

[New Orleans Book Festival at Tulane University announces opening night with The Atlantic and 'America at 250' theme](#)

February 04, 2026 9:00 AM Aryanna Gamble
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The Atlantic Editor-in-Chief, Jeffrey Goldberg (right), in conversation with Anne Applebaum during the packed opening night session of the 2025 New Orleans Book Festival at Tulane University, held in McAlister Auditorium. (Photo by Kacie Fayard)

[The New Orleans Book Festival at Tulane University](#) has unveiled an opening-night lineup for 2026 that promises dynamic conversations that reach far beyond the stage.

In partnership with *The Atlantic*, the festival will open on Thursday, March 12, with a special keynote evening honoring the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States of America. The evening will bring together *The Atlantic's* Editor-in-Chief Jeffrey Goldberg (moderator), bestselling biographer Walter Isaacson, acclaimed filmmaker and storyteller Ken Burns, *Atlantic* Staff Writer and bestselling author Clint Smith and Annette Gordon-Reed, author and Pulitzer Prize-winning historian.

Together, these distinguished voices will examine the evolution of the American experience — our ideals, our challenges and our shared pursuit of progress — while reflecting on the enduring power of storytelling, history and journalism to define who we are and where we are headed. Several of these subjects were featured in Burns's PBS documentary series, *The American Revolution*, and in an ongoing *Atlantic* reporting project, as well as in a special issue of the magazine, "[The Unfinished Revolution](#)."

"*The Atlantic* is honored to return to the New Orleans Book Festival for an opening night that takes on a moment of extraordinary national significance," Goldberg said. "As the country approaches its 250th anniversary, we look forward to convening voices that can help us reflect on the American story — its triumphs, tensions and possibilities — and explore how ideas and journalism shape our democracy."

The 5th annual New Orleans Book Festival at Tulane University will take place March 12–15 on Tulane's uptown campus. The festival is free and open to the public. Registration is available on the [festival website](#), and a full schedule of events will be released in early March.

Additional authors, journalists and participants joining the 2026 lineup include Kiki Baker Barnes, Vincent Barraza; Ron Bechet; Neal Bodenheimer; David Brooks; Heddwen Brooks, PhD; Congressman Troy A. Carter, Jelagat Cheruiyot, PhD; Kenny Chesney; Anderson Cooper; Jeff Duncan; Karen Essex; Samantha Fleurinor; Tim Francis; Melissa Fuster; Dr. Veronica Gillispie-Bell; Holly Gleason; Dr. Sanjay Gupta; Maggie Hansen; Ibram X. Kendi; Kate D. Levin; Michael Lynton; Ti Martin; Gov. Wes Moore; Mayor Helena Moreno; Kevin Morris; Susan Morrison; Lesley-Ann Noel; Catherine Price; Sara Reardon; Ben Sandmel; Anna Rita Scott; Ayo Scott; Marguerite Sheffer; Evan Smith; Joshua L. Steiner; Emilie Taylor Welty; Brandon M. Terry; Xavier University President Reynold Verrett; Steve Vogel; and Bronwen Wyatt. The full author lineup is available [here](#).

“The New Orleans Book Festival is more than an event — it’s a literary odyssey that celebrates the power of storytelling,” said Walter Isaacson, festival co-chair and the Leonard A. Lauder Professor of American History and Values at Tulane University School of Liberal Arts. “As we approach America’s 250th anniversary, this opening night sets the tone for a festival that bridges generations, disciplines and perspectives. The written word becomes a catalyst for understanding, empathy and human connection.”

Beyond opening night, the 2026 festival will feature a robust slate of conversations connected to the “America 250” theme. Sessions will span history, politics, culture, economics and storytelling, moving from deeply local Louisiana perspectives to national reflections on democracy and civic life. Together, they will examine how the American experiment has been shaped by place, power, conflict and imagination and how literature continues to influence who we are and who we might become.

The popular culinary track also returns this year with panels featuring national and local chefs, writers and food leaders, including Edgar “Dook” Chase IV, John Currence, Kelly Jacques, Emeril Lagasse, E.J. Lagasse, Ti Martin, Ian McNulty, Jordan Salcito, Alon Shaya, Arvinder Vilku and Bronwen Wyatt, as well as restaurateur Cathy Whims.

Food offerings will grow as well, with local favorites including Barracuda Taco Stand, Coops Burgers, Crepes a la Cart, Francolini’s, French Truck Coffee, PJ’s Coffee and Saba, contributing to a lively and welcoming festival atmosphere. Expanded programming in the Hyatt Regency Festival Tent will feature live music throughout Friday and Saturday, including Brooks Drost Band, Da Lovebirds with Robin Barnes and Pat Casey, Kristin Diable and Jon Cleary. Saturday’s festivities will conclude with a musical celebration featuring Big Chief Bo Dollis Jr. and the Wild Magnolias starting at 5 p.m.

Following record-setting growth in 2025, the 2026 festival will expand its footprint to welcome more participants. The Avron B. Fogelman Arena in the Devlin Fieldhouse will be brought fully online as a premier venue, becoming the largest space within the festival footprint and significantly increasing capacity for marquee conversations.

The Berger Family Lawn will feature an expanded festival bookstore in partnership with Baldwin & Co. and Octavia Books, creating a vibrant hub for browsing.

Introduced last year as an intimate, immersive space, the Burgundy Room will expand this year, once again hosted by Cleo Wade and Nicole Richie, and offer relaxed, candid conversations that invite attendees to slow down, connect and experience the festival on a more personal level.

“Our fifth anniversary celebration will represent the readers, writers and literary community who have made this festival possible,” said festival co-chair Cheryl Landrieu. “Opening with a reflection on America at 250 invites us to consider how stories shape our shared future, while the rest of the weekend offers readers of all ages a joyful, welcoming space to connect through books.”

The festival concludes on Sunday, March 15, with Family Day at the Fest. Beginning at 10 a.m., families are invited to enjoy a full day of free programming, including children’s author readings, interactive performances, crafts and community literacy partners. New Orleans Saints head coach Kellen Moore and his wife, Julie, will serve as co-chairs of Family Day, welcoming New Orleans-area children and their families to a joyful day of exploring the magic of books and stories. FOX 8 morning news anchor Kelsey Davis will emcee the day’s activities.

The festival is free and open to the public thanks to the generous support of [donors](#), [media partners and friends of the festival](#). All events will take place on Tulane’s uptown campus.

For more information on the New Orleans Book Festival at Tulane University, visit bookfest.tulane.edu or follow the festival on [Facebook](#), [X](#) and [Instagram](#).

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