

“Fireworks” *The birthday comes at an anxious moment in America’s history*

THE ECONOMIST, July 2nd 2026 (abridged)

From the start, 250 years ago, America’s founders believed their republic would shine out as an example to humanity. But they also feared that their experiment could collapse into disorder or tyranny. Slavery and xenophobia, corruption and civil war have all tested the republic even as America rose to become **the beacon of the free world**.

On July 4th Americans will celebrate their **semiquincentennial**. Far from succumbing to tyranny, America helped save the world from tyrants. Glorious disorder created a dynamism that has sustained America as a superpower. Yet this birthday comes at another anxious moment. Virtue is under threat and talk of decline is in the air. Public life is scarred by division, while America is dismantling much of the world order it created after 1945. Is this **retreat**—or renewal?

Many Americans worry that the separation of powers is degenerating into a White House-takes-all world. Congress was meant to be the leading branch of government, but vicious partisanship punishes compromise and gerrymandering rewards extremes. The Supreme Court is adding to the **might** of the executive.

America’s openness to immigrants has long been one of its greatest strengths. People of any race or **faith** can become American, with the promise that what they and their children can achieve is limited only by imagination and hard work.

But the American dream has **soured**. Parts of the MAGA movement want to restrict legal immigration as well as illegal immigration. As the share of Americans who call themselves “white” approaches 50%, some on the right want special status for “heritage Americans”. This is an ugly **throwback** to the racism that Americans rejected as part of their country’s moral and material progress.

Abroad, America is retreating from its values, too. Donald Trump is leading a **wrecking-ball revolution** against the institutions and alliances created after the second world war. Many Americans blame the global system for aiding China, hurting American workers and sending young soldiers to distant wars. America is consequently **throwing its weight around** like any other country chasing wealth and power. Freedom and democracy for foreigners are off the agenda. **Trade** has become a tool for extracting concessions; allies are increasingly seen as **dependants** to be exploited.

Many conclude that America is in decline. That strikes this newspaper as a grave **misreading**. America’s power remains immense—and could soon grow much greater. Look beyond its dysfunctional politics. Its artificial-intelligence companies are mobilising hundreds of billions of dollars to pursue technological dominance. If AI changes everything, as its champions predict, America could become extraordinarily powerful. Some of that strength will flow into its businesses and armed forces.

But awesome power carries awesome risks. Mr Trump has tainted public life with an ugly cynicism. AI-enhanced government could make executive power **overwhelming**. Concentrated wealth could **foster** a predatory elite. Partisanship, amplified by social media and gerrymandering, could become **entrenched**. Politicians might prove unable to manage the **upheaval** ahead.

America could also become more predatory abroad. If its abandonment of the project to promote liberty became permanent, other countries would copy it. Violent leaders might feel **emboldened** to conquer or **coerce** their neighbours. The world could descend into chaos.

But that future is not certain—or even likely. America’s dynamism gives it a capacity for reinvention. Pearl Harbour, Sputnik and Watergate all jolted the republic into recovery. Roused, Americans set about doing better. Change is coming because too much today is **unsustainable**. The social contract, financed by borrowing, cannot continue indefinitely. Mr Trump’s generation, too, will pass. The hope must be that voters decide that the parties’ sterile mutual contempt has become unsustainable as well.

As fireworks light up cities and towns across America, remember that **restlessness** is precisely what prevents the republic from sinking into stagnation. Its arguments and fights are part of the creative destruction that precedes renewal.

The founders would surely be worried today, as they were 250 years ago. Yet their great **insight** was to build their experiment on faith in the people. **Time and again**, that faith has been rewarded.

1. **Vocabulary** : translate the highlighted words and expressions into French

2. General comprehension:

- what type of article is it?
- what is it about?
- overall, is it optimistic or pessimistic about the USA and its future?