. And I think that it's really difficult to filter through all of the stories that we see because so many of them are about the discriminatory or violent ends that come to people that are queer or LGBT, or a minority of any kind in this country. And so that's, I think part of my concern, like when we do radio, we do Closet Free, we could spend our hour every week talking about the latest violence against our communities that's occurred.

Richard Baldwin:

But the point more is to get harm reduction and get some basic community building and inclusion and empowerment into our community. And it seems really frustrating and divisive if the stories that people hear, especially if they're just learning about the LGBTQ+ communities, are these histories of violence. They're real, they're unavoidable in their presence. But if we can teach more or have more representation of folks that have been able to affect change, or at least get a message out there that sometimes prevents violence from occurring to have that inclusion, that respect, that foundational respect and visibility for the LGBTQ+ communities.

Dr. Carleen Carey:

Excellent. Thank you, Richard. And last but not least, Hannah.

Hannah Malvin:

I echo the sentiments about LGBTQ+ identity transcending some various class, gender socioeconomic status, all of these other identities and the importance of making sure that we're telling stories from the full spectrum of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, just all of the different pieces of the community. And Richard's point about celebrating queer joy, that it's not just about telling the painful story. It's important to acknowledge and understand and work to repair the inequities and injustices, but also that we want to be recognizing all the beautiful, joyful parts of our history too. And connecting to those, and not just the famous people, not just the rich people, the politicians, the entertainers but sort of

everyone at different levels. And one thing I think could be interesting would be to tell the stories of the people who've been telling the stories. I think of Bob Skiba, Philadelphia or Jose Gutierrez in DC.

Hannah Malvin:

There's so many people who've been... and Rainbow History Project. There's so many folks doing such incredible work, really pouring themselves into care taking this history. And I think we all are and they are especially a part of taking care of these stories. And I'd love to shine a light on them too. And then also just wanted to shout out the Queering the Map, those kinds of efforts that if folks haven't seen that before, it can be really nice to poke around and just see sort of little slices of life all around the world, just little tiny queer stories that can make you feel connected to a place. So I think all of these can be ways to make people feel connected.

Dr. Carleen Carey:

Excellent. Thank you, Hannah. We're definitely invested in building bridges across communities at A250, that's one of the major objectives for the advisory councils. Our huge criteria was what evidence of bridge building can we find in your lived experience? And so a lot of the folks that we have on advisory councils, whether they're health and wellness or youth engagement or sports and entertainment, we made sure that their bridge builders. But thinking about bridge building is a really lofty idea and sometimes it can come with challenges. If we're thinking about challenges, what are some of the challenges that America250 might run into in supporting and including the LGBT community in executing and in planning the commemoration?

Dr. Megan Springate:

Can I? I just want to hop in, got some questions and comments along that line from folks in the chat. Tracy, you've been called out for the most intriguing background alert, which is not related, but it's still a background award rather. And a thanks for the work that you've done with the Chicago Reader. And I think some of the comments, right, oral history of aids epidemic among queer communities of color, noting that the recognition of LGBTQ+ is so new that most of the gains have occurred within the life spans of living folks. And so there's an opportunity for oral histories.

Dr. Megan Springate:

Interpretive staff, linking historical events with contemporary issues. So that sort of relevance piece, that what happened in the past matters today, which is of course at the heart of A250. And the call to include LGBTQ+ in terms of challenges, LGBTQ+ folks living in rural areas. So it's not just the urban stories of folks. And I think that that's important. If you're in the chat, Tracy has provided a whole list of names and requested sort of a public call for submissions for those. And at the end, we'll give you an email address.

Dr. Megan Springate:

Let's see. So also just to think about the challenges regarding representation, and this is a question from someone in the audience, how can we help the nation understand the difference between communities being underserved? And in fact, some like LGBTQ+ have been historically excluded and how can we make that in a way that folks can understand and engage with? So kind of all of the things about challenges and addressing that excluded versus underserved. I'll throw it out to y'all. Richard, your mic is open. Do you have a comment or you're just hanging out?

Richard Baldwin:

That's a whopper of a question, I got to say. I think that a challenge for this commemoration kind of follows along this idea of getting it out of the 1776 colonial Northeastern America stereotypical sort of concept. And just reinforcing making sure that it's specifically about inclusion and about representation in those ways, reaching out to pride events and doing things like that might be a way to make sure that a larger community, especially the queer community feels that connection. And yeah, I mean, we were talking a little bit about stories before and challenges now, I think it's wrapped up in the same thing. And that for a lot of the time that we've been around as a country, there's been difficulty in representation, in being out and loudly queer. And not just being the exception, but just something that people could predictably see within their communities.

Richard Baldwin:

It kind of seems like you have to be somewhat personally motivated to step up and stand up and speak out and lead. And when a lot of that has the potential to be undercut by discrimination, it makes it all the more difficult to see representation. And you don't make space for what you don't see, or you don't have a place at the table for... Well, exclusionary, like we don't want to hear about these degenerate things or just not even thinking about them as within the realm of possibility.

Richard Baldwin:

So I think politically this could be challenging as well, having so much of the American spirit and all of that sort of thing, being captured as a liberal or a conservative representation. And it may be very challenging to encourage representation from groups that have been so historically discriminated against in that way. If there's a sense that this is just kind of a Republican or a democratic project as opposed to nonpartisan and what have you, that definitely could be a challenge.

Tracy Baim:

Yeah. I would say the political part is possibly a challenge depending on how your funding happens, right? I don't know if this is privately or publicly funded so that could be a challenge. I think the amazing diversity of our community is a challenge for you to make sure to lean into that instead of fear it. And then funding, you could have 12, you could have 20 staff and you still might only get the tip of the iceberg. But I do think it needs to be extremely well funded and hopefully national funders, like the Guild Foundation and others will fund America250 to the point that it needs it because the information's out there and findable. But you cannot do this with one person. It needs to be a really well funded project and resources need to be put into community centers and community media and other places that can help you do the work so money.

Dr. Carleen Carey:

It's an important one to keep in mind.

Jeffrey Harris:

I would also add at least from an angle on the having an excluded element, there are stories or growing stories within LGBTQIA history of reinserting those exclusions from those individuals who are part of our community that have been obscured by our past. And I think that those stories are challenges in that if we're talking about historical individuals that have achieved a certain place in the minds of many, to then see them included as a part of the LGBTQIA community can be a challenge. But by virtue of

reminding the world that they were a part of that community, I think helps to chip away at that sense of those who were excluded. And I think that another chipping away when we're dealing with stories go into the issue of urban versus rural, coastal versus not, lots of people who did amazing things on the coast and in urban areas come from rural and smaller communities.

Jeffrey Harris:

And if we reverse, if we sort of go into their histories, my suspicion is that those individuals who left places left behind people who were a part of our community. And those people have done interesting things at the smaller local levels that likely have not been told, have not been dealt with because people still go home. And if they're like most of us, they have that small community that they return to, those friends, those buddies. And I think that that has been the case over the course of LGBTQIA history. So I guess I'm thinking from that historian challenge, sort of how do you deal with those issues? And I think those are angles with which we can deal with that. But as Tracy said, yeah, money, money.

Dr. Carleen Carey:

Yeah. That's definitely an important challenge to always keep in mind in these fields, Lord. But last question of the evening for you guys, what do you hope to see for America's future for 2026 and even beyond?

Dr. Megan Springate:

Hannah, I'm going to call on you. Hannah Go.

Hannah Malvin:

I'm going first. I would love to see collective liberation and justice and democracy, all of that thriving for everyone.

Dr. Carleen Carey:

Beautiful. Thank you, Hannah. What about Tracy?

Tracy Baim:

I would like to see an interrogation of our history that doesn't run away from it, but expands it and is inclusive and has an equitable future in mind.

Dr. Carleen Carey:

Oh, fantastic. I love that. What about you, Kai?

Kai Azada:

We need to continue towards equal rights for everybody. It's not just going to happen. It's you have to view it as a long haul kind of thing, because there's always going to be progress. And then a few steps back and we just really need to keep our eye on having the same rights as everybody. Everybody having the same rights, not just, okay, you get this piece of the pie and you get these benefits, it's we are together in this. We need to be together in this.

Dr. Carleen Carey:

I love the idea of being together, but I think sometimes people struggle with the idea of remembering that there's not uniformity in unity, right? We can all be different. What do you think Richard, thoughts on the future?

Richard Baldwin:

Well, I think that if this COVID era that we are working through has taught us anything that we're adapting to new ways of communication, new ways of connecting. And they're becoming more inclusive because more of us have the technology to be able to do conversations such as this. But to still be kind of aware of that technological divide and especially that great division between the edges of our country and the great middle flyover states concept, right? I hope that there is a strong undergirding into those systems that unify us as a country that are somewhat transparent, but still so important. I think of the postal service in particular and these sort of things that we all kind of assume are always going to be there. But really play an important role in the infrastructure of our country. And that it's those sort of public serving institutions that have, because of changes in the law and policies, become more inclusive and representational. But that we need to pull everyone along into that in the future.

Dr. Carleen Carey:

I love the idea of pulling all of us along, Richard. And last but not least, Jeffrey.

Jeffrey Harris:

First and foremost, I'd like to see our democracy thrive fully, thoroughly, with as many people included as possible, that's a just general point. In terms of how we understand our past, I would love... This is a personal thing, I'd love to see a greater integration of the various parts of our history, moved into a broader cohesive U.S. Historical narrative so that we really have a more full and complete understanding of the complexity of who we are. That we can embrace our tragedies while also embracing our triumphs and making sure that we remind people that history is, it's neither good, nor bad, it simply is. And it's our job, the job of people like us to present as much of that as we can. And for those of us who particularly occupy the LGBTQIA space to ensure that a part of that integration of the narrative includes our stories. So those are my hopes, but definitely, definitely strengthening our democracy and making sure that what good will it be for all of us, with our various parts, if we all aren't able to participate.

Dr. Carleen Carey:

Well said, I think that concludes the discussion portion for the evening. I'll turn it back over to Dr. Springate to help us out.

Dr. Megan Springate:

Thank you. So we are pushing up against our one hour time slot. There's a couple of comments in the chat that I'd like to just sort of share. One is the rights of our community are still "debatable," debatable by an influential segment of American politics. The celebration of our history is an important part of convincing people that our rights are self evident and alienable, right? That's part of what we're doing is we want everybody to see themselves in this commemoration and that is at the forefront of all of the work that we're doing.

Dr. Megan Springate:

And so we will continue to be doing that. And another comment says a potential problem for A 250 is the perception that it has a partisan if not conservative agenda. The recent federal 1776 commission and state backlash from the 1619 project could taint America250 among the LGBTQ+ community. I thank you for the comment. And all I can say is I'm glad that you've joined us for this conversation. And I think actions over words and I hope that we can, right, move forward as an inclusive and expansive organization moving forward.

Dr. Megan Springate:

I appreciate the concern, but keep an eye on what we're doing. So I want to thank you all. I want to thank our panelists. Every one of you, I appreciate you all. And your candor and your brilliance and generosity for being here this evening. And also for all of those who attended, I cannot express my appreciation more for you all to be here and be part of this conversation. We do want to continue the conversation. You can contact us at engage@amer250.org, send your comments, your ideas.

Dr. Megan Springate:

You want to give us a pat on the back or hold our feet to the fire, that is the email to contact us at. And keep a lookout in your email for a feedback survey so that we continue to improve on the experience with these community conversations. Our next community conversation in... What is today? November, will be beyond the 50 states. So we're looking at the U.S. Jurisdictions in DC, that will be in November, stay tuned. I hope to see you all there again. Thank you everybody so much. And thank you, Dr. Carey for co-wrangling with me. Have a good night y'all, thank you.

Dr. Carleen Carey:

Bye, good night.