

Voices of the 250th Interview with Bill Moran, 06-04-2026

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Bill Moran and Cliff Robinson conducted on June 4, 2026. The interview took place at the Princeton Public Library in Princeton, NJ as part of the Voices of Princeton Project's Voices of the 250th collection.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

TRANSCRIPT

Cliff Robinson: [00:00:01] My name is Cliff Robinson. Could you please state your name?

Bill Moran: [00:00:04] Bill Moran.

Cliff Robinson: [00:00:06] Bill, how did you come to Princeton, and how long have you been here?

Bill Moran: [00:00:09] Well, actually, I was born here, so that's how I came to be here.

Cliff Robinson: [00:00:14] Excellent, thank you. So, my first question related to the 250th is: thinking back to 1976hat do you remember most about the observance of the U.S. Bicentennial? Comparing that time to today, when we are approaching the 250th, how do those two milestones feel alike or different to you?

Bill Moran: [00:00:32] That's an easy one. What stands out just as sharp as when I experienced it in '76 was the reenactment of the Battle of Princeton was huge. I mean, it was just beyond. You know, they had hundreds and hundreds of reenactors. You know, British Hessians, Continental troops, guys in buckskin. You know, it was just–and it was snow on the ground, which sort of lent to the atmosphere. And I just remember that experience. I've seen more than one reenactment, but that was very special because of the 200th connotation. So, I got a lot out of that. I thought–we also my wife and I took a bunch of kids from one of the local reformatories. They gave them special dispensation, so we took them up in our station wagon,

and I think they got a little bit out of it. I hope, I hope they did. So yeah, that stands out. And then of course, regional things like the tall ship parade in New York and the fireworks, and just the general feeling of, "Wow, we made it 200 years." You know, pretty, pretty good milestone.

Cliff Robinson: [00:01:42] That's great. So comparing that time to today, when we are approaching the 250th, how do the milestones feel alike or different?

Bill Moran: [00:01:50] Yeah, it seems very different. I guess a lot of people are still excited or enthused about the 250th. But again, and even in the 200th, the American commercialism, you know, creeps into everything. It's all about, you know, selling your product, but still it has, it still has historical meaning for Americans. You know in this era it's a little different because–what's the old saying? The moral arc of the universe seems to be bent the wrong way right now. So, or bending the wrong way.

Cliff Robinson: [00:02:32] Okay, understood. So, what does the 250th anniversary of the United States mean to you personally? Does it feel like a significant milestone? Why or why not? What would make it more meaningful to you?

Bill Moran: [00:02:44] Well, you know, in some respects, it's just a number, but 250 is a pretty, pretty good milestone. You know, we're not–we haven't equaled the Roman record yet, or a few others, but at least you know it's the survival of a more or less democratic system that the people devised for themselves out of Enlightenment principles. That's my view, anyway. And we're surviving remarkably well, considered all the all the issues and problems, and not to

mention things like the Civil War, and on and on and on, but you know, this, that concept, the beacon on the hill, still kind of resonates. I think with a lot of Americans, we and you know people like, as you know, one of my favorites, Thomas Paine, said we can begin the world anew, and that's pretty much what I think about it.

Cliff Robinson: [00:03:42] Excellent. So, as you look around at how the 250th is being marked, whether it's here in Princeton, throughout the state, or nationally, what has caught your attention? Does any particular part stand out to you? How do you feel it should be observed?

Bill Moran: [00:03:58] Well, I don't see a whole lot, or haven't observed or noticed a whole lot. Although locally there are a lot of things going on in Trenton, because Trenton was historically important with the battle and so forth. And Princeton's going to again going to probably have a tremendous reenactment that would be in the new year, just past the new year, so I'm looking forward to that again to renew my memories of the 200th. At the national level, it's a little different story. You know, seems to be a couple competing ideas about what America is all about. So, it's kind of difficult to analyze what's going on at a national level.

Cliff Robinson: [00:04:51] Okay, so do you feel like the Revolution of 1776 is still relevant today, or is it a thing of the past? Are there ways in which it feels like an unfinished project?

Bill Moran: [00:05:02] Yeah, I think revolutions are always relevant. You know, they set an example, a historical record of what happened and why, and the fact that you can have a revolution sort of sets up the next stage. If you need another one, okay, it's justified. Or if you

can justify it and pull it off, you might get some good results. I don't know. I think we're a long way from any kind of. I mean, that that rhetoric's used a lot by politicians. You know, the Reagan revolution, the this revolution, the that revolution. But a real revolution is quite different, and with the American Revolution, it's just sort of incremental, I think, ever since the original.

Cliff Robinson: [00:05:52] Okay, thinking about 1776, 1976, and today, how do you see the political trajectory of the United States? What feels like progress to you, and what feels unfinished?

Bill Moran: [00:06:04] Well, again, we certainly made some progress for sure. The establishment of rights for women and non-white male people certainly has happened. The Civil Rights revolution, the Civil War. All these are milestones, which I think shows, you know, a good trajectory. But at the same time, there's always reaction. There's always a counter-revolutionary kind of movement. You know, you get the Civil War and Reconstruction, followed by, you know, an era of severe repression and deprivation of rights. So, you know that had to be adjusted again. So again, it's unfinished. It's never finished. I don't know if you, you'd want it to be finished.

Cliff Robinson: [00:07:00] Great. Okay. So as you imagine the country changing over the next 50 years, what kind of political future do you hope for? What concerns you when you think about the ideals of 1776: how do they show up or not in politics today?

Bill Moran: [00:07:13] Well, I've always had a vision of a more just, progressive, more democratic nation, society, world, and sometimes it seems to be evolving that way, and sometimes not. I mean, I see surveys that say there is less democracy around the world today than there was, so that's not a good–ha!–not a good trend, and you see right-wing and authoritarian governments and factions becoming more powerful, visible. That's never a good sign. My first election was for John Kennedy, 1960, and I was very hopeful then, you know, and felt really good about the way politics were progressing. You know, many, many years later, I'm not quite as hopeful, but still not ready to throw in the towel. You know.

Cliff Robinson: [00:08:17] Yeah, I understand. So, last question: Is there anything else that we haven't talked about but you wish to include? For example, are there stories about Princeton's past which you feel aren't well known enough?

Bill Moran: [00:08:30] Well, I'm not sure about that. Princeton goes back quite a ways, you know, it was founded by Quakers, I believe, seventeenth century. And it's you know we were the capital of the United States for one thing. A lot of people don't know that–that story. A lot of the founders hung out here, and the town had a large Tory faction. A lot of people don't know that. Of course, they disappeared after the war. They were gone, and there was a not enviable period of segregation in this town, which I–it was ending just as I was coming of age. So, I kind of–I saw it happen, you know. I saw the schools integrated. I saw businesses finally accept non-white people as customers, you know. Sold them a cup of coffee, that kind of thing, didn't require them to sit in the balcony of the movie theater anymore. So, maybe a lot of people don't know that story, but we should. We think of segregation, we think of the Deep

South, but it was everywhere. It was technically illegal in New Jersey, but–nobody cared about that, you know. So, that's a story that needs to be remembered. I think.

Cliff Robinson: [00:10:08] Okay. Well, thank you so much for doing the interview, and take care.

Bill Moran: [00:10:12] Okay. Thanks.

[END OF INTERVIEW]