

Dr. Megan Springate ([00:02](#)):

Greetings everyone. Welcome to America250's Community Conversation: Beyond the 50 States. With these conversations, we're going to engage with communities across the United States and around the world. Panelists and 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. My name is Megan Springate. I'm the director of engagement here at America250, and I'm one of your co-moderators today. Our other moderator is Dr. Carlene Carey, America250's director of public outreach and inclusion.

Dr. Megan Springate ([00:41](#)):

I just have a little bit of housekeeping before we get going. This conversation is being recorded and will be available on the America250 website soon after we're done. Please use the Q and A or the chat function to ask questions or make comments to the panel. We'll be monitoring those and make sure that your questions and comments are relayed. A reminder to all that America250 and these conversations are nonpartisan, and a shout out to Stephanie, and Mari, and Cara, and Kelsey, and our ASL interpreters, Jordan, I can only see your face right now, for keeping everything running smoothly behind the scenes. Thank you everyone for being here. Before we meet our panelists, I'll give a brief overview of what America250 is to help set the stage for our conversation, but before I do that, let me introduce to you America250's president and CEO, Mr. Joe Daniels. Joe?

Joe Daniels ([01:39](#)):

Thanks, Megan. I just wanted to welcome everybody who's attending tonight. I'm really excited. This is my first Community Conversation that I've attended. I just started in this role about a month ago, so today I think is my 31st day on the job. Just to give a quick little background on me, my former job or the one where I spent the majority of my career, I was the founding CEO of the National September 11 Memorial & Museum in New York City. Hopefully, many on this call have at one time or another gone to the memorial and the museum.

Joe Daniels ([02:24](#)):

I got interested in America250 because the experience with the 9/11 project really gave me this first front row seat to what this country can do when we come together to support one another in a really large scale, caring, and national way. The idea of being involved with America250 and our very ambitious aspirations to not only have the largest and most inclusive commemoration in our nation's history, but to use that commemoration to bring this country together and to remind all of us that we are a country that is special in large part because of the many, many, many different backgrounds and stories that the individuals in our country make up to form the American spirit. I think the title of this talk really says it all that we of course look at the 50 states as an integral part of this commemoration, but it is tremendously important to the board, to the commission, to the staff, and to myself that our U.S. Territories and of course the federal district, Washington D.C., are equal partners in making sure that what we do here engages is many of the tens, hundreds of millions of Americans that live across the territories and across the United States.

Joe Daniels ([04:08](#)):

I'd love to put this charge onto our partners here that'll be speaking on the panel tonight is that we are certainly not only open involving you in this commemoration, but we're also very receptive to your ideas. Our mandate is programming across the spectrum that is positive, that is optimistic, that is

celebratory, that recognizes is that this country has been a force for good in the world and a force for good here at home, but a commemoration that is also serious, and reflective, and recognizes that while we have made incredible progress since our founding in really building out this notion that we started with, e pluribus unum, out of many one, that we have needed to make progress for so many people, and that progress has been uneven.

Joe Daniels ([05:11](#)):

What this commemoration can do if we do it right, is to bring us together, so that we can courageously and bravely face the next 250 years and make sure that the promise of America is really accessible and meaningful for everyone who makes up the American story. I'll leave it with that. I'm so pleased that we have such an august panel with us tonight. I also wanted to thank my team. These kinds of conversations are not just... They may look good, but we're doing them because they're the right thing to do. Megan and her team have just done a wonderful job with Dr. Carey in engaging all those whose voices we want to hear for this commemoration, so thank you.

Dr. Megan Springate ([06:03](#)):

Thank you, Joe. I'm going to give a brief overview of America250 now. Hopefully you see the screen. This is the 10,000 foot view of what we're doing here. The purpose is to catalyze a more perfect union. Joe mentioned the largest and most inclusive commemoration in American history, but the purpose is to catalyze a more perfect union. We are a living experiment here, and we want to continue that and improve the world we live in. The values, we have the values. Our values are service, diversity, collaboration, respect, integrity, optimism, and imagination. I hope that those are reflected in everything that we do. Our themes are to involve, invite, imagine, and to inspire. With those ideas in your head about who we are and what we're doing, let me introduce to you the director of state partnerships, Kelsey Millay, who will talk a little bit about initiatives that highlight and support those in the U.S. Jurisdictions.

Kelsey Millay ([07:18](#)):

Great. Thanks so much, Megan, and just big thank you to all the amazing panelists we have here tonight and to the great audience that we have as well. Thanks everybody for being here and being part of this conversation with us. Yes. Once again, my name's Kelsey Millay. I'm the director of state partnerships for the America250 foundation. My team at America250, we are entirely focused on engaging with the U.S. States and territories or jurisdictions. As Joe mentioned in his remarks, it's really important that America250 have a presence all throughout the country as we're planning for this commemoration and then as we're marking the big milestone in 2026. It's very important that we be amplifying what organizations and communities throughout the country are planning for this anniversary and that we're generally amplifying all the amazing stories, histories, and cultures there are throughout our great nation, so that's why we have this specific focus on really engaging and working closely with states and jurisdictions as we're building this commemoration.

Kelsey Millay ([08:28](#)):

One of the key ways that we're approaching this is we are encouraging every state, every jurisdiction, and the District of Columbia to establish its own official 250th commission through legislation or executive order, both to lead the planning in the state, in the jurisdiction, and also to work closely with us, with the national organization, so we can all collaborate and build this thing together. To date, there are 19 states that have established these official commissions. You can see on the screen here on the

map in dark green, the 19 states that have established, and there's several states and jurisdictions that are making progress towards establishing a commission as well. We're aiming to have all 56 of these commissions by 2023, so all 50 states, all five jurisdictions, and the District of Columbia, with the goal of having all of these established by 2023.

Kelsey Millay ([09:28](#)):

Then as these commissions are established, there's a few ways that we want to work really closely over the coming years with these state commissions and jurisdictional commissions. First of all, we see our role as the national organization, a big part of it, as being a convener, so we'll be facilitating quarterly convenings, at least quarterly, mostly virtual, but hopefully some in-person convenings as well, bringing all of these state commissions and jurisdictional commissions together to share lessons learned, to share ideas for the commemoration, and to coordinate and collaborate on programs and initiatives.

Kelsey Millay ([10:10](#)):

Then the other piece of this is the America250 Foundation aims to form official partnerships between our organization and each of these state commissions and jurisdictional commissions, so we've started signing partnership agreements with some of the states that have already formed their commissions. What these agreements do is they just, first of all, very generally outline the fact that we plan to collaborate and cross promote over the coming years. These agreements also come with \$10,000 in initial partnership support from the foundation to our partners. Then we can also provide what you see on the screen here as well, these custom state specific or jurisdiction specific America250 logos and branding. We recently signed an agreement and brought the Maryland commission on as an official partner, so you see America250 MD as an example here on the screen, and we can provide these at no cost to all of our state commission and jurisdictional commission partners, and just really build this strong brand that will become very recognizable all across the country through these partnerships.

Kelsey Millay ([11:24](#)):

Then also we just see a lot of opportunity for programmatic collaboration and cross promotion through these partnerships and through this collaboration over the coming years, so we're really looking forward to getting commissions stood up in Guam, Puerto Rico, Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa, the Virgin Islands, and the District of Columbia, and just generally amplifying all of the great work that you all are doing as you're planning for this commemoration and the amazing civic engagement initiatives that you all have and working together to plan and build this commemoration. Thank you again to our panelists for being here today and our amazing audience that's here today. We're also just really excited for this to be the beginning of an ongoing conversation as we all plan for this historic milestone. Thank you.

Dr. Megan Springate ([12:20](#)):

Thanks, Kelsey. I'd like to now invite the panelists to introduce themselves. If you can give your full name, your affiliation, and maybe just three words of how other commemorations things the bicentennial, or the 400 years of African American history, or other commemorations, how those have made an impact on you, just a couple of short words? Eduardo, would you like to begin?

Eduardo Arosemena-Muñoz ([12:48](#)):

Yeah. Thank you. Welcome everyone, and thank you for having me. It's great to represent Puerto Rico in this forum. Right now, we are celebrating the half millennium of the founding of San Juan, the capital

city of the island. I believe that as of today, what I am thinking with regards to America250 is the progress that the nation has made in terms of diversity and inclusion. That for us here, being Latinos, mostly a Latino jurisdiction, is pretty important. I have been reflecting on this for a little bit.

Eduardo Arosemena-Muñoz ([13:24](#)):

I first will introduce myself. I should have started with that. I'm an attorney. I'm the president or chairman of the Puerto Rico Institute of Culture and the Center for the Performing Arts. I am a former under secretary of state for federal and foreign affairs, so I have a career in government. Right now, I'm a private sector attorney.

Eduardo Arosemena-Muñoz ([13:43](#)):

I've been reflecting on what this 250 commemoration means and how much progress the nation has made. If you think back to the 94th Congress, back in 1976, when we commemorated the bicentennial, there were only 18 African American members of Congress. Today, there's 57. That's a 211% increase. In terms of Latinos, back in the 1976 in the 94th Congress, there were only eight. Today, there's 52. That's an increase of more than 500%, so the nation has made a lot of progress.

Eduardo Arosemena-Muñoz ([14:22](#)):

The CEO, I congratulate him by the way, was mentioning the motto through which our nation was founded, e pluribus unum, out of many one, so I'm thinking about unum, part, the many. Who makes up that many? Who's part of the many? The nation has made progress. I think that the many from 1976 to today is very different. It's more of a mosaic. It's more diverse. There is more inclusion, and the experiment I see... As an attorney, I see the nation as a great experiment in political science. It has been able to withstand several tests. I'm not going to get into the political arena here, but the experiment has proven to be successful. I look forward to participate and bring in some of the things that Puerto Rico can contribute to this great event. Thank you for having me here.

Dr. Megan Springate ([15:24](#)):

Great. Thank you. Elliot?

Elliot Ferguson ([15:28](#)):

Wow. That was a lot and a great opening. Thank you very much for that inspiration, Eduardo. My name's Elliott Ferguson. I represent the District of Columbia, Washington D.C., the city that is, as many of us do, continuously fighting for the opportunity to have the representation that's necessary to get necessary dollars to really allow us to do what the other 50 states benefit from on a regular basis. My job here is to promote D.C. From an economic development perspective for conventions, tourism, and bringing folks to the city, and all things tied to the economic engine, the \$8 billion generated by those visitors. Opportunities like the bicentennial and all other celebrations, the 400 years of African American history and commemoration, these are opportunities for us to look back and really correct some of the things that were taught erroneously.

Elliot Ferguson ([16:35](#)):

For the bicentennial, I was 11 years old. I was living on the West Coast, but not long afterwards, I moved to the South. I think we've learned a lot over the last few years about the history and equally as much how wrong some of that history was in which we celebrated. As we looked forward to where we are

today, and look at where we are in terms of celebrating the American experience and history, and recognizing the District of Columbia and the other jurisdictions that are represented here now, this is an opportunity for us to really focus on the importance of those that don't benefit from perhaps some of the same opportunities as the 50 states that are part of the United States. At the same time, we all are a part of the United States as well. Looking forward to being a part of this panel, and engaging, and learning, and maybe sharing as well.

Dr. Megan Springate ([17:32](#)):

Great, thank you. Kimberlee?

Dr. Kimberlee Kihleng ([17:40](#)):

[Foreign language]. I'd to begin just by acknowledging and paying deep respect to the Indigenous Chamorro people of Guahan in the Mariana Islands, who first settled this island archipelago approximately 4,000 years ago and who have experienced 400 years of colonialism, first under the Spanish, then the Japanese, and finally the United States. I am Kimberlee Kihleng, the executive director of Humanities Guahan, which is an independent nonprofit organization that is affiliated with the National Endowment for the Humanities, which is an independent federal agency. Our organization presents and supports public humanities programming for the people of Guahan, much of which addresses important public policy and civic issues facing our island community from migration and belonging to Indigenous culture and identity, race and ethnicity, militarization, environmental sustainability injustice, and political status in terms of self-determination and decolonization.

Dr. Kimberlee Kihleng ([18:52](#)):

I have been privileged to call Guahan home most recently for the past 16 years. I first came to the island over 40 years ago. Interestingly, in terms of Guahan's colonial history, we have been in the process of commemorating 500 years of the Spanish first arriving in Guahan and the larger Marianas. We've done this through beginning with Marianas History Conference where we focused on those 500 years, and we will continue to commemorate this event, this happening throughout this year and next. I think it's been a really educational, this commemoration, also pretty remarkable in terms of the perseverance and strength of the Chamorro people, as well as inspirational for their continued existence and vibrancy as an Indigenous people. I will stop there.

Dr. Megan Springate ([20:05](#)):

Thank you. Leo?

Leo Pangelinan ([20:09](#)):

Hello and [Foreign language]. Good morning, everyone. I'm Leo Pangelinan. My job here in my jurisdiction is to oversee the Northern Marianas Humanities Council, which as Kimberlee Kihleng on Guahan had indicated, we are affiliated with the National Endowment for the Humanities. We're partially funded through that national agency. Similarly also, we do work to advance the humanities locally in our communities. Specifically as an independent nonprofit, our mission here locally is to navigate and explore the diverse experiences of our Indigenous people and the others in our community by enriching their lives through publications, research programs, and dialogue. We share a similar colonial past as Guahan and Guam, as I think we will unravel here today between Kimberlee and I, and so we do commemorate some things locally that tie into the US. I think as part of this conversation, I would to highlight that we would be celebrating our 50th anniversary in 2026 as a member of the

American family, having signed a covenant in 1976 with the United States, establishing a commonwealth for our area here and our people in political union with the United States.

Leo Pangelinan ([22:03](#)):

Back to Dr. Megan, your request for three words, that's really difficult to do, but one thing that comes to mind that I feel is most relevant to us out here in our jurisdiction is this history of overcoming adversity among people of different races, marginalized people in U.S. History. I think those are the historical moments, and milestones, and pieces of U.S. History that comes to my mind as I think about our relationship here, our jurisdiction with the United States and how to relate to that. Yeah. Thank you for having me.

Dr. Megan Springate ([22:47](#)):

Verdel, you are up next.

Verdel L. Peterson ([22:52](#)):

Greetings everyone. My name is Verdel Laverne Petersen. I am representing the exquisite islands called the Virgin Islands of the United States. My native land is St. Croix, which is the largest of the three major islands that make up the Virgin Islands of the United States. After obtaining a BS degree from Xavier University of Louisiana, I returned to my homeland, and I became an educator. I worked for 33 years for the Department of Education in the Virgin Islands of the United States.

Verdel L. Peterson ([23:52](#)):

Currently I am a facilitator for a public education campaign and constitutional development. This is a result of a federal grant that was approved to the Department of Interior. The administrator of this grant is a professor at the University of the Virgin Islands by the name of Dr. Malik Sekou. Together we are working to ensure that everyone is enlightened, educated, and inspired, so that we can finally have our own constitution because we have been governed by an organic act, and we have not had the opportunity, we the people of the Virgin Islands, to have our own constitution. I'm very excited to be part of this inclusion initiative, and it will definitely be an enhancement to the work that Dr. Malik and I are doing in terms of education and constitutional development, as well as political status, and self-determination. Once again, greetings. It's a pleasure to be part of this distinguished panel.

Dr. Megan Springate ([25:24](#)):

Thank you all. I am so grateful that you are all here. I'm going to stop-

Verdel L. Peterson ([25:29](#)):

I forgot the three words. The three words to describe previous commemorations words, unique, and uneven, and equal.

Dr. Megan Springate ([25:46](#)):

Great. Thank you. I'm going to stop sharing my screen, and Verdel, I hope we can dig a little bit into your thoughts there. Dr. Carey, I'm going to turn it over to you to continue the conversation.

Carleen Carey ([26:01](#)):

Thank you, Dr. Springate. As Joe mentioned in his opening remarks, part of our goal is to really embody the ethos of e pluribus unum, or out of many, one. To that end, we're really excited to hear from our esteemed panelists on a variety of topics. Please feel free to unmute your mic and share your thoughts with the team. Without further ado, let's dig into question number one. Sometimes you'll hear references to us territories, other times U.S. Jurisdictions or U.S. Insular areas. What is your preference in terms of the terminology that is used?

Eduardo Arosemena-Muñoz ([26:38](#)):

Us attorneys are taught that the name does not make the thing. This is obviously a language distinction, whether we're called jurisdictions or territories. I personally prefer, as an attorney, jurisdiction. That's because in Latin it means that there's a capacity to dictate the law, justice, but at the end of the day, as my fellow panelists were stating, we are glad to have been made part of this panel and moving forward, I personally am very happy to take part in this event.

Eduardo Arosemena-Muñoz ([27:16](#)):

I am a naturalized citizen. I wasn't born in Puerto Rico, so I became a U.S. Citizen by choice. That also defines a little bit of who I am and how thrilled I am to be here, so I would say that in terms of your question, my preference would be jurisdiction because federal law applies here in Puerto Rico, and there's the legal capacity to dictate what justice is. Territory sounds more like a possession. Jurisdiction sounds more something that the federal government does in all of the states.

Elliot Ferguson ([27:48](#)):

Totally.

Carleen Carey ([27:48](#)):

Thank you, Eduardo.

Elliot Ferguson ([27:52](#)):

I can go next. In Washington, we are known as the District of Columbia, so we consider ourselves the District. From a marketing perspective, it means different things in different parts of the world. If I'm out of the United States, I would reference Washington D.C., the full name. As we're looking at the fact that we're not a state, we do recognize the fact that in 1790, a parcel of land that we occupy was created to be the seat of government for the United States, and was not created as a state at that particular time. We definitely are fine with being called the District, or District of Columbia, D.C. We answer proudly to any of those names.

Carleen Carey ([28:43](#)):

Excellent. Thank you, Elliot. Leo, it looks you might have something to say.

Leo Pangelinan ([28:50](#)):

Yeah, if I could respond next. Some of the other terms that I've heard are terms like U.S. Possessions in the far Pacific for our islands here in the Pacific or U.S. protectorates, but the bottom line is I think our people here had no choice in the matter. These terms imply that our lands and people belong to the United States and don't necessarily reflect these longstanding international or multilateral efforts to empower our people and areas to exercise self-determination and self-government. The civilians who

survived World War II in our islands, the vast majority being of Chamorro and Carolinian ancestry, the Indigenous people here, chose to adopt the governance models, freedoms, and security offered by the United States of America.

Leo Pangelinan ([29:52](#)):

My personal preference, but this may not apply to all and probably shouldn't because we all have different political relationships with the U.S... My preference would be to just refer our islands here in the Northern Mariana Islands as a U.S commonwealth. I think it signals that we are something other than a state in the union, but also reinforces this idea that we're not much different. I think there isn't much difference between the term commonwealth and state, yet we are different. We're not a state. We don't have the same voting rights that representatives have or people of other states have, so that's my take on it.

Carleen Carey ([30:41](#)):

Thank you for your insights. Kimberlee, would you to share?

Dr. Kimberlee Kihleng ([30:44](#)):

Sure. I'll just follow up on what my colleague had to say. Living and working in Guahan, which is an organized unincorporated territory of the U.S., I often use U.S. Territory, but the more inclusive, U.S. Jurisdiction would be most important, most appropriate if you want to include D.C. and the fact of the commonwealth status for the Northern Marianas. I think the important thing is that in Guahan, and I think it's the same in the Northern Islands in the Marianas, we live in a real strange space of contradictions, right? We are citizens of the most powerful and celebrated democracy in the world, and yet we are in the shadows and on the margins as U.S. jurisdictions or as U.S. territories. I think that's something that really needs to come to the fore as we commemorate America250. Thank you.

Carleen Carey ([31:48](#)):

Thank you and Verdel?

Verdel L. Peterson ([31:49](#)):

We don't have any preference. I am comfortable with the term insular areas, U.S. possessions, American colonies, U.S. jurisdiction, unincorporated territories of the United States of America, but perhaps you can refer to the islands such as Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands of United States as the Caribbean American paradise.

Carleen Carey ([32:23](#)):

I love that. That sounds great.

Elliot Ferguson ([32:25](#)):

Love that too.

Eduardo Arosemena-Muñoz ([32:29](#)):

We have a... Well, is anybody left from the panelists, anybody?

Carleen Carey ([32:35](#)):

No.

Eduardo Arosemena-Muñoz ([32:35](#)):

Well, I wanted to share something. Here in Puerto Rico, sometimes we refer to ourselves as a country, a [Spanish]. It's not something that excludes who we are as part of the United States. It's similar to what happens in Spain with the Basque country, that they call themselves a country, but they're part of Spain. Obviously it goes to identity and the fact that Puerto Rico's a very old jurisdiction. I mean, it was discovered on Columbus' second voyage. I'm not going to get into that, of course, but what my colleague here, my fellow panel is from the Virgin Islands just said about being a paradise, we sometimes have a saying that Puerto Rico's that part of world where the United States becomes a Caribbean nation. It's very true, and it's not only Puerto Rico, it's the U.S. Virgin islands. Yeah. I just wanted to share that.

Carleen Carey ([33:29](#)):

Thank you, Eduardo. That's definitely highlighting some of the complications and some of the complexity that Kimberlee referenced. For our second question of the evening, what do you see as the significant opportunity that America250 presents for the U.S. Jurisdictions? Let's start with Verdel.

Verdel L. Peterson ([33:47](#)):

Thank you for that question. I think it's an opportunity to recognize the fact that the insular areas are made up of unincorporated territories of the United States, the flag, the American flag, and the inhabitants consider themselves to be Americans. However, each territory has a distinct culture, history, and identity. This is an opportunity to highlight the gems that the United States have, and hopefully we will all be included. We are not a state, but the Virgin Islands of the United States is on a path of self determination, and we appreciate this inclusion to recognize that we are Americans despite having our own identities and histories.

Carleen Carey ([34:55](#)):

Thank you, Verdel. Elliot, it looks you've got something to say.

Elliot Ferguson ([35:03](#)):

Yeah. I'll go next. I think it's an opportunity to really focus on education and recognition and to, as I referenced earlier, reconnect. As we looked at the centennial celebration of the United States, it was really a one dimensional story tied to the American experience. It did not represent all of America. It did not represent the extraordinary importance of the Black community on the economics of this country, as well as the islands. My father is from the Bahamas, so I represent one of those beautiful places, but I think now we have a chance to go back, and really connect in a different way, and focus on the real truths, and really deal with some of this spotty history tied to how we've become this America, the country that we are and United States. It's not all bad, but at the same time, you can't sweep the stories of colonialism, or slavery, and other aspects that also happened in some of the island countries under the rug as we move forward.

Elliot Ferguson ([36:21](#)):

For us as a district and for those that are on the call, let's just face it. The District of Columbia, I moved here 20 years ago. Before I moved here, yeah, I heard about taxation without representation, but I

didn't really think about it until I physically moved here and had to start paying the same amount, if not more taxes, than others, but yet I don't have the representation. Unfortunately under the last presidential administration, Puerto Rico, we saw how it was treated during unfortunate circumstances of a natural occurrence such as a hurricane, but at the same time, I think a lot of people don't recognize or understand that those of us that are on the call, perhaps maybe D.C. more than others, but that we're all part of the United States and what that means..

Elliot Ferguson ([37:13](#)):

It's like when I talk to someone who lives in Texas, and they're not from Mexico, and someone in Texas... I have a friend that's from Chile, and he is like, "Oh, Mexico, Chile, it doesn't really matter." Well, it does matter, and this is an opportunity through this celebration to talk about how we all represent various aspects of American history and ironically, happen to all be destinations that rely heavily on tourism for our economies.

Eduardo Arosemena-Muñoz ([37:44](#)):

If I may, because Puerto Rico was referenced... Thank you, Elliot, for your comment. Dr. Carey, may I?

Carleen Carey ([37:50](#)):

Yes.

Eduardo Arosemena-Muñoz ([37:53](#)):

Elliot touched on Hurricane Maria, and what a great challenge that was, and it was terrible. One thing was what you saw in the screens of newscast and broadcasts at the national level, but when you were here in the ground, I was under secretary of state of the island during that time. I was assisting FEMA in repatriating hundreds of students who were stranded here from Columbia, Chile, Peru. You had thousands of American soldiers on the ground here helping, assisting. I would say, thank you, 20, 30 times a day to different military men and women. They would all say, "Yeah, I'm doing this because I fought in the war, I mean, in the Gulf. I fought in Bosnia, alongside fellow Puerto Ricans, brethren, and they gave their lives for me, they sacrificed, so I'm paying it back." One thing is the political discourse and the political rhetoric. The nation is not the politicians. It's the average common folk who make it what it is.

Leo Pangelinan ([39:08](#)):

I'd to comment on that. Thank you, Eduardo and Elliot for framing the conversation here. When I think of opportunities for our jurisdiction and for all of us outside of being a United or a state in the union, is it really gives us an additional platform to be able to voice our stories, our histories, a lot of which is localized to our people, and to the uniqueness of our lands, and our own history with other nations and not just the United States. It's also an opportunity, as Eduardo had led into, to talk about these successes, the benefits that come to our way, that help our people as part of being part of the United States.

Leo Pangelinan ([40:05](#)):

Between, I know, the Northern Mariana Islands and Guam, we have a high proportion of our citizens that join the military. This might be true in other jurisdictions. Patriotism and allegiance to the U.S. is not a question for us. I think the trauma we've had to experience through World War II is really ingrained in

not just my parents' and their parents' generation, but also something that we continue to commemorate today with our youth to remind them about how we have these freedoms today.

Leo Pangelinan ([40:45](#)):

In our jurisdiction here in the Pacific, we are subject to violent typhoons. We call it typhoons, right, out here and hurricanes out in the Atlantic. I think a couple of years after Hurricane Maria, two or more years, Super Typhoon Yutu hit our islands. This was in 2018, it was a category five storm. FEMA personnel, they were on the ground even before the storm hit. They were on Guam getting ready to deploy resources to support the aftermath of such a catastrophic, natural disaster. We're still in recovery as a community here. I want to echo Eduardo's sentiments about feeling that and wanting to thank them continuously because I don't think if we had that support coming from the United States that we would be able to come to this level of recovery in our community, both socially, culturally, economically, and of course, in the family as well, keeping our families together.

Dr. Megan Springate ([42:08](#)):

Thank you for that. I want to some give some comments that we've been getting in the chat and in the question and answer, just to move the conversation along. One of the comments is since we're talking about the American Revolution beyond the 50 states, I hope this celebration will finally reveal what has been erased from history, starting with this Spanish enterprise in the Americas that took place prior to the American Revolution, and then offering there some notes on where to find that history.

Dr. Megan Springate ([42:44](#)):

We have a comment also that now we're getting to the core of exactly what we need to bring to the forefront, so thank you panelists for getting there. It's refreshing to see these perspectives from beyond the 50 states, especially the recognition of the Indigenous populations and their rights and aspirations, but it does seem that Indigenous first nations located within the 50 states should also be included in this conversation. I'll open that to thoughts for folks. Then a question. As you begin the process, in what way do you want Americans to contribute to the building of the narrative in the immediate term, and how can they help in designing what the commemoration should look like? How is that... How can that work from your perspective?

Dr. Kimberlee Kihleng ([43:44](#)):

I'll just begin just by talking about, if you want from my perspective, living in Guahan, the America250 can make a very inclusive, very collaborative celebration, I guess, by once again, giving voice to the experiences and perspectives of the peoples of these U.S. jurisdictions, right, giving their own voice, their storytelling as Leo pointed out, and once again, particularly those of the Indigenous people. The experience of the Indigenous people in the territories or the jurisdictions are not similar to, but in some ways they're reflective of the experiences of Native Americans in the 50 states in terms of marginalization, erasure, those issues. I think obviously, yes, Native Americans need to be included in the conversations.

Dr. Kimberlee Kihleng ([44:46](#)):

Also it's an opportunity to create really... I think Leo touched on this as well as the two gentlemen that are with us, Eduardo, about creating greater awareness, understanding, and knowledge of the U.S. jurisdictions and their diversity, right, their histories and cultures, their political status, environmental conditions, specifically as related to climate change, economic conditions because in Guahan, we are

extremely dependent on the U.S. in terms of our economies through the military, through militarization, and through corporate tourism. Those are all the things I think that America250 could really be a very special commemoration and celebration by giving voice to all of these communities.

Elliot Ferguson ([45:39](#)):

Yeah. It's all about the diversity of the American experience. I think constantly about how one dimensional things are in terms of how we promote destinations and how America has been perceived. To a certain extent how those that have led this country in high positions for a long time have not really... There's so many things and so many opportunities to really educate, keep diversity at the forefront of the celebration. America is not a country that the vast majority of us that live here... We took this land, and we need to talk about the Indigenous people. We also...

Elliot Ferguson ([46:31](#)):

It's global. This is not the only country whereas that happened, and that's the importance of travel. I knew about the Maori people in New Zealand. I knew about the aboriginal people in Australia, but traveling to those lands, and learning more about how they're treated, and some of the things that have happened over the decades in terms of how those individuals, that occupy these lands, how they've managed to survive, that's important to learn, and then it gives us an opportunity to look at ourselves, and look at how this country was formed, and how we became a superpower in an extraordinarily short period of time. Again, it was not just because of industrial minds. It was because the unfortunate circumstances of slavery for 400 years. Again, that is also tied to several of the territories that are represented on this call. You've got to bring all of those aspects of the celebration together.

Elliot Ferguson ([47:35](#)):

It's not about just focusing on the negative, it's about moving forward, and it's about us recognizing that our differences are very few. There are fewer differences between each of us than how we treat each other. Celebrations like this give us an opportunity to really just focus just on that.

Eduardo Arosemena-Muñoz ([47:55](#)):

Yeah. I'd also like to share that I think the United States is a nation defined by milestones. The core progress is based on that which once seemed to be impossible in time becomes inevitable. You have the founding of the nation, the Declaration of Independence, then next big milestone, the westward expansion. Then you had obviously the liberation or the emancipation of slaves, the women's suffrage, then the United States becoming the world dominant superpower. To me, it seems that we should reflect on where we want to be by 2076, if you will, by the third century of the Declaration of Independence. I think that progress has been made, and just like technology has advanced so rapidly in the last decade or so, we will see a lot of social progress just because sometimes people don't react until something at is at stake.

Eduardo Arosemena-Muñoz ([49:03](#)):

As territories, I would share with my fellow citizens in the States that sometimes you take things for granted. I mean, when we had the issue with Maria, and we had the blessing of having the assistance of the federal government, despite of what the administration was saying, or the leader of the administration for that matter, we were embraced by the citizens, not the politicians. We were embraced by our fellow citizens. I just wanted to share that. I think that we should focus on where we want to be by 2076 and what we do to get there because they will look back. I started my dialogue with

the numbers of legislatures that are Latinos and African Americans, how much they've grown. In the future, I am sure that we will include Asian Americans. We will include people from the LGBTQ+ community. The only path of progress is forward. Those are my thoughts.

Carleen Carey ([50:09](#)):

I don't think I could have asked for a better transition to our final question for the evening. That question is what do you hope to see for America's future for 2026 and beyond? Thank you for taking us to 2076. Kimberlee, could you get us started please?

Dr. Kimberlee Kihleng ([50:29](#)):

The heavy question, right? What do I see for America's future beyond 2026? Oh gosh, a greater inclusivity and diversity. I think racial equity, as we all know, is key as a social justice, environmental justice, given what's happening with climate change and really a stronger democracy for the U.S. Then my hope is the decolonization of Guahan and other non self-governing territories of the United States.

Carleen Carey ([51:09](#)):

Excellent. Thank you, Kimberlee. Would anyone else like to share?

Elliot Ferguson ([51:14](#)):

I'd say more at a more equitable future for us all, and for us to have conversations tied to the diversity of America and the territories, and not weaponize the diversity, to recognize that all of the people, all of the territories represent the United States. We are a country that is based on immigration, some forced and some came for a different way of life, but we're here, and let's celebrate that. We're hoping, I'd to think that by 20... Well, 2026 is probably way too soon, that we're looking and talking about our cultural differences, our ethnic differences, and not weaponizing it, and really focusing on how unique this country is simply because of the melting pot that we all are, as well as the territories.

Leo Pangelinan ([52:17](#)):

I'd like to add, Elliot, thank you for sharing how impactful it was to reflect on your visit with the Maori people in New Zealand. I think moving forward, a more perfect union for me means a better understanding, and awareness, and respect for our differences, what makes America, and that's its people. Its people are highly diverse, I think culturally first, but there's other types of diversity, right? I think in this day and age, we don't quite know how far to the right we may go with engaging online as opposed to visiting each other in our physical spaces.

Leo Pangelinan ([53:07](#)):

My hope is that we can, just like we have a state program, the Fulbright Scholars, for example, where there's this exchange between nations, we should probably do that domestically, have people from the mainland visit our islands out here, out to Puerto Rico, out to the Virgin Islands. We have programs that allow our youth to go out to the District, D.C., to be able to experience our nation's capital, so we have that connection, and there's that impression, and more of this long term connection our youth can make to the history of our nation and our connectedness to the U.S. Perhaps we should do that with cultural groups and other diverse groups that define our nation.

Elliot Ferguson ([53:59](#)):

Great.

Carleen Carey ([54:01](#)):

That's a beautiful idea. I really love that one, Leo. Verdel? I'm afraid you're on mute.

Eduardo Arosemena-Muñoz ([54:15](#)):

Famous words from the pandemic. You're on mute.

Carleen Carey ([54:18](#)):

I have to get it on a T-shirt.

Eduardo Arosemena-Muñoz ([54:21](#)):

It has to be. Yeah.

Elliot Ferguson ([54:23](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. You're on mute.

Verdel L. Peterson ([54:26](#)):

Okay. I'm sorry. Am I on?

Carleen Carey ([54:28](#)):

You're on.

Eduardo Arosemena-Muñoz ([54:28](#)):

You are.

Verdel L. Peterson ([54:31](#)):

Okay. As I look forward to commemorating America250, I reflect on what is written in the preamble of the constitution of the United States. We, the people form a more perfect union. The perfect union I see is to have a stronger unity with all the insular areas and the 50 states. I look forward to learning about America beyond the 50 states. You have several five unincorporated territories of the United States. I would like to learn and celebrate their historical moments as well. I think everyone should learn when and how America acquired the various U.S. jurisdictions.

Verdel L. Peterson ([55:30](#)):

Specifically for the Virgin Islands of the United States, I would also for others to join us in commemorating some milestones, such as when these islands, the Virgin Islands of United States were transferred from Denmark to the United States of America. Other important dates, when we were allowed to vote for the first elected governor of the Virgin Islands of United States, mass naturalization, and most recent, we had an election, a referendum, in which the people have spoken and expressed the will and desire to adopt the Revised Organic Act of 1954 as our constitution. I would like to commemorate with the others, and learn about the various cultures we have within the America, and for us to have true equality. We're all Americans. Whether regardless of the political status, we can all join in a celebration and say, we are truly Americans and grateful that we live under the most powerful

flag, and so that we can join together, and celebrate, regardless of what part of the globe that we are, and recognize that we are American, regardless of a location.

Elliot Ferguson ([57:17](#)):

Yeah. Travel does that by the way, tourism. Let's make sure that the celebration is tied to promote visitation to each of these areas, to all of our areas that are represented. Again, that's how you start really appreciating our differences, and celebrating how similar we are, and learning more about the cultural differences. I think we have just...

Eduardo Arosemena-Muñoz ([57:43](#)):

I have a suggestion before we go, so integration has to start someplace. In the future, it'd be great to integrate the territories for jurisdictions with the states, for future conversations so that we can compare and contrast notes.

Dr. Megan Springate ([57:59](#)):

Heard, thank you. Thank you everybody so much, to our panelists and those in the audience for attending. I'm sorry we couldn't get to everybody's comments and questions, but this is just the beginning of the conversation. Thank you so much. We would like to continue the conversation with you. Please contact us at engage@America250.org. There's a feedback survey in the chat, so we can continue to improve the experience. We hope to see you in January for our Community Conversation with the Latinx and Hispanic community members. Please stay tuned. Thank you so much everybody for joining us. Have a wonderful evening morning, day, wherever you are.

Eduardo Arosemena-Muñoz ([58:46](#)):

Thank you.

Dr. Kimberlee Kihleng ([58:46](#)):

Thank you.

Elliot Ferguson ([58:46](#)):

Thank you.

Verdel L. Peterson ([58:46](#)):

Thank you.