The America 250 Faith Gap

A survey of children's reading lists curated for America's 250th birthday and what they collectively chose to leave out.

300+	25+	ZERO
BOOKS REVIEWED	SOURCES SURVEYED	TITLES ADDRESSING FAITH

SUMMARY FINDING

Not one title.
Not one source.

As the nation prepares to celebrate its 250th birthday on July 4, 2026, libraries, publishers, and educational institutions across America have curated reading lists to guide families toward books that tell children the story of their country's founding. We surveyed all publicly available reading lists spanning major publishers, public library systems, educational institutions, and government-affiliated programs, and cataloged more than 300 individual children's titles recommended for the occasion.

Not a single title on any list addresses faith, religious liberty, or Christianity's role in the founding of the United States.

Religious liberty is the first freedom named in the First Amendment. The Pilgrims came to this continent seeking freedom of worship. The Great Awakening helped forge a shared American identity across the colonies. The founders debated, prayed over, and grounded their vision of self-governance in what the Declaration of Independence calls 'the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God.' Faith is not a footnote in the American story. It is foundational to it.

And yet, the institutions responsible for telling that story to the next generation have collectively decided to leave it out.

Methodology

We searched for publicly available America 250 children's reading lists curated by institutional sources — publishers, public libraries, educational institutions, and government-affiliated programs. We excluded personal blogs, retail product pages, and individual reader recommendations. We included every institutional list we identified. Each title was categorized based on its title, subtitle, publisher description, and any editorial framing provided by the curating institution.

WHAT THEY DID INCLUDE

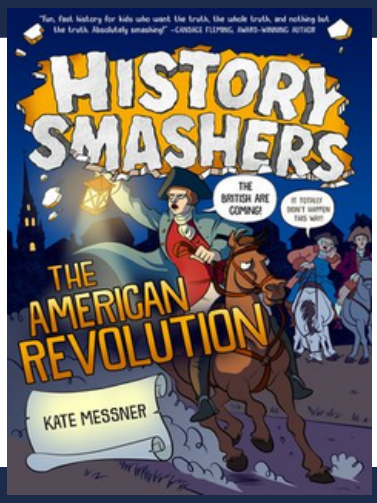
The lists are not identical, and they range from relatively traditional (Dallas Public Library, Simon & Schuster) to explicitly progressive (Johnson County Public Library, Random House). But across the full sample, clear patterns emerge in what institutions consider essential to the America 250 children's canon:

LGBTQ+ history

appears on multiple sources, with the most notable being the following: *Sylvia and Marsha Start a Revolution!* (about the trans women of color who made LGBTQ+ history), *Flor Fights Back: A Stonewall Riots Survival Story,* and *Stonewall: A Building, An Uprising, A Revolution.*

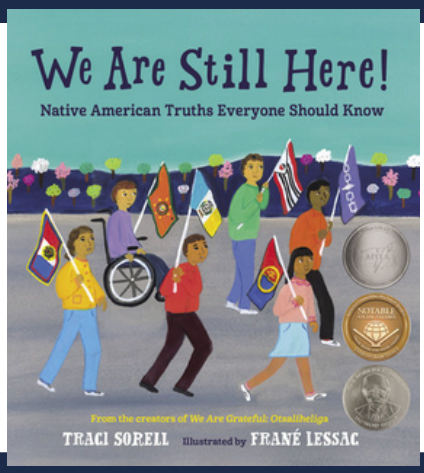
Revisionist and "myth-busting" content

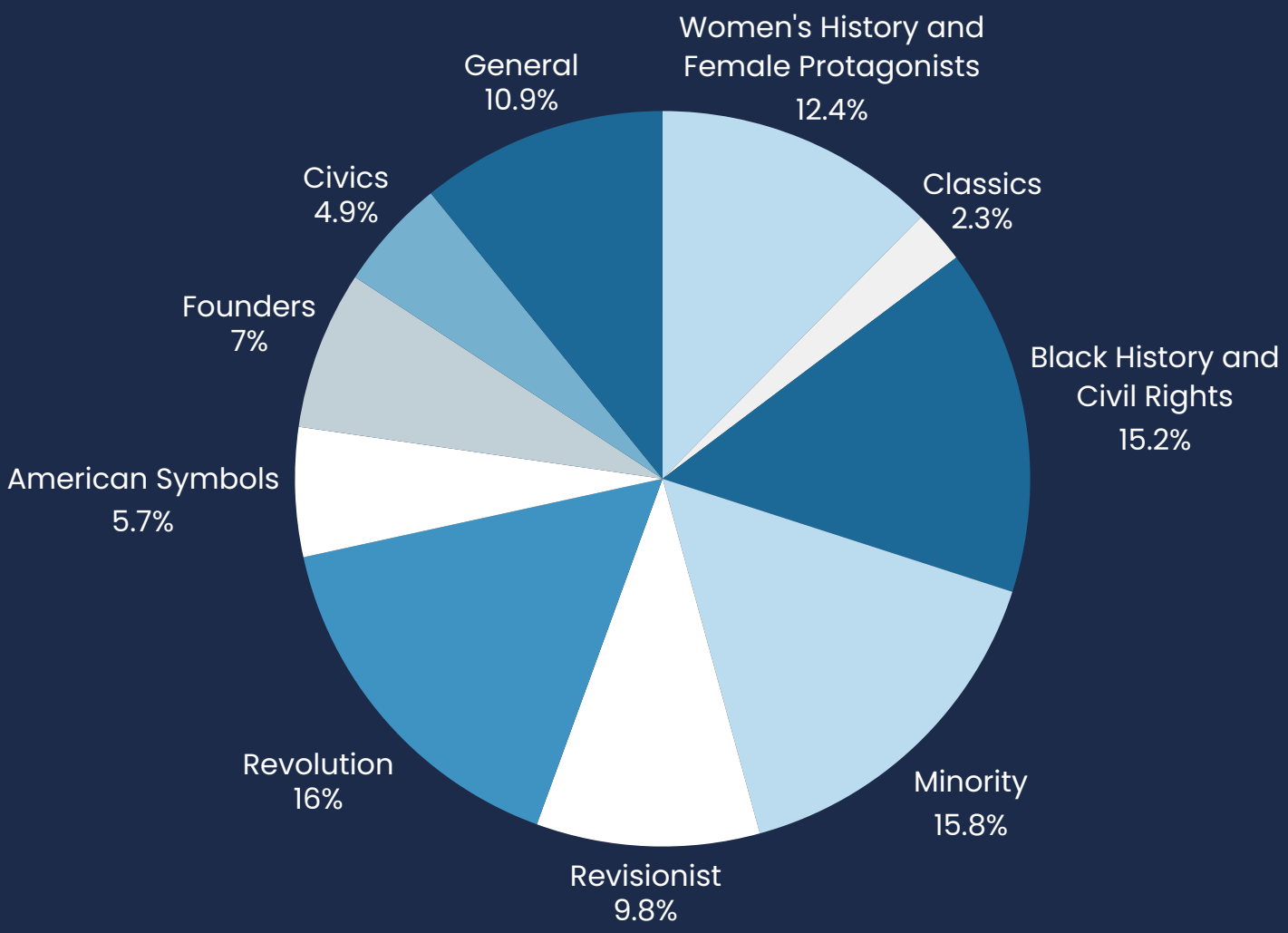
appears on at least 10 sources. Kate Messner's *History Smashers: The American Revolution* — tagline: "Myths! Lies! Secrets!" — appears on more lists than any other single title in the survey. Random House features a dedicated section called "Race to the Truth" in which every book is explicitly framed as: "Until now, you've only heard one side of the story."



Native American and Indigenous perspectives

appear on the majority of sources, including We Are Still Here, An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States for Young People, Colonization and the Wampanoag Story, and Stealing Little Moon: The Legacy of the American Indian Boarding Schools.





Percentage of key themes across the 300+ books recommended

WHAT IS MISSING

Faith

0 Titles

No books about the Pilgrims as religious refugees. No books about the Great Awakening. No books about religious liberty as a founding principle. No books about the faith lives of the founders. No books about the Black church's role in American history, even on lists heavy with Black history content. No books about faith-motivated abolitionists, even on lists featuring abolitionist narratives. No titles from any faith-based publisher.

In Their Own Words

The institutions' own editorial language reveals the posture behind the curation:

- **Random House** introduces its list as books about "the rich, diverse, **complicated** history of the United States."
- **Simon & Schuster** promises to "spotlight **protest and reform movements, voices long excluded** from the history."
- **School Library Journal** notes that its America 250 picks "primarily feature one aspect of America's history — that of **white colonists**" and immediately redirects readers to "more voices and stories."
- **PBS Books** frames its list around **"courage, complexity, and conviction"** — "complexity" signaling that a straightforward patriotic or faith-informed narrative is insufficient.
- **Chicago Public Library** titles its kids list "America at 250: Informational Books for Kids" — conspicuously avoiding the word **"celebrate,"** which it uses freely on adjacent adult lists.

The recurring editorial vocabulary — "complicated," "complex," "voices long excluded," "hidden," "untold," "unfinished" — reveals a shared institutional assumption: the primary purpose of America's 250th birthday is to complicate, correct, or expand the traditional narrative. Celebration is qualified. Faith is omitted.

Conclusion

This survey does not argue that all of these books should be removed from the list. Some of the titles represented across these 25+ sources include genuine literary merit, important historical perspectives, and age-appropriate content for young readers.

But when **300 books** are curated for a nation's birthday and **not one of them tells children about the role of faith** in that nation's founding, **something has been lost.**

Not by accident, but by a systemic blind spot so deeply embedded in the institutional curation ecosystem that it operates identically in red states and blue states, in major publishers and local libraries, in trade press and university education departments.

The first freedom Americans enshrined in their founding document was religious liberty. Two hundred and fifty years later, the institutions entrusted with telling children that story have written faith out of it.