



## **America 250: A Republic Built on Native Land**

### **National Native Youth Essay Contest**

#### **Purpose**

As the U.S. nears its 250th anniversary, its history takes on a very different shape through a Native lens. Native News Online, in partnership with the Center for Native American Youth (CNAJ) at the Aspen Institute, invites Native youth ages 18–24 to raise their voices and reframe the story. This is your chance to show America what it never learned in school.

## **Official Rules**

#### **Eligibility**

The contest is open to self-identified Native American youth ages 18 to 24, currently residing in the United States. Employees, contributors, and contractors of Native News Online or CNAJ, as well as their immediate family members, are not eligible.

#### **Entry Requirements**

All submissions must meet the following criteria:

- Must be original work created by the entrant.
  - AI tools may be used for research or idea generation, but the text of the essay must be written by the participant.
- Must be previously unpublished
- Entries must be written in English. Words or phrases in Native languages may be included, but the primary text of the essay must be in English.
- Maximum length: 1,000 words

Only one entry per person will be accepted.

### **Theme**

Submissions must address the theme: ***America 250: A Republic Built on Native Land***

**The Challenge:** Your essay must tackle the complex history of 1776 and challenge how America views its 250th anniversary.

To guide your writing process, please consider these four fundamental questions:

- Should July 4, 2026, be commemorated, mourned, or reframed? What does 1776 mean to you as a Native American?
- What do you want Americans to understand that they never learned in school?
- What does it mean to recognize that the United States was built on Native land and democratic ideals and principles?
- What does tribal sovereignty mean to you? How does your Indigenous identity influence your relationship to the United States?

### **Submission Deadline**

All entries must be received by **May 1, 2026; 11:59 p.m. EDT**

### **Judging Criteria**

Entries will be judged based on:

- Creativity and originality
- Clarity and quality of writing
- Relevance to the theme

Judges' decisions are final.

## **Submission Process**

Entries must be submitted electronically to [submissions@nativenewsonline.net](mailto:submissions@nativenewsonline.net). Please use this subject line: “National Native Youth Essay Contest Submission - [Your Name].”

Late submissions will not be considered.

## **Prizes & Platform**

Three essays, selected by impartial judges, will be selected as the winners and published by Native News Online during the week of **July 1, 2026** (before the Fourth of July). Winners will also be awarded a monetary prize, sponsored by CNAY:

- First Prize: \$300
- Second Prize: \$200
- Third Prize: \$100

Beyond the three winners, additional essays (or excerpts) may also be featured across Native News Online or CNAY platforms.

## **Publication Rights**

By entering, participants grant Native News Online or the Center for Native American Youth at the Aspen Institute a non-exclusive license to publish, reproduce, and distribute submitted entries for promotional or editorial purposes, with credit to the author.

The top three winning essays will be published by Native News Online the week of **July 1, 2026**, prior to the Fourth of July.

## **Notification of Winners**

Winners will be notified by email and announced publicly.

## **General Conditions**

The organizers reserve the right to cancel, modify, or suspend the contest if necessary.