

Freedom to Thrive: The American Experiment in Colorado Springs



In 2026, what does it mean to be an American, a citizen, a resident? The Semi-quincentennial of America and the Sesquicentennial of Colorado provide an opportunity to reflect, examine, and discuss our past – present – and future. Using history as our guide, what are our best hopes for tomorrow? How do we ensure future generations will enjoy the “fruits of liberty and democracy”? And how can we overcome our political, social, and economic differences to work together on the shared project that is the “American Experiment”?

Perhaps we should start by focusing on what binds us together as a country, a state, and a community. 250 years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, and 150 years of Colorado Statehood, what connects us as a people? Is it our belief in the revolutionary assertions of freedom and equality in the Declaration of Independence? If so, can we band together to ensure these ideals move beyond aspiration to realization? For all of us?

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

In her book, *Our Declaration*, Harvard professor and political philosopher Danielle Allen argues, “The Declaration of Independence matters because it helps us see that we cannot have freedom *without* equality.” Drawing on academic scholarship, primary sources, and the powerful stories of people in our community, this exhibit maintains that freedom and equality are not incompatible. Instead, they are equally accessible — if we choose them not just for ourselves — but for our neighbors as well.

This project began in 2021 as a series of conversations during the global COVID-19 pandemic, but over the past five years it’s been shaped by many minds and many hands. In addition to our talented colleagues at the CSPM, we are grateful to members of the Colorado College and UCCS Faculty, Colorado College History Department Fellows, and a host of undergraduate and graduate interns who have all contributed ideas, words, and energy.

At the heart of this project are six Community Curators who’ve liberally shared their passion, expertise – and time – to dream up this wildly ambitious project with us: Jay Byron, Maria Cordova, Chauncy Johnson, Patience Kabwasa, Joyce Salazar, and L’Bertrice Solomon. We also owe a debt of gratitude to the individuals featured in this exhibit (from both the past and present) for their commitment to making our community a more vibrant and equitable place — where everyone has the *Freedom to Thrive*.

Leah Davis Witherow, Curator of History and Kelly Murphy, Exhibits Designer



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