

Call for Papers: Special Issue of *Amerikastudien/American Studies. A Quarterly*

“The Cultural Politics of 1776: Rethinking an American Moment”

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Deadline for abstracts: November 20, 2024

Deadline for full papers: March 31, 2025

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2026 marks the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, initiating the founding of the United States of America. Today the Declaration of Independence is celebrated by some as the zero hour of democracy and liberty, while others heavily criticize its gross oversights, hypocritical inequalities, and problematic racial politics. Such oppositional assessments of U.S. history also reflect an increasingly divided nation and, arguably, these different understandings further this divide, as evident e.g. in the January 6 insurrection. As the Fourth of July nears its 250th year, public discourse on the incisive historical event in 1776 becomes ever more present and pressing.

The proposed special issue aims to reflect on how the Declaration of Independence and its affiliated discourses have been utilized by political actors originally excluded from and marginalized in the national project to repudiate its optimism, to seek inclusion, or to imagine the transformation into a true democracy. From Frederick Douglass’ 1852 “What to the Slave is the 4th of July?” to Nikole Hannah-Jones’ 2019 *The 1619 Project*, activists and scholars have critiqued and corrected the American project. At the same time, the political Right increasingly appropriates this rhetoric of being excluded and marginalized to advance their own white nationalist, anti-democratic, and nativist objectives, as is evident, for example, in *The 1776 Report*, the MAGA movement, or Project 2025.

We invite contributions from the fields of literary and cultural studies, history, political science, and education studies that critically consider the competing truths and epistemologies surrounding 1776. The special issue seeks to facilitate discourse across the humanities and social sciences by juxtaposing varied perspectives on American national history and the cultural politics of its contested interpretations. The Declaration of Independence has often served various groups – African Americans, Native Americans, women’s rights advocates, LGBTQ+ activists, and labor movements (among others) – as an ideological and rhetorical anchor to address their struggles for alternative political formations. Equally, privileged and regressive groups, such as white supremacists have invoked the historical document to defend and further their own exclusionary agendas. We thus consider the Declaration of Independence as a site of contestation - historically, politically, culturally - which we seek to explore in this special issue by considering progressive, conservative as well as reactionary angles. This approach sheds light on a central battleground of a nation’s increasing polarization, as it also plays out in efforts to lay claim to and envision the past, present, and future of the United States in the context of its Semiquincentennial.

Possible topics for contributions include, but are not limited to:

- 1776 in U.S. (domestic and international) politics
- reception and cultural politics of previous celebrations, for example 1876, 1926, and 1976
- *The 1776 Report*
- (un/patriotic) education and (high) school curricula, e.g. *1776 Unites*
- *The 1619 Project* and other counternarratives
- memorialization and/of 1776, e.g. in museum spaces, the public, and reenactments
- representations of the 1776 in social media, historical fiction, and popular culture
- conservative, nativist, and reactionary politics (of Whiteness)
- narratives of independence, e.g. by Native Americans, African Americans, Latino/as
- gender, sexuality, and the Declaration of Independence
- The Declaration of Independence and/in labor movements
- initiatives such as America's Invitation by the America250 Commission
- 21st-century affects and 1776
- speculations about the future – the 1776 tricentennial

Please send abstracts of up to 400 words and a short bio (50 words) by **November 20, 2024** to the guest editors:

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Prospective authors will be notified about proposals by the end of November, and final articles of roughly 6.000 words will be expected by **March 31, 2025**. Please follow the *Amerikastudien / American Studies. A Quarterly* style guide (<https://dgfa.de/american-studies-a-quarterly-2/article-style-sheet/>) *Amerikastudien / American Studies. A Quarterly* is peer-reviewed, and peer review will follow in the summer of 2025.