

Panel to explore Louisiana's impact on American history at Book Fest 2026

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Tulane's Mintz Professor in Architecture Richard Campanella will take part in the panel discussion "How Louisiana Shaped a Nation" at this year's New Orleans Book Festival at Tulane University.

As the United States approaches the 250th anniversary of its founding, the [New Orleans Book Festival at Tulane University](#) will invite attendees to consider the American story through both national and local lenses. Alongside panels showcasing national perspectives on U.S. history, this year's lineup of America 250 sessions will include scholars highlighting that history through a Louisiana lens.

"Louisiana differed from the rest of the nation in just about every way imaginable: demographically, culturally, linguistically, religiously, architecturally, even geographically," said [Tulane's Mintz Professor in Architecture Richard Campanella](#). He added that the state's location allowed Western, Southern and Caribbean cultures to converge under the umbrella of Louisiana culture.

"The assimilation of all that distinctiveness into the emerging American identity broadens the very notions of both 'American' as well as 'identity,'" he said.

In the panel, "How Louisiana Shaped a Nation," journalist and documentary filmmaker Jason Berry will moderate a conversation with Campanella; Freddi Williams Evans, an internationally recognized scholar and author of "Congo Square: African Roots in New Orleans"; and Ben Sandmel, a journalist, folklorist, drummer and producer who wrote the books "Zydeco!" and "Ernie K-Doe: The R&B Emperor of New Orleans."

The festival will kick off Thursday, March 12, with a special keynote evening marking the 250th anniversary. The event will feature The Atlantic's Editor-in-Chief Jeffrey Goldberg as moderator, biographer Walter Isaacson, filmmaker Ken Burns, The Atlantic staff writer and bestselling author Clint Smith and Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Annette Gordon-Reed.

The speakers will discuss the nation's history and its ongoing challenges. Several of the topics have been explored in Burns' PBS documentary series "The American Revolution," an ongoing reporting project by The Atlantic and a recent special issue of the magazine titled "The Unfinished Revolution." The Atlantic is the national media partner of this year's festival.