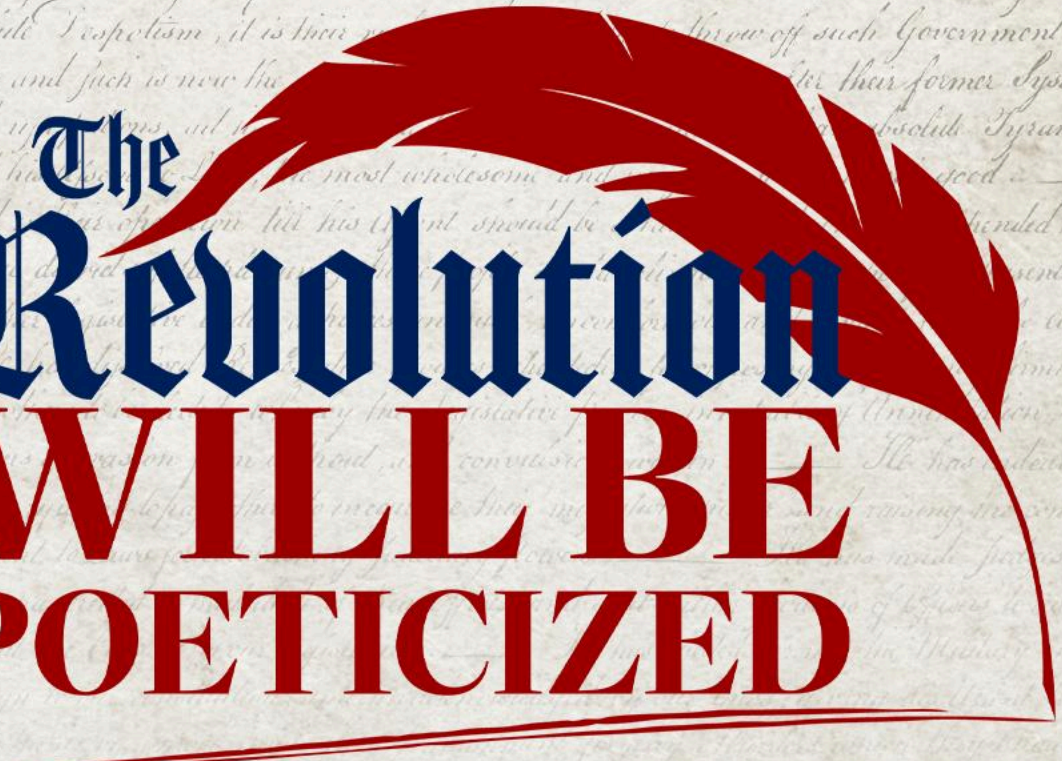


Past. Present. Possible.

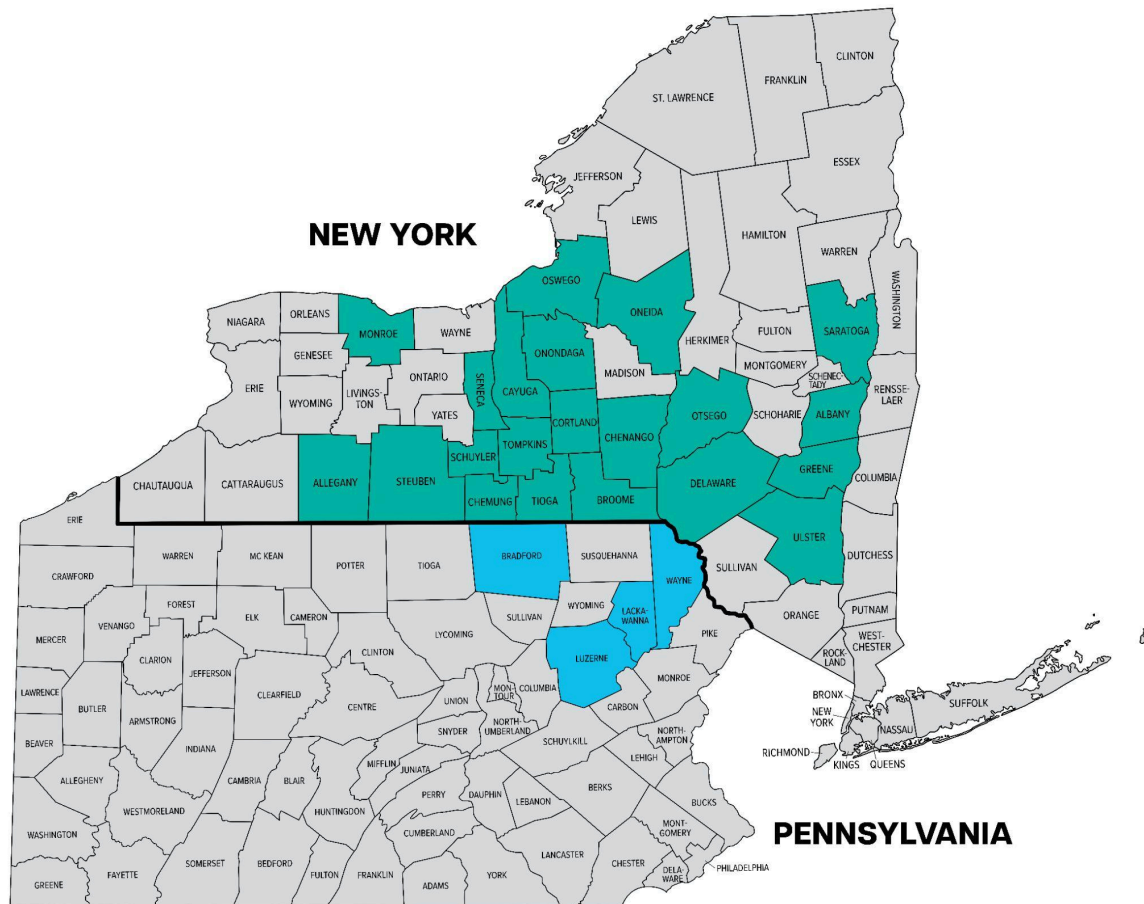


The
Revolution
WILL BE
POETICIZED

THE
WINNERS

- Jessica Femiani _____ Standing at the Cutting Edge of the Fascist Takeover of America
Robert Bensen _____ U.S. Steel, 1966
Christine Gelineau _____ Instructions for Hanging On
Jerry Mirskin _____ Cooperation
Susan Thornton _____ I Met a Traveler
Katherine Micha _____ Liberty and Justice for All
Bridget Meeds _____ America
Terrence P. Dwyer _____ American Soil
Lisa Wujnovich _____ Questions for ICE Agents Who Murder
David Weiss _____ Synecdoche and its Discontents

WSKG



In 2026, America marks the 250th anniversary of the United States Declaration of Independence. *The Revolution Will Be Poeticized* invited regional poets to reflect on America’s past, examine the present, and imagine hopes for the next generation through their original work.

This open call reached poets across the Southern Tier and surrounding region, resulting in 163 submissions from 25 counties. Each poet was asked to respond to one or more of three guiding themes:

Looking Back: history, founding ideals, and untold stories

Right Now: modern America, democracy today, and lived experience

Looking Forward: hopes for future generations.

The poems gathered here reflect a wide range of voices and perspectives, offering an expansive portrait of a region in conversation with itself.

We have made every effort to preserve each poem’s original formatting as submitted. However, variations in word processing and digital display may affect elements such as spacing, line breaks, and indentation.

Thank you to every poet who shared their work with us, and to the communities that continue to support and uplift creative expression across our region. This project was made possible with support from a grant provided by Public Broadcasting Service.

Standing at the Cutting Edge of the Fascist Takeover of America

Jessica Femiani

I

As we walk past the house with the four-foot silver Buddha, seated in the wooden beams of a treehouse

shrouded in lilac branches bursting, my friend Maria tells me, you can't do this kind of thing in Russia.

Her eyes glance at the Not-My-President bumper sticker slapped on the back of an old tank of a Buick. Maria talks

about the things I had heard that people disappear when they say things, like her mother's brother, Uncle Boris.

Then the neighbor downstairs, they took him in the middle of the night, just like that. We are in it now, no longer

on the cusp: Kilmar Abrego García, Mahmoud Khahil. God bless, Zohran Mamdani. These days I ask myself

should I make a quick getaway? The way Gerhard Richter drove himself out of East Berlin, never to see most

of his family again. I can see why Maria's thoughts didn't make sense to me then, I guess I never thought

I'd have a reason to worry like that. The same way it never clicked when a blonde haired, blue-eyed little girl named

Christina made her way out of the woods & into my childhood backyard, just like a fairytale, that it was anything but.

My mother tells me, Christina's parents had been refugees in Rome, having escaped the Russian pogroms of the 1980s.

I don't know if it were the nightly news with Dan Rather, or if as a child, I could conjure fear out of anything. But after

Christina moved in, I began having nightmares of being

caught in the woods by Russian soldiers. Every night

they hid in the woods, driving the butts of their rifles
into the center of my chest, pinning me to the ground.

II

The experiment of America is now Cowboy Town.
Masked thuggery, haranguing immigrants, citizens.

Shattering windows, windshields, throwing mothers
to the ground, abducting elementary-aged school children

makes me think this dystopian nation is the fallout
of the flagrant willed blinding of men and women

living in a country of stunted vision? Or is it the
gluttonous desire driving our own consumption

that wills us to push the truths of hard history aside?
Leaving us to mark history with half-priced mattresses.

Not because Bob Barker would say, "The price is right."
But because it is the Dream that has gone awry.

It is the dream that gets you, gets you to believe if you move
your children to the suburbs, they will be safe. Gets you

to believe your children will be happy to have all that you did not.
The morning Silverio Villegas Gonzales drops one son

at nursery school, it is likely in this small Chicago suburb,
Silvio was worrying his fate as undocumented.

Outside the traffic light, ICE gunned him down. The records,
the bodycams shows no threat. His two orphaned sons, now

somewhere in foster care in Idaho, five states west of Illinois.
No experience necessary, Kristi and Markwayne want more

bodies on the ground, to wreak more havoc on Black & Brown
hearts. Because they say, they say those people, *they cross borders,*

they break the law, they're lazy, they steal. Americans are challenged
by the ease of their circumstance, they can't comprehend

the backbreaking work they refuse, left for the undocumented.
To pick corn, tear husks, stock wooden crates, staplegun shut,

stack high, *how can you?* The undocumented slaughter cows,
the pigs, the chickens, sometimes losing fingers, hands, whole limbs

to bring Americans, all your beloved barbecued burgers,
how can you? The undocumented haul endless crates of apples,

oranges, ruby-red grapefruits. Undocumented hands submerged
in streaming baths of ice-cold, for twelve to fourteen, whittling carrots

into bite-sized babies. *How can you?* Tell your three-year-old,
Daddy, is at work, attacking the illegal people. How can you?

All the oligarchs, the bounty hunters, the pimps. *How can you?*

U.S. Steel, 1966

Robert Bensen

Pushed white-hot from the furnace mouth, half-ton billets
squeeze through rollers, reach the reeler
at bullet-speed, then coil and cool. Are supposed to,
three shifts a day, 7 days a week. Wartime.
But this one hit wrong, cobbled, looped,
and slithered out on the walkway's cement.
An hour lost, no limbs, to fix the roller, run
a test sample. Get back on the clock and roll that steel.
The whole shift gathered, black men come north
from the mills of Mobile and Bethlehem. Plus me.
Their glance said give the white kid a chance. So I took
the tongs, squared up to ram the test piece through.
But I botched the heave-ho. They make it look so easy!
I backed it off. Gathered all my puny strength,
but another scrape and dead-stop in the channel.
The biggest man I ever saw, took off his hard hat
and stepped toward me, and in the kindest way
offered his massive hand like he was welcoming me
to his church. In a way, he was: the church
of men who commune with fire and steel,
who give of their bodies and blood, their days and nights,
who bless and cuss each other out with equal conviction.
I hand-signed for one more, one more try.
I clamped the tongs on that cherry-red hot piece of shit
and somehow found the strength where theirs must come from,
and leaned in and slammed it home. The roller bit the steel
and me almost with it, but I yanked the tongs free.
Then behind me, muffled in asbestos gloves, applause!
So I turned and took my first bow, I guess.
The all-clear horn blared *look alive, look alive*,
and we headed back to our death-traps
to make the steel that made the guns that made the war.
Sometimes when the mill broke down, say 3:00 a.m.,
I'd step out in the steaming night, lie down and balance
on a rail between my shoulder blades, cross my ankles,
my whole length against that polished, cold steel.
I'd get lost in the depth of stars, and in the silence
of the shut-down heard my ears ring.
Hard hat for a pillow, body drained enough
to catch some z's until five flatcars of billets
juddered into the yard. I woke, rolled off in time.
The blues the rail sang still sings up my spine
fifty years later. The mill is gone, down to the concrete
foundation. The men, where did they go?
The office building where my sister worked,
the machine shop where her husband worked,
also gone. Fifty married years, gone. That's more
than most of us get, unless we're lucky, until somebody
upstairs blows the whistle and we all go home.

Instructions for Hanging On

Christine Gelineau

(with thanks to Ada Limon whose Instructions on Not Giving Up showed me a way in)

Two hundred fifty years of flawed progress
would be a lot to give up on. Imperfections
persist and persist but in the long length
of time's arc we yearn to confirm the prophet's
faith: it is *an arc that bends towards justice*.

Consider this midwinter's spontaneous
blossoming of neighbor protection in ice-
cold Minnesota; the frogs and unicorns of support
in Portland; the fierce refusal to look away
so many have shown: instead to remember what
brought my grandfather from Northern Ireland
or my in-laws from Nazi Germany, what brought
my father's grandfather south from Montreal
to remake himself and lend his skills to building
Rhode Island's state capitol dome,
to contributing one to another,
one to others.

Out of the mud and the winter detritus daffodils
are spearing their way to the surface, tulips
unfurling their leathery leaves in preparation,
and the forsythia wands blare their multitude
of tiny trumpets. Orioles are returning
to the apple trees, those naturalized
citizens we think of *as American as*.

Spring muscles its way past winter: the tree
leaves un-fist and applaud their green-gold palms,
reminding us: the urgency to bear fruit endures.

Cooperation

Jerry Mirskin

As if behind a screen,
firm, resolved, knowing, or not,
there is great cooperation.

Look at the workers over there,
how they stand and look away, courteously
cupping their cigarettes, combing their hair
that has become wet in the rain.

Or how the young rabbi
explains the Hebrew word for cemetery
means “house of worlds.”

And a city of stones crops up, sentient and oblique.

The last thing she said to me was, “live.”

She said it three times.

She was my beginning in America.

The fur of her coat. The kisses kissed.

Hands waving over candles on the stove.

I need one life to live, and one to be nostalgic.

Nostalgic for the crumbs of her semi-sweet cookies.

For the tone of pogrom
that was always in her voice.

Live, she said, sitting in a wheelchair
outside her building in the Bronx.

Her blue eyes neither sea nor sky.

The rabbi beckons us
to come forward, to take part, take shovel.

For real, he says, not symbolic.

My grandmother’s words board a train, then a ship.

They take passage for a time on the infinity of waves.

When they arrive they fill out forms.

Listen, what I’m trying to say
is she did not tell me to be happy, or gentle,
or loving, or good.

Burying, the rabbi said,
is one of the most loving things you can do for another.
This was his blessing.
Live, she said, live. Giving me her blessing, live,
whole and undivided.
In most cases I would stop here, just telling it like it is.
But I had further to go.
I climbed onto the pile of earth, the soil,
the original body of the world, and started shoveling.
My wedding shoes sinking into the loose dirt.
There was great cooperation.

I Met a Traveler

Susan Thornton

I met a traveler from an antique land who said:
You guys just don't get it, do you?
When he stumbled into our village,
high on heroin, on fear, on his own stupid ideas of
manhood, I recognized him right away.
We had met at Ypres. And before that
at Gettysburg. And before that on the Ohio Border in the
badly misnamed French and Indian wars.

He saw me. But did he know? I remembered that I was the Jerry
who got him with hand grenade in the clouds of poison gas on that
Tuesday in May and I remembered he was the Yank who put
a bayonet in my throat on the Second day of the Battle for Little
Round top and then I remembered his cabin on the
Ohio River and going for him
with a tomahawk just after my braves with their painted faces
stormed his wife and daughter and on and on it went
back and back and back
for generations yet untold.

And so that night I didn't move as he stepped into the
fire light where I was drying fish, the hearth
where my father was teaching my little boy
to read, the fire light where two nights before the Viet Cong
had rested from their tunnel digging and enjoyed my cooking.
I was a woman at that time at home in my village, the able
bodied men all being away to fight the war of liberation
against the American invaders.

I saw him and I knew. I had my
cooking knife and I could have put it in the hollow of his
throat but then it would have started all again and I just
wanted off of that wheel and so I just sat there, staring into his eyes.

And the M16 came up and he and his men killed us all. Later they lied
about it to the press. It was one of the few occasions that got what
is called Press Attention. He was stoned and we were the "enemy"
although that night we had no weapons: our only weapon was the food
we had fed to our neighbors when they asked.
But the Americans killed us all and later they lied about it.

Sometimes I visit him in his sleep. He lives in Hagerstown Maryland and doesn't remember that the reason he likes to be by the river is that it resembles that part of the Ohio where he once had a homestead and grew potatoes and cabbages and put up his own sauerkraut by the barrel and planted five hundred apple trees. Now he's a baker in an organic restaurant, obsessed by the purity of the ingredients with which he cooks. He's sixty-eight, balding, with a whiskey cough and a bum knee from a rugby injury he got when he returned to the States. He works nights and weekends, shifting his weight to favor his bad leg, standing on the tile floor in his Adidas sneakers, slicing the peaches for pie, pounding and molding the sourdough, pushing himself with burning eyes because he's afraid of the dark, afraid of what he will dream.

In his nightmares he never gets it right. He recalls my face and then wakes himself shouting and sweating before the dream even gets to the part where he activates the incredible killing machine called an M-16. He's afraid of the look on my face.

He still doesn't understand it. Even though he's revisited it often, often, often. It wasn't fear, that look, it wasn't horror. It wasn't even grief for the loss of my village, my father, my son, though we all died that night and I knew we were all going to die. It was acceptance. It was a prayer for peace. It was, dare I say it, love. Love of a kind he has not found since in this his life, search though he can, forage though he may, suffer though he will.

Liberty and Justice for All

Katherine Micha

Sacagawea guided it

Phillis published it

Betsy sewed it

Elizabeth cured it

With liberty and justice for all

Doretha saved them

Cady organized them

Lucretia reformed them

Lucy petitioned them

Clara nursed them

With liberty and justice for all

Harriet conducted it

Susan amended it

Louisa Mae wrote it

Arabella passed it

With liberty and justice for all

Belva argued it

Jane reformed it

Nellie exposed it

Annie taught it

With liberty and justice for all

Helen inspired

Margaret rebelled

Amelia dared

Viola survived

With liberty and justice for all

Gertrude swam

Eleanor advocated

Frances served

Ella sang

With liberty and justice for all

Georgia painted it

Maya expressed it

Barbara discovered it

Rosa refused it

Ruby braved it

With liberty and justice for all

Katherine solved it

Grace programmed it

Billie Jean beat it

Sally explored it

With liberty and justice for all

Sandra decided it

Ruth pursued it

Sheryl swooped it

Hillary cracked it

Kamala smashed it

With liberty and justice for all

America

Bridget Meeds

America, I Saw You

America, I saw you leaping from the burning skyscraper, believing in your urgency that you would survive,

America, I saw you on the on-ramp, smiling with meth-brown teeth, holding a sign that said “homeless and pregnant please help,”

America, I saw you huddled in the belly of a Chinook, earbudded and solitary,

America, I saw you up at four a.m., ironing your blouse for work,

America, I saw you punching a stop sign, screaming in Chinese,

America, I saw you looking straight with seventeen pounds of pot hidden in your spare tire,

America, I saw you texting while driving,

America, I saw you bite your father in a fury,

America, I saw you put on ten pounds,

America, I saw you walk the winning run,

America, I saw you asking for an epidural,

America, I saw you raise your hand to strike your child,

America, I saw you eating roadkill woodchuck.

America, I saw you drinking a kamikaze by the hotel pool,

America, I saw you at the Super Great Wall buffet with blue swastikas tattooed on your neck and knuckles,

America, I saw you in your 87 Oldsmobile, wearing your best wig and sunglasses, God radio blaring,

America, I saw you in your private helicopter above Manhattan, doing mental arithmetic,

America, I saw you walking a dog who was wearing a Hello Kitty t-shirt,

America, I saw you waving a white linen napkin from a broken window in the burning skyscraper,

America, I saw you fall.

American Soil

Terrence P. Dwyer

On the lower East Side, in an area known as Kleindeutschland, part of my family story began in 1847 when my great-grandfather drew his first breath in a tenement flat during a searing summer of typhus and crowded coffin ships arriving at South Street piers filled with escaping Irish citizens who sailed in steerage and landed in quarantine.

The first born in my New York City bloodline, after his father emigrated to avoid Prussian military service and government oppression, he put on a Union army uniform at 15 as a flag bearer for the 102nd Infantry Regiment and left lower Manhattan for Cedar Mountain, Virginia where half the regiment were either killed, wounded, or missing.

Too poor for any other way out of the teeming slums than to carry the colors into battle, he ran across fields, through woods, and up hills at Antietam, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and Missionary Ridge as one of Colonel Van Buren's city boys, then suffered a pass-through hip wound in the Battle Above the Clouds at Kennesaw Mountain.

Returning home at 17, he learned a trade, collected his war pension, joined the Grand Army of the Republic until expelled for not paying his dues, and raised three children, none of whom knew how to speak a word of German, but could recite every line of Whitman's "I Hear America Singing."

Thirty-five years after being wounded, his overworked heart gave out and he collapsed on the shop floor where he worked as a cabinetmaker and lived above as a tenant in a Cherry Street apartment, not far from the East Side flat he left as a boy to go fight for a place to be buried on American soil.

Questions for ICE Agents Who Murder

Lisa Wujnovich

Behind that mask, who did your lips last kiss?
Are your parents, proud, alive, have health care?
How long ago did your family cross borders?
Were you beaten as a child?
Are you a commando wannabe, video game hero?
Have you killed before?
Were you a soldier?
Did you miss the adrenaline rush?
Do you punch your wife, slap your girlfriend,
throw your children against walls?
Where were you last employed? When?
Are you empowered? A void filled
with the weight of new boots, vests, and weapons?
Are there crying babies at home to feed?
Is your heart a rush-hour,
your mind tracked underground?
Do you pray? Believe in David versus Goliath?
Is freedom a contact sport in your concussed brain?
Do you cheer for The Joker instead of Batman?
Are you rooted in a small town or a sky-scraper city?
A lone house in an open pasture?
Are you a drifter—luxuriating in the Marriott?
When you yank and wrestle a child, woman,
old man to pavement, do your rootlets strain,
snap? What let go when you shot and continued
to shoot? Whose back, whose face exploded?
Your father's, mother's, lover's, your own?

SYNECDOCHE AND ITS DISCONTENTS

(for Matthew Lippman)

David Weiss

With each day the world as I've known it
grows more unknown

Every day I mistake some small part of it
for the whole

as if a small act of kindness stood for human nature
as if the vast awakened

underground rivers of Greenland
letting themselves like blood into the North Atlantic

said it all or
as if cultural changes in the baking of bread in Lebanon did

or the catacombs of the Medicare system I've now entered
said it

Today the whole was summed up by a boy
so young

that it's as if just yesterday he hadn't yet begun
to exist

who loves to break eggs
and help make pancakes and yet

go figure
refuses even so much as to taste them

And then there's kissing
that awkward dazzling and chancy thing

which I think about more often than
I receive or give

which feels like a part
that's no less than the whole

shebang
part and world remaking each other

Every day I mistake and have mistaken this world
for a place

that I am inseparable from
until

with an edict or insult or a kick in the teeth
you are made to feel

no longer even the least part of it
your world made foreign

and you fleeing it a foreigner
hounded and unprotected over the face

of the earth maybe pulled from a sea
made colder by the bleeding waters of Greenland

to seek a refugee now refuge
and maybe to receive it and maybe one day

as a result
to be able to offer it to others

which like a kiss
would mean the world