

# Written Report

**American History: Exploring Conflict through Poetic Forms: 2b-01**

---

## **Group Members:**

Ang Shao Xuan (1), 2i4

Jake Liew (11), 2i4

Elliot Lau (15), 2i4

(L) Low Shi Yang (19), 2i4

## Table of Contents

### **1. Introduction**

1. Rationale
2. Objectives
3. Methodology

### **2. Survey of the Ground**

1. Poems

### **3. Literature Review**

1. Pre-Columbian
2. Columbian
3. American Revolution
4. American Civil War
5. World War II
6. Present Day

### **4. Creative Product**

1. Choosing to use poetic forms
2. Themes in our poems
3. Poem Excerpts

### **5. References**

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Rationale:**

In recent years, the United States of America has constantly appeared in the news due to its political and racial conflicts. One such major conflict was the Capitol Hill insurrection. The storming of Capitol Hill happened when the Republican candidate, Donald Trump, attempted to overturn his defeat in the presidential election in 2020. This hints at the fact that America is divided into several polar opposite groups, and for a country that prides itself on being united, we observe that there is a lack of unity. This has sparked our curiosity in exploring this topic, and thus we wish to investigate the reasons for the discord by analyzing America's roots, to properly identify the major events that could have shaped American beliefs and values.

It is common knowledge that America prides itself on being the "land of the free", and while that may hold true to some extent, we wish to investigate institutional and systemic racism in the country that has prevented the country from really achieving this title. Contrasting this knowledge to American History, we wish to see if the nation as a whole has changed, and to the extent that they have been shaped by key events like the Civil War has shaped it as a nation.

## **1.2 Objectives:**

We want to suggest that the Americans' values of freedom and rights have been incorporated into them since the founding of America by sparking ideas through poetic forms, and that their mindset is rigid. Additionally, we will offer a fresh perspective of an outsider to other adolescents who have basic knowledge of American history and want to further explore the conflicting sides throughout American history.

We also aim to prove that America, despite having been through many hardships, is still and always has been divided. A country, whose name references "United" in it, surprisingly lacks the unity one might expect from them, and in fact, is laden with turmoil in it. By proving that America has a lot of disputes, and segregation, we hope to come to the conclusion that key events like abolishing slavery did not actually impact the mindset of the modern-day American citizen.

## **1.3 Methodology:**

### **i. Poetic forms research:**

We had read some examples of poems from the various poetic forms we might be using such as the twin cinema poetic form and the blank verse poetic form, we had also found out how to better write these poems to better convey our ideas through poetry. We did this to gain a better understanding of how to best utilise these forms to convey and present our ideas.

### **ii. Historical research:**

We utilised the appropriate sources to research the various conflicts that involved the Americans. Some of the sources that we looked at were blogs, encyclopedias, websites, and scholarly articles. We used blogs since they are subjective, and our poems revolve around the perspectives of people, especially the outsiders' point of view. We had conducted research on the various time periods that we were presenting in our poems, namely: Pre-columbian, Columbian, American Revolution, American Civil War, World War II, and present day. This is to ensure that we have a good idea of the events we were writing to allow our ideas to fully formulate and so we can better convey our ideas to our readers.

### **iii. Focus group:**

We wanted our poems to act as a catalyst for ideas about their perception of America. Hence, we chose to use focus groups to collect information to further improve our poems. We chose to use focus groups instead of surveys as we wanted to get genuine and legitimate responses from selected people who had read the poems and to further understand their thought processes when reading these poems. These focus groups are small scale and held online in line with COVID-19 restrictions. In these focus groups, we held a discussion with both classmates and seniors. By holding a discussion amongst different levels, we are able to get a greater variety of answers, for seniors may perceive events differently.. This enabled us to tweak our poems accordingly.

## **Chapter 2: Survey of the Ground**

### **2.1 Poems:**

As most poems regarding American History are written by American authors themselves, the ideas presented are usually more personal to the poet, and the emotions would be stronger and more relatable for the Americans, but not so for the outsiders. Mentioned in our rationale, we offer an outsiders' perspective on how historical events are being portrayed. This is because this perspective is not as prevalent in American poetry. This new perspective can show how the events may appear differently to outsiders compared to the American. Hence, we decided to adopt a more distant perspective towards American history.

(One example would be an American poet, Michael. S. Harper and his work, "American History from <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42831/american-history-56d2217856b08>)

In the short poem, it shows a personal perspective and gives us a glimpse of the author. The poet speaks in first person to indicate personal ideas and thoughts. Contrast to this, we wish to do otherwise and present a sense of distance, which is aligned with our rationale of being an outsider's point of view.

## **Chapter 3: Literature Review**

In our poems, we explore American history, and we have selected the following time periods: Pre-columbian, Columbian, American Revolution, American Civil War, World War II, and present day. In these time periods, conflicting ideas and parties are evidently shown. For example, in the American Civil War, there is a clear conflict between the Republicans and Democrats. To gain a proper understanding of these time periods, we conducted some research on the respective time periods to ensure that our understanding is sound and we are able to present our ideas clearly.

---

### **3.1 Pre-Columbian:**

Long before the Europeans had arrived in the Americas, many immigrants from many parts of the world had already made the Americas their home. Since the Natives have been adapting continuously to survive in their environment, they have vastly different cultures for different areas. Hence, to keep track of these diverse groups, anthropologists and geographers have divided them into “culture areas”, or rough groupings of contiguous peoples who shared similar habitats and characteristics: the Arctic, the Subarctic, the Northeast, the Southeast, the Plains, the Southwest, the Great Basin, California, the Northwest Coast and the Plateau. (History.com editors, 2020)

For our poem, however, we focused on only one culture area, the Northeast culture area. We chose this culture area because it was one of the first culture areas to have sustained contact with the Europeans, and in hindsight, they might have contributed to the first impressions made to the Europeans and might have caused some culture shock which led to racial discrimination against the Natives. Furthermore, the Iroquois Confederacy, which created the Great Law of Peace, which had shaped American law, originated from this cultural area.

We focused on the conflict between the Iroquoian speakers and Algonquian speakers in our poem. The Iroquois were more politically stable and constantly raided other tribes, especially the Algonquins who were the closest to them. (History.com editors, 2009)

We also wanted to show how much the Natives had respected their gods, and we wanted to respect and honour their culture. Hence, we had done some research to find out the name of the gods and what they represent. As seen below, Hahgwehdiyu was one of the great gods that had shaped the land:

They had also worshipped and believed in gods, and here we will specifically be looking at the Iroquois. In Iroquois mythology, the good creator deity; son of the sky goddess Ataensic, and twin brother of Hahgwehdaetgah, the evil spirit. Hahgwehdiyu shaped the

sky with the palm of his hand, placed his dead mother's face in the sky as the sun, while from her breasts he made the moon and stars. To the earth he gave her body as the source of fertility, thereby making Ataensic into the earth goddess. (Cotterell, 1997)

Another god is the Great Spirit, which the Iroquois believed in, just like other culture areas and tribes. The Iroquois believed the world to be full of supernatural creatures, including gods, spirits, and demons. Many religions have a god who is strongest or most important, and in the Iroquois religion that central god was the Great Spirit. (Chapel, n.d)

We also wanted to honour the beauty and richness of the Native Americans culture since the beauty of the Natives are often overlooked. Hence, we wanted to honour them and allow more people to appreciate the beauty of the Native's culture that has been unfortunately lost during the Columbian Exchange. We focused especially on the storytelling traditions since they are most relevant to our poetic forms, both of which are presenting ideas and telling a story. Hence, we decided to find out more about their storytelling traditions to see if we could incorporate some of their elements into our poems.

In these storytelling traditions, there are typically some themes, such as love, life, nature, rituals, relationships between people, and gods or spirits. Of these themes, the spirits and gods are of particular importance to the Native Americans. Furthermore, the stories typically use animals to represent a certain idea. (Ross, 2018)

One limitation is that the Native's storytelling traditions were mostly oral. Hence, we cannot fully capture the essence of the storytelling traditions. Instead, we try to bring out the imagery of oral communication and other animal imagery in our poems.

### **3.2 Columbian:**

The Columbian exchange is a large part of a more general process of biological globalization that followed the age of exploration of the 15th and 16th centuries. This revolutionized how the Old and New Worlds perceived themselves since they had been exposed to other people of other cultures. However, the Columbian Exchange had also killed many Native Americans along with their cultures. Hence, in our poem, we showed the conflicting ideas between the Natives and the Europeans on three main aspects of the European Exchange, namely: the fight over land, the deaths of the Native Americans, and the political and economical revolution.

The Europeans saw that the land in the Americas were extremely valuable and could be exploited to obtain resources to make profits. Hence, they came up with treaties to take the land away from the Natives. At that time, the Natives had no concept of land and territory, their lives were simple and they shared their lands. However, the Europeans came in and took advantage of their confusion to make them sign treaties to obtain land. When the treaties were not enough to satisfy their greed, the Europeans had gone against the treaties and forced the Natives out of their lands. When the Europeans had forced the Natives to leave their lands, they used force and violence, and this led to heightened fear towards the Europeans. The Europeans at that time might have seen their actions as justifiable since they would be able to make better use of the lands compared to the natives. However, the Natives felt cheated, anger, and fear. And these are the conflicting ideas that we presented in our poem.

Other than forced removal, the Europeans had also brought in diseases such as chicken pox, measles, and influenza. Due to the Natives' lack of resistance to the diseases, their population fell to 95 percent by the 1650s (McNeill J. R., 2020). And these problems were not addressed by the Europeans, who definitely had the capability to do so, until 1832.

When the federal government had taken action, it was after more than half of the Native population had already been wiped out, which was too late to save the destruction of the Native Americans and their culture.

However, there are always two sides to every coin, and the Columbian Exchange, despite having brought a ton of devastation to the Natives, had also benefited them, and the world too. For crops, the potato was the most impactful and revolutionary for Europe, since it was a crop that could be stored for prolonged periods of time. Other than the Europeans, the Natives had also benefited from the exchange. Staple food crops were introduced into the Americas, and these grew well in places too cold for corn (the usual food source for the Natives at that time) (McNeill J. R., 2020). This evidently shows that the Columbian Exchange led to expansion in agriculture and greatly benefitted the Natives and Europeans.

However, other than agricultural impacts, the Europeans had managed to grow politically due to

horses. Mastery of the techniques of equestrian warfare utilized against their neighbours helped to vault groups such as the Sioux and Comanche to heights of political power previously unattained by any Amerindians in North America. (McNeill J. R., 2020)

As seen, both the Natives and Europeans can agree that they have benefited greatly from the European Exchange. Arguably, this idea should not be included in our poem since we are focusing on conflicts. However, we wanted to introduce a bitter tone, as the Natives had suffered a lot, with at least half of their population wiped out, something that cannot be compensated for with material gains. This bitter and solemn attitude then contrasts with the Europeans' flippant attitude towards the Natives' lives.

### 3.3 American Revolution:

The American Revolution, also known as the United States War of Independence or American Revolutionary War, (1775–1783), is defined as the insurrection by which 13 of Great Britain's North American colonies achieved political independence and went on to form the sovereign United States of America. (The editors of *Britannica*, 2020)

For our poem, we focused on mainly 5 events that had led to the American Revolution and a summarised version of the war. We placed emphasis on the growing tension between the British and the Americans during the events and the war.

There were mainly five major events that had led to the American Revolution. The first event was "The Stamp Act" in March 1765, which was then followed by "The Townshend Acts" that occurred from June to July 1767. The third event was "The Boston Massacre" in March 1770 and the fourth event was "The Boston Tea Party" occurring in December 1773. Lastly, this is then preceded by "The Coercive Acts" which happened from March to June 1774. However, we will only be highlighting the events that are relevant to our poems.

The first event was "The Stamp Act":

Shop owners were able to tax customers anytime they stamp the product the customers are buying. This policy was implemented by the British government on the American colonies because they needed more money as they were in debt of 60 million pounds from protecting the American colonies from the French and the local Indians due to the 7-year global conflict and they felt the American colonies owed them the huge sum of money as protection fees. (Kieger, 2020)

This event marked the start of the growing tension between the Americans and the British as the British had taxed the American colonies. We chose to highlight the significance of this event in our poem as the tax policy angered the Americans and was the first event which sparked the tension between the Americans and the British. While the Americans were protected by the British, there was still a feeling of anger towards the British as they were expected to pay for the protection. This made the Americans upset because they felt a sense of belonging towards the British and felt that it was their duty and responsibility to ensure the safety of their colonies without wanting something in return.

The second event was the "The Townshend Acts". The British Government levied a whole bunch of new taxes on the Americans via import duties. Some of the products imported to the Americans which were taxed include Glass, Lead, Paper, Tea, Oil.

This resulted in the Americans boycotting British goods once again and the Americans constantly harassing the British customs commissioners. The British Government was getting frustrated because they felt that they should be able to assert their control over their colonies. Thus, they repealed all of their taxes, except for tea, and sent 1000 troops to Boston to take control.

This second event further increased the tension between the British government and the Americans and marked the beginning of the King sending British troops to govern and manage the Americans, which definitely made the Americans angry as they had always been left in salutary neglect. We wanted to highlight this event in our poem because it indicates the tension between the Americans and the British, especially when they arrived in America. Not only were the Americans angry that they had to be managed by the British, the British themselves were furious at the Americans boycotting their goods, which defeated the purpose of the tax policy and resulted in a greater economic loss. The lack of control over the American colonies also fueled the anger of the British.

The third and one of the most significant events was “The Boston Massacre”, as seen in the text below:

The tension between the British troops and the Americans was palpable. On March 5th, a band of local patriots began heckling a British guard at the Customs House. More and more Americans joined in the heckling and more British troops turned up in support of their comrade. Thus, about 200 Americans were surrounding 7 British troops. The Americans began throwing items such as rocks and oyster shells. The soldiers were outnumbered and they panicked, thus they fired at the crowd.

Three men—including an African American sailor named Crispus Attucks—were dead, and two others were mortally wounded.” (History.com editors, 2020)

In addition, the editors also included how the murder was used as a propaganda tool for the colonists.

We chose to highlight this event in our poem because the murder of Americans sparked an outrage among them, and this event was the main reason the Americans had wanted a revolution. We can infer that the Americans were in fact, in favour of having a war, which is of considerable difference to World War II, when the Americans decidedly took up an isolationist position.

The fourth event was “The Boston Tea Party”, which was a tax on tea to help the financially struggling British East India Company. However, the Americans responded harshly as seen below:

They (The Americans) didn't want the British telling them that they had to buy their tea, but it wasn't just about that. He continues that The Americans wanted to be able to trade with any country they wanted. (History.com editors, 2020)

This angered the British government because tea worth about a million dollars of the company was wasted. Hence, the British punished Massachusetts.

The British retaliated by levying The Coercive Acts (fifth event), which is where the Parliament passed a series of laws, the Intolerable Acts, a series of punitive measures that were intended to cow the restive population into obedience (History.com editors, 2020)

After knowing that Boston and Massachusetts were under the direct rule of the British, the other colonies feared that they might be next. Thus, the colonies held a meeting to decide what to do. They decided on telling the local militias to start arming and be ready at a minute's notice. Across the colonies, these minutemen stood ready for the beginning of the American Revolutionary War. They also decided on appointing George Washington as the commander-in-chief.

From this, the British felt politically threatened and was enraged with the open rebellion of their American colonies. As a result, they retaliated by sending more troops to America. We can infer that at this moment, the tension between the British and the Americans was at its peak, thus leading to the American Revolution.

The first battle in the American Revolution was in Lexington and Concord in April, 19, 1775:

British General Thomas Gage ordered 700 troops to raid Lexington. And American spies who got hold of the information such as Paul Revere, rode ahead to warn that the British were coming, giving the rebels time to prepare. (History.com editors, 2020)

We wanted to highlight the significance of this event in our poem because it is the start of the American Revolution. On 13th November 1775, Benedict Arnold, an American military officer, attempted to invade Canada in a two-pronged attack. The continentals, which were led by General Richard Montgomery, managed to capture some British forts and the city of Montreal.

The battle also resulted in the first victory for the Americans and the morale for the Americans rose, which was a great start for them. This was important because it seemed as if the Americans were going to win the war without suffering any defeats as they had won their battle against the strongest army in the world at that time. However, this was not the case.

During that time, Thomas Paine, an English-born American political activist had written and published a pamphlet called 'Common Sense' in which he advocated for total independence from Great Britain. It spread across the colonies like wildfire. This shows the growing desire of the Americans to have freedom. (Stuart, 2018)

This is important as the murder of the Americans was used as propaganda for revolution, which travelled all across America, thereby riling up the population for a common goal, which was to have independence.

The Americans had torn down a statue of King George in New York and melted it to 42 000 musket balls. (Stuart, 2018) To the British, it was treason. The king sent an intimidating force of troops to New York. That fight led to the start of America's many defeats, which had also led to Washington's leadership being questioned.

The destruction of the statue of the King angered the British, who added more troops to America. We wanted to highlight the fights that were occurring in our poem because in most of the fights, the Americans were losing and there were many doubts. This was imperative because it indicated the challenges and the difficulties the Americans faced in order to achieve their eventual goal and be successful.

However, there was finally hope for the Americans as a Prussian officer who was hired by Benjamin Franklin gave George Washington's men European military training. Washington's army then came out of the winter in 1778 a new and improved force, ready to take Philadelphia back from the British after they captured it from the Americans. (Stuart, 2018)

We wanted to accentuate the improvement of the Americans' military strength and this marked a turning point for the Americans as they moved towards success.

The British debt was soaring, and due to America's newly improved army, they managed to severely weaken the British due to general Nathanael Greene's clever plan.

The French showed up in greater numbers to support America to finally defeat the weakened British. The impacts of the support of French are elaborated below:

The American and French forces tightened around the city and were shooting heavily on Cornwallis, who desperately appealed to Clinton for aid. Over 7,000 British troops were captured, a crushing defeat, and with that, Parliament had reached the end of its rope.

The British felt they were losing even though they still held New York, Charleston, and Savannah, but fighting between the two sides mostly ceased as peace negotiations opened up in Paris.

The resulting treaty in 1783 saw Great Britain remove its troops from American soil, recognize U.S. independence, and cede territory up to the Mississippi River. In return, the Americans agreed to pay any debt still owed to Britain and give fair treatment to any colonists who remained loyal to Britain. Washington was elected as president, and the United States of America was born. (Stuart, 2018)

We wanted to emphasize the significance of the victory for the Americans in our poem as the liberation and the independence they had from the British indicated how the Americans were able to succeed collectively as a country to work towards a common goal. Despite the adversities they faced, the Americans were able to persevere and succeed in the end. This was an important moment in American history and thus, we wanted to highlight this event in our poem.

### 3.4 American Civil War:

The Civil War is defined as “the central event in America’s historical consciousness”, for it resolved questions “left unresolved by the [American Revolution]”, namely what exactly constitutes the fact that all men were created equal, and “whether [The United States] was to be a dissolvable confederation of sovereign states or an indivisible nation with a sovereign national government”. (McPherson, 2008)

There are several events that have shaped the Civil War.

One such event is “Bleeding Kansas” which started in 1854, and it was in regards to whether Kansas’ two new senators would affect the balance of power in the U.S. Senate. The conflict escalated when those from Missouri entered Kansas to claim residency and to influence the decisions regarding slavery in Kansas. The conflict eventually developed into brutal gang violence:

In New England, a group of abolitionists formed the Emigrant Aid Company, which sent anti-slavery settlers to Kansas to ensure it would become a free territory. On the other side, thousands of pro-slavery Missourians flooded into the new territory to illegally vote in Kansas’ first territorial election in November 1854. Pro-slavery candidate John Whitfield easily defeated two Free Soil candidates to become the territory’s delegate to Congress, with only half the ballots cast by registered voters. (Editors of History.com, 2021)

However, both sides refused to recognize the other as a functioning government, with the Free Staters creating their own, while President Franklin Pierce recognized the pro-slavery government as the only legitimate one. As such, tensions escalated, and this resulted in John Brown responding in violence by brutally killing five men, for he felt that liberating the oppressed was his “raison d’etre”.

We wanted to highlight this event as it indicated how much the pro-abolitionists were willing to sacrifice for the equality and betterment of others. In the case of John Brown, a staunch pro-abolitionist activist, he sacrificed his life to lead a rebellion against the Southern slave-owners, as he hoped to bring about a large-scale rebellion against slave owners across America. This was an important moment because it caused tensions to mount between the South and North, and was the first event which led to the Civil War.

The second event that could have influenced the Civil War was Lincoln’s inauguration. Abraham Lincoln came from the anti-slavery Republican Party and had been elected president. However, this only resulted in states seceding from the Union, due to their views that slavery would become forbidden.

South Carolina was the first state to secede from the union, citing the reasons that there was

“an increasing hostility on the part of the non-slaveholding States to the institution of slavery”, and because they felt that any "form of government becomes destructive of the ends for which it was established, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute a new government." (*Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union*, 1860)

As such, slaveholding states decided to form their own government, called the Confederate States of America. However, Abraham Lincoln deemed the secession of states as illegitimate, which led to even more tension between slave states and free states.

Next, another event was the attack on Fort Sumter. The Confederate shore batteries under General P.G.T. Beauregard opened fire on Union-held Fort Sumter in South Carolina. The fort had been poorly fortified, and there was a lack of available resources. Hence, the Confederates besieged the Fort. Soon after, the fort had been surrendered to the Confederates. By making the first move, it almost ensured that the Civil War would escalate to the extent that it did. This provocation was also recognized by Abraham Lincoln as an insurrection, and he promptly made a request for 75, 000 conscripts to quell it. This sparked the most brutal Civil War in America.

We wanted to highlight this event in our poem because it was important as the Confederates seized the Federal properties, which angered the Union, thus escalating tensions and eventually causing the Civil War.

In the end, the Union managed to win and slavery had been abolished, but at the cost of 618, 222 men. This is considered as a pyrrhic victory. The insight provided from the American Civil War may have led some to believe that the issue of racism has been solved, but fundamentally, the war has barely impacted people's mindsets.

### **3.5 World War II:**

In 1938, tensions in Europe were extremely high and the outbreak of another great war was a real possibility. To prepare America in case it was pulled into the conflict, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt announced that he would expand the civilian pilot training program.

During this period, racial segregation was still a pervasive problem in America, African-Americans faced discrimination and were perceived to be inferior to white soldiers.

A 1925 study conducted by the Army War College concluded that African-Americans were inherently ill-suited for combat physically and psychologically. (Melissa, n.d). However, they would soon prove them wrong.

Most believed that they were incapable of learning how to fly and operate sophisticated aircrafts. The civilian pilot training programme did not allow the participation of African Americans. Black newspapers like the Chicago Defender and Pittsburgh Courier joined civil rights groups to argue for the inclusion of African Americans. In September 1940, Roosevelt's White House responded to such lobbying campaigns by announcing that the AAC would soon begin training Black pilots.

However, neither the NAACP nor the most involved black newspapers approved the solution of creating separate black units; they believed that approach simply perpetuated segregation and discrimination. Nevertheless, largely at the behest of Pres. Franklin D. Roosevelt, a separate unit was created. (Wallace, 2020). This evidently shows the racial discrimination against the Natives, and their desire to prove them wrong. However, despite their contributions, they are still not recognised in the present day, and we want to spark this idea in our readers.

For the training site, the War Department chose the Tuskegee Army Air Field in Tuskegee, Alabama, then under construction, it was located in the heart of the racially segregated South.

The program's trainees, nearly all of them college graduates or undergraduates, came from all over the country. In addition to some 1,000 pilots, the Tuskegee program trained nearly 14,000 navigators, bombardiers, instructors, aircraft and engine mechanics, control tower operators and other maintenance and support staff.

In April 1941, Eleanor Roosevelt, the First Lady, visited the airfield. The chief flight instructor in the program took the first lady on an aerial tour, and photos and films of that flight helped publicize the program and made it more accepted by the public.

In April 1942, the Tuskegee-trained 99th Pursuit Squadron deployed to North Africa, which the Allies had occupied. In North Africa and then Sicily, they flew missions in less modern, second-hand P-40 planes, which were slower and more difficult to manoeuvre than their German counterparts. After the commander of the 99th's assigned fighter group complained about the squadron's performance, the chief flight instructor had to defend his men before a War Department committee.

The 99th Pursuit Squadron was then moved to Italy, where they served alongside the white pilots of the 79th Fighter Group. In early 1944, pilots from the 99th shot down 12 German fighters in two days, going some distance toward proving themselves in combat.

In February 1944, the 100th, 301st and 302nd fighter squadrons arrived in Italy; together with the 99th, these squadrons of Black pilots and other personnel made up the new 332nd Fighter Group.

After this transfer, the pilots of the 332nd began flying the top of the line P-51 Mustang plane, escorting the heavy bombers of the 15th Air Force during raids deep into enemy territory. The tails of their planes were painted red for identification purposes, earning them the nickname "Red Tails" and "Red-Tail Angels ". Of the 200 escort missions which they flew, only around 25 bombers were shot down, which is an extremely high survival rate compared to the escort groups from the 15th Air Force, which lost around 46 bombers.

By the end of World War II, the Tuskegee Airmen achieved more than 15,000 individual sorties in North Africa and Europe in the span of 2 years. They were awarded more than 150 Distinguished Flying Crosses. They destroyed or damaged 36 German planes in the air and 237 on the ground, as well as nearly 1,000 rail cars and transport vehicles and a German destroyer. (History.com Editors, 2021)

The skill and determination to prove their worth as soldiers allowed the Tuskegee Airmen to leave a lasting impression on the history of aviation. Despite being sent to fight with inferior equipment and facing discrimination and scorn from their own allies, they still managed to triumph over a better equipped enemy. We wanted to highlight this in our poem because it shows how many Americans were prejudiced against African Americans, as seen from how they had to be defended in front of a War Department committee. However, their record speaks for itself, so the accusations of their performance seems to be unwarranted. This shows how they refused to see African Americans as equals until they achieved many feats and how racism was still very prevalent despite the Civil War having been fought decades ago.

### 3.6 Present Day:

In the 21st Century, we highlight two major events. The aim of highlighting these two events would be to prove that in the Present Day, people's mindset has far from changed, and that racism is in fact, extremely imminent in the country. First, we would like to place emphasis on the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. The movement is defined as an international social movement, formed in the United States in 2013, dedicated to fighting racism and anti-Black violence, especially in the form of police brutality. (Editors of Britannica, 2020)

However, it has recently blown up due to the death of George Floyd, who was murdered for using a counterfeit \$20 bill. Even though it was only a minor offence, a police officer, Derek Chauvin, was seen to be pressing his knee to the neck of the victim for a long while. Other officers on the scene did not intervene with the ministrations of Chauvin. This brought about protests against police brutality, particularly against Black people.

Below is an abstract mentioning the extent of outrage that was sparked from the death of George Floyd.

"Say his name" and "I can't breathe." Words that became a national chorus in the months following the death of George Floyd, a Black man killed while being taken into police custody in Minneapolis on Memorial Day 2020. In demonstrations that drew millions in cities across the country and abroad, protesters called for police reform while mourning the death of yet another unarmed Black person at the hands of police in the United States. (Deliso, 2021)

Evidently, his death brought about a series of protests regarding police brutality against the African-Americans in the country. Whilst the police officers were punished severely, with all being fired and Chauvin being sentenced to imprisonment, it is considered deeply saddening to recognize that as a country that prides itself on being equal, such events of police brutality still occur. What is even more troubling is the fact that some tried to justify Chauvin's actions, since some have recognized Floyd to have been killed by fentanyl overdose, again in some way defacing the Black community. This also shows the disparities between racial communities even though America prides itself on liberty.

Another event that has been mentioned is the American Presidential Debate of 2020. First of all, we would like to emphasize on the fact that the Presidential Debate has little talk regarding racism, but we find this important because especially in times of the pandemic, inequality in terms of economic income (due to race) is a very pressing issue. This proves that Americans are either first of all, oblivious to the notion of "Race", or secondly, just choose to ignore it in favor of other issues.

Regardless, it was still talked about and discussed in one of the presidential debates. The topic

of institutional racism was brought into question. Candidate of the Democratic Party, Joe Biden, mentioned that institutional racism was present and that however, he has made efforts to reduce any such racism. One example he elaborated on was the “The Talk” that African-Americans had to face. He mentions that when said people were pulled over by a police officer, they had to answer in a specific way, with tame answers like “Yes Sir” and “No Sir”, regardless of class and wealth. Giving the example of his daughter, he continues that the White did not have to have such a talk. While some may argue that it is merely a code of conduct that they must follow, our thoughts are otherwise. Especially in the USA, which strongly advocates for the freedom of speech, this is clearly not demonstrated by harsh treatment.

Similarly, a candidate of the Republican Party, Donald Trump mentions that racism was present in the country, but that he has aided the African-American communities. Both parties agree on the presence of racism, yet they blame the opposing party for lack of counteraction.

In that same presidential debate, Trump criticized Biden for not calling out the left-wing extremist groups. Trump himself, however, only reluctantly condemned the White Supremacist group, Proud Boys. Trump supports his claim that Biden should be condemning said groups (like Antifa) by asserting that it is often those that want to achieve racial equality that cause violence and non-peaceful protests. This presents America with a troubling position, for despite all these years of effort, not much progress on the issue of racism has been made.

While the evidence can be freely interpreted, we would like to view that in that presidential debate, Trump says what he has mentioned, because only movements supporting racial equality are flagged. An example that can be used is a clash between Proud Boys and BLM activists. In Florida, BLM activists were demonstrating, and requesting for racial justice. However, Proud Boys launched a counter-protest against them. To prevent measures from escalating, police started to enforce laws. However, what was concerning was that only BLM activists were cited or charged. This invalidates Trump’s claims.

In conclusion, it is evident that despite all the time that has passed from the American Revolution till now, not much on racism has changed, and it is evident in the following text:

Persistent inequality is obviously serious... But... today the picture is much more complicated... blacks and whites now graduate at the same rate from high school today and are almost equally likely to attend college, [but] on average they are not equally educated. That is, looking at years of schooling in assessing the racial gap in family income tells us little about the cognitive skills whites and blacks bring to the job market. And cognitive skills obviously affect earnings. (Thernstrom, A. T. A. S., 2020)

The problem of racism is clearly evident in the country, and despite action taken to stop it, not enough has been done at the moment, which is considered ironic when America is considered

to be “the land of the free” where “all men are created equal”.

One of the primary reasons that people continue racism is that people have the “Freedom of Speech”. However, it is often very difficult to define this term, for even the USA Supreme Courts have challenges defining it. While some sources claim that Freedom of Speech is a “right, as stated in the 1st and 14th Amendments to the Constitution of the United States, to express information, ideas, and opinions free of government restrictions” (Editors of Britannica.com, 2020), we find a major flaw in the definition which is that it is be it intentionally or unintentionally, left extremely vague. Instead, we would like to propose that freedom of speech refers to the act of being able to express one’s thoughts freely so long as it does not impose on others. This way, it is clearer to identify what exactly Freedom constitutes, and in the Present Day Twin Cinema, we have hinted at this overarching theme several times.

## **Chapter 4: Creative Product**

### **4.1 Choosing to use poetic forms**

We wanted to use poetic forms to present our ideas because poems have many forms that present different ideas. For example, free verses connote a sense of freedom, with irregular metric and rhythm, which we used to present the American Revolution, where the Americans are fighting for freedom. We had used the Twin Cinema poetic form to strongly emphasise the two conflicting sides, and we used blackout poems to give a sense of censorship and suppression. Instead of using other forms like videos, or plays, we decided to use poems because videos and plays may focus more on the visual and aesthetic parts of the content, which may divert readers' attention to the animation of the videos or to the action and actors in plays instead of the use of the language in the content.

## **4.2 Themes in our poems**

### **4.2a Pre-columbian:**

This poem highlights the conflict between the Native tribes at the time and to honour the culture of the Natives. Hence, this poem highlights the culture of the Native Americans and their great respect for spirits. This poem is written from the perspective of an adult from the Iroquis. One main reason we did this is so we could better highlight the mindsets of the Natives at that time and suggest a sense of closeness between the reader and the Natives so that the readers can better appreciate the Native's culture. We focused on the conflict between the Iroquois and Algonquins from the Iroquois perspective mainly because the Iroquois were the more violent one, with many human sacrifices simply to please the god, and there have even been cases of cannibalism, which evidently show how violent they were, which was interesting to showcase in our poem. We chose the free-verse poetic form to further emphasise the fact that the Natives at that time were free and not suppressed.

### **4.2b Columbian (Twin Cinema):**

Here, we used the Twin Cinema poetic form to clearly differentiate the two opposing parties: the Natives, and the Europeans. This is to emphasise the fact that these two parties are polar opposites, and to allow us to emphasise our personal opinion when read horizontally. Here, the Europeans were very unreasonable and discriminatory, allowing the Natives to die so that the Europeans could take their land. Hence, this poem is more emotional. We also used the length of the lines for each party to add meaning. In our second stanza, we made the Europeans' lines significantly shorter compared to the Natives. We wanted to suggest that the Europeans' argument that the many deaths of the Natives were not because of the Europeans' fault, was weak and unsupported. The poem has an overall feeling of loss, because of the many deaths of the Natives.

### **4.2c Columbian (Blackout):**

Here, we used the blackout poetic form because it symbolises suppression, censorship, and destruction, which was very much evident during this time, when the Native's culture was killed along with the population. We tried to suggest fear in our poem, and how scared the Natives were of the Europeans, and that they saw the Europeans as being far superior to them.

### **4.2d American Revolution:**

This poem marks an important moment in American history as it was the start of an independent country without the governance of Britain. We chose free verse as the poetic form for this poem. This is because we wanted to write the poem based on the word "free" in "free verse" to express the Americans' desires for freedom and independence. In addition, there is no fixed metrical

system for the poem. This is to show the chaos and irregularities the Americans had at that time during the American Revolution. There was no order and fixed control, just like how the poem is not constrained to a fixed metrical system. In the beginning of the poem, we wrote about the sadness and anger the Americans felt, of how they had to pay protection fees. Later in the poem, we used metaphor to compare America to an eagle, referencing how the national animal of America was a bald eagle. In addition, we also used tactile imagery to show how conflicted the eagle was as the eagle was trapped in a cage as the metal bars shrink, highlighting how trapped and oppressed the Americans felt. Next, we wrote about the lions, which symbolises the British since the national animal for Britain is a lion, to invade the Americans. Then we highlighted the defeats the Americans faced but eventually, they persevered and got a victory, which is a momentous occasion in American History.

#### **4.2e American Civil War:**

This poem describes how America eventually came to the decision of freeing its slaves. The poem highlights how Americans value freedom and equality and are willing to fight for the betterment of others despite losing out. We chose to write this poem in the twin-cinema format as it shows a clear contrast between the opinions of the Union and Confederacy. Both sides expressed conflicting opinions and desires, with the Union wanting the emancipation of the slaves while the Union desired for a stable economy, which they felt could only be achieved through forced labour and slavery. In the first stanza, we highlighted the desires and the differences between the two sides, revealing the ideological side of the Union and the pragmatic side of the Confederacy. We also wanted to highlight the conflicts of both sides. In the next stanza, the Civil War had officially started and we wanted to highlight the sacrifices that were put forth for the freedom of slaves and how much bloodshed there was. It also tore the country apart as the Southern States left the union. In the last stanza, we wrote the aftermath of the Civil War and how both sides agreed for change, which was imperative for American History as the country was moving forward.

#### **4.2f World War II (Tuskegee Airmen):**

This poem emphasises how the Tuskegee Airmen performed exceptionally despite facing discrimination and being disadvantaged in many ways. The poem aims to show the determination and skill of the African Americans who wanted to show others that they were equals. This poem was written from an outsider's perspective. This was chosen as it shows how the skill and determination of the Tuskegee Airmen have made it well known and have even spread to outsiders who retell the tale. We chose to write the poem as free verse, as it shows how the Tuskegee Airmen's accomplishments in the war have earned the respect of others and liberated them from discrimination. We chose to start off the poem with America's reaction to the bombing of Pearl Harbour as it would show that the African Americans were also patriotic as

they wanted to help to defend their country. Additionally, it also shows how the African Americans wanted to perform well to prove their worth as soldiers. Later in the poem, we chose to write about the Germans, as they had superior planes and equipment, while the Tuskegee Airmen had older planes that were inferior to others in the army. This emphasises how the Tuskegee Airmen had to work harder to fill the gap between them and the Germans. We wanted to highlight this in our poem because it shows how many Americans were still prejudiced towards African Americans and saw them as inferior.

#### **4.2g Present Day:**

In this poem, the poetic form of a Twin Cinema is utilized to make a clear distinction between the two opposition parties, the Republican Party and the Democratic Party. Both parties are seen to be explicitly questioning what Freedom actually means, for most of the time it results in violence, and hate crimes (racism is the key example used). Reading from the Republicans point of view presents themselves as people who are uprighteous, and challenges the then definition of Freedom, for it was not inclusive. On the other hand, the Democrats are seen to be trying to maintain the definition of Freedom, and proclaiming that in the Civil War, there were perhaps some ulterior motives. From the Second stanza, the Republicans have maintained an idealistic mindset as they view their country, whereas the Democrats are seen as more pragmatic. The theme of freedom is continuously questioned, with no common consensus reached in the last stanza. When read across, the emotion and tone is bitter and resigned, to show that despite the lapses in time, Americans as a whole are still the same, and to that the poem expresses dissatisfaction.

### 4.3 Poem Excerpts

#### 4.3a Columbian Twin Cinema:

Native American	Europeans
The	Age of Exploration
Columbian Exchange	Connected the divided continents,
Reformed the way of life	Greatly revolutionised political life,
Improvements	For the better
Paid for	Lost lives that vanished
With bullets and blood	For the common good

Here, in the Native American column, the phrase “bullets and blood” is an alliteration to place emphasis on the violence that scarred the Natives. The diction of “Paid” also suggests a transaction of human lives, or that it was costly (sentimentally speaking). We used this to show how desensitized the Natives were towards human killing due to the excessive deaths that occurred during the European Exchange. In the European column, the diction of “vanished” suggests that the Natives had completely disappeared without a trace. Historically speaking, the British tried to downplay the actions that they did. Many also seem to forget that many Natives have died in the Columbian Exchange. Furthermore, as seen in “for the common good”, it displays the indifference of the Europeans towards the Native’s lives, and suggests that they felt that the many human deaths were justifiable by the revolutionary Columbian Exchange that allowed for great advancements for the Europeans.

#### 4.3b American Revolution Free Verse:

“Your power shrank,  
like the cage she was in.

Constricting

Restricting

So the king of the jungle

Heart of the pride

Ordered an

Invasion”

This is an excerpt taken from the American Revolution Free Verse poem. In the first line, the use of the phrase “Your power shrank” signifies that the British’s control over the Americans was diminishing. However, despite the Americans longing for independence, they were no match in terms of sheer military strength. Thus, we used the simile and tactile imagery of “like the cage she was in. / Constricting / Restricting” to represent said limitations. The diction of “Restricting” indicates a sense of suffocation, reflecting the conflicts that the Americans faced. The “king of the jungle” refers to a lion, who is seen as fierce and powerful. The lion here refers to the king of Britain -- King George. The diction of “heart of the pride” connotes that the King of Britain was the most important figure according to the British. However, another interpretation of the line is that “pride” connotes a sense of arrogance. Thus, it can be connected to how King George was the one fuelling their arrogance. Lastly, the line “Ordered an / Invasion” was used to represent King George sending his troops to America to manage and take control over the American population.

### **4.3c World War II Free Verse:**

“God’s gift,  
The modern Mustangs,  
Descended upon the Giant,  
Putting it back to sleep.”

This is another excerpt taken from our World War II Free Verse poem. Here, we use a guttural alliteration, “God’s gift” to emphasise the fact that the modern Mustangs were seen as a fighter jet that was technologically advanced. This shows how they were so good for combat that it is like a work of god, gracing them with these fighter jets. Also, we compare America to a “Giant”, and earlier in our poem, this is consistent throughout the poem, where we compare it to a “Sleeping Giant” because America, at that time, was indeed referred to as a “Giant” because it was a powerful force, but was often “Sleeping” due to its isolationist policies.

#### 4.3d Present Twin Cinema:

We are America, the land of the free.	
The land where Liberty is	Nothing more than a statue
Of utmost importance.	For
Everyone can speak their mind, but	Only those with power are actually heard.
It's not enough.	But what can we do?
Every man and woman must be set free, but	It's not in our control.
Some are just more equal than others.	

This excerpt taken from our Present Twin Cinema Poem alludes to Liberty as nothing more as a symbol or status. This is referencing the Statue of Liberty, and that it did not truly symbolize anything. The word "Liberty" is treated as a proper noun as we wish to emphasize the fact that Liberty is a right, and that it should be given to everyone. The term that "only those with power are actually heard" is a reference to Trump, who whilst has power, uses his power to spread misinformation. The sarcastic remark of "Some are just more equal than others" is an oblique reference to George Orwell's "Animal Farm", where one group always has had more power and thereby voice than others. The oxymoron used here arrives at the conclusion that perhaps the notion that people are treated equally may exist, but in reality, there will always be some sort of divide, or some form of oppression. The diction of the word "just" also makes the tone of the poem seem resigned, and that we are powerless to interfere with the action going on in America.

## **References**

- Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2020, August 13). *Black Lives Matter*. Encyclopedia Britannica. Retrieved 10 August, 2021, from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Black-Lives-Matter>
- Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2020, March 13). *Freedom of speech*. Encyclopedia Britannica. Retrieved 10 August, 2021, from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/freedom-of-speech>
- Chapel, L. (n.d.). *Iroquois Lesson for Kids: Religion & Ceremonies*. Retrieved 10 August, 2021, from <https://study.com/academy/lesson/iroquois-lesson-for-kids-religion-ceremonies.html>
- Cotterell, A. (1997). *Hahgwehdiyū*. In *A Dictionary of World Mythology*. Oxford University Press. Retrieved 10 August, 2021, from <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780192177476.001.0001/acref-9780192177476-e-336>
- Deliso, M. (2021, April 21). *Timeline: The impact of George Floyd's death in Minneapolis and beyond*. Retrieved 9 August, 2021, from <https://abcnews.go.com/US/timeline-impact-george-floyds-death-minneapolis/story?id=70999322>
- E.E.B. (n.d.). *Tuskegee Airmen*. *Britannica.Com*. Retrieved 20 June, 2021, from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tuskegee-Airmen>
- H.E. (2009, November 9). *Tuskegee Airmen*. *History.Com*. Retrieved 23 June, 2021, from <https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/tuskegee-airmen>
- History.com Editors (Ed.). (2009, December 4). *Native American Cultures*. Retrieved 16 April, 2021, from <https://www.history.com/topics/native-american-history/native-american-cultures>
- History.com Editors (Ed.). (2021, April 7). *Bleeding Kansas*. Retrieved 16 April, 2021, from <https://www.history.com/topics/19th-century/bleeding-kansas>
- Kieger, P. J. (2020, July 14). *7 Events That Enraged Colonists and Led to the American Revolution*. Retrieved 28 May, 2021, from <https://www.history.com/news/american-revolution-causes>
- Melissa, M. T. (n.d.). *The Tuskegee Airmen*. *Military.Com*. Retrieved 23 June, 2021, from <https://www.military.com/history/the-tuskegee-airmen.html>
- Ross, B. (2018). *Storytelling Traditions Across the World: Native American - All Good Tales*. Retrieved 16 April, 2021, from <https://allgoodtales.com/storytelling-traditions-across-the-world-native-american/>

Stuart, Webster. (2018, August 31). *The American Revolution*. Retrieved 28 May, 2021, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gzALIXcY4pg&t=118s> & <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rtYC2jx1LM0>

The Avalon project at the Yale Law School. (2000). *Confederate States of America - Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union*. Retrieved 7 August, 2021, from <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.37sup-515>

Thernstrom, A. T. A. S. (2020, June 26). *Black Progress: How far we've come, and how far we have to go*. *Brookings*. Retrieved 9 August, 2021, from <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/black-progress-how-far-weve-come-and-how-far-we-have-to-go/>

Wallace, W. M. (2020, August 27). *American Revolution*. Encyclopedia Britannica. Retrieved 28 May, 2021, from <https://www.britannica.com/event/American-Revolution>