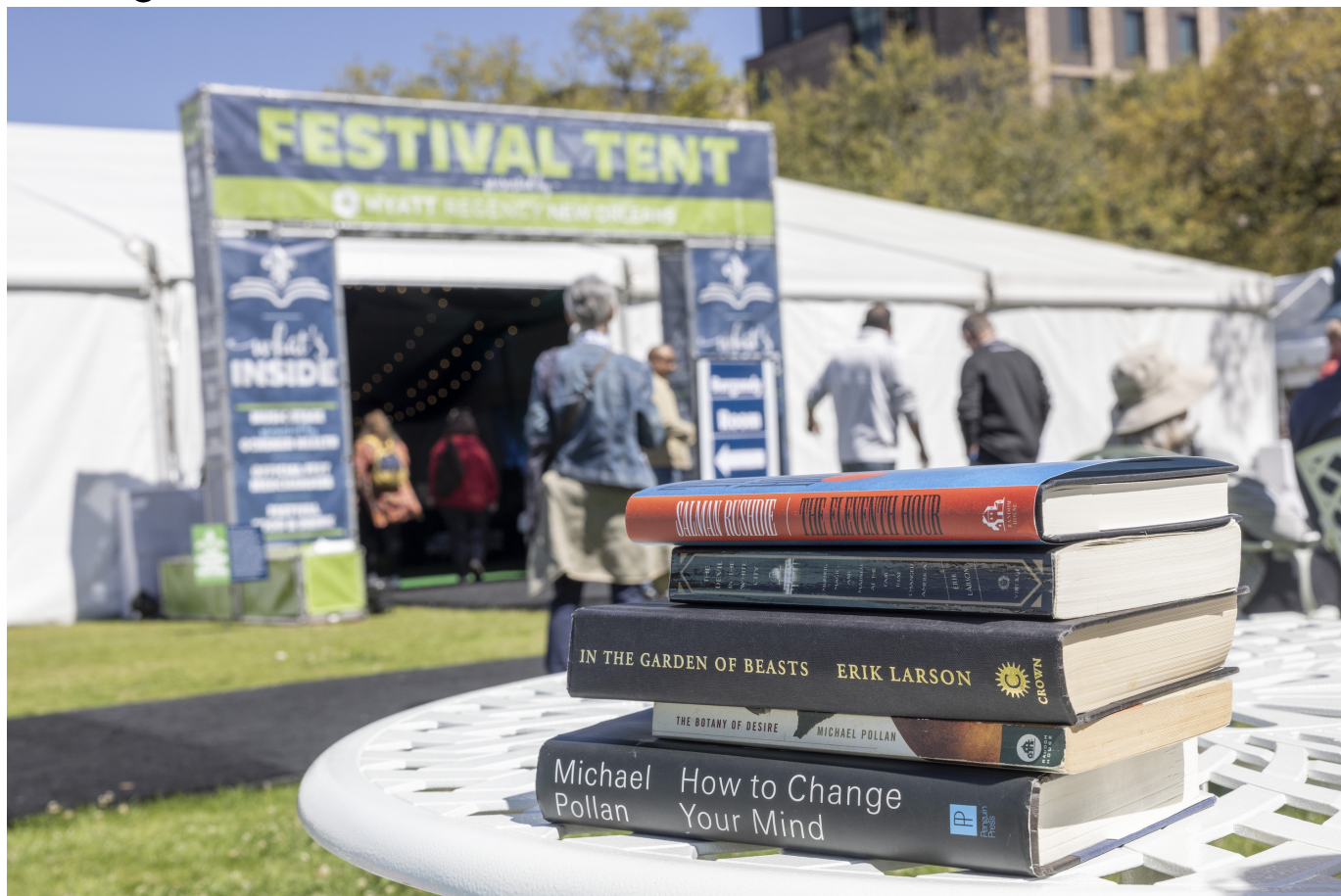


## [New Orleans Book Festival at Tulane University draws record crowds to celebrate books and ideas](#)

March 18, 2026 9:00 AM Barri Bronston  
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This year's New Orleans Book Festival at Tulane University attracted a record number of attendees, who gathered to hear celebrated authors, historians, journalists and cultural voices come together for conversations around the issues shaping the world today. (Photo by Ameliah Kolp)

Packed auditoriums, long book-signing lines and lively conversation filled Tulane's uptown campus last weekend as the [New Orleans Book Festival at Tulane University](#) attracted a record-breaking 20,000 attendees.

Over four days, [the free festival](#) — dubbed by President Michael A. Fitts as Mardi Gras for the Mind — brought together celebrated authors, historians, journalists and

cultural voices for conversations exploring the issues shaping the world today.

Now in its fifth year, the festival has quickly grown into one of the nation's most prominent literary gatherings, drawing audiences from across New Orleans and beyond.

"We call it the 'Mardi Gras for the Mind' because it's engaging across a wide variety of topics, but it's also fun," Fitts said. "The New Orleans Book Festival at Tulane University has reached a new level of scale and impact that is highly valued by authors and readers throughout the country, as well as here in New Orleans. This is what great universities do: they serve as places where big ideas are shared, debated and brought to life through meaningful conversation."

Over 250 authors, artists and storytellers gave festivalgoers the chance to hear from some of today's most influential writers and thinkers, including Tulane historian and the Leonard Lauder Professor of American History and Values, Walter Isaacson, who co-chaired the festival with Cheryl Landrieu.

"It's incredibly meaningful to see how much this event has grown and how deeply it has been embraced by our community," Landrieu said. "Seeing families, children and readers of all ages come together to celebrate the joy and magic of books is exactly why we created this festival, and keeping it free and accessible to everyone will always be at the heart of our mission."

Opening night of the festival featured two major discussions, the first of which included retired Gen. Stanley McChrystal and Isaacson in a conversation about leadership, teamwork and decision-making in complex situations. Drawing on decades of military experience, McChrystal spoke about the importance of trust and responsibility and the challenges leaders face when making difficult choices.

The evening continued with "America at 250," which examined the nation's past and future as the United States approaches its 250th anniversary. The conversation featured filmmaker Ken Burns, historian Annette Gordon-Reed, author Clint Smith and Isaacson in discussion with The Atlantic editor-in-chief Jeffrey Goldberg, on how storytelling, journalism and history shape Americans' understanding of their country.

Throughout the event, panelists explored cultural identity, storytelling, today's political landscape and the creative process behind bestselling novels and nonfiction works.

Among the weekend's most popular sessions were the two opening night panels along with conversations that included Burns, Isaacson, podcaster and actor Dax Shepard, author Salman Rushdie, CNN health reporter Dr. Sanjay Gupta and authors Michael Pollan and Michael Lewis.

Lines formed outside lecture halls as readers waited to hear from their favorite writers, while others gathered on the Berger Family Lawn and nearby festival spaces to browse books and merchandise, meet authors during signing sessions, listen to music and grab a bite to eat.



The festival offers attendees plenty of opportunities to connect over a shared passion for literature and thoughtful conversations on the most pressing issues of today. (Photo by Kenny Lass)

For some attendees, the festival has become an annual tradition. "It gets better every year," said Karen Strouse of Miami, who attended with husband Arthur for the

third time. “It’s the variety and quality of the speakers. It’s people you really want to hear from. When I saw the schedule I said, ‘We can’t not come.’ ”

Students were also a visible part of the festival experience, with some given the opportunity to meet authors in smaller, more intimate settings.

“Book Fest is my favorite event on Tulane’s campus,” said Will Tutwiler, a sophomore from Boston. “The opportunity to speak with and hear from so many authors and professionals is amazing.”

Beyond author conversations, the festival offered a lively campus atmosphere including an evening celebration on Saturday that featured crawfish and music by Big Chief Bo Dollis Jr. & the Wild Magnolias.

One of the weekend’s highlights was Family Day, which welcomed young readers and their families for a full day of programming dedicated to children’s literature and literacy.

This year marked the first time Family Day was given its own dedicated day, allowing festival organizers to expand programming and present several major author events at the Avron B. Fogelman Arena in Devlin Fieldhouse, one of the festival’s largest venues.

Families explored interactive storytelling sessions, book signings and hands-on activities, making the festival a destination not only for avid readers but also for the broader New Orleans community.

Festival organizers also gave special thanks to Honorary Family Day Co-Chairs, Saints head coach Kellen Moore and Julie Moore, who generously donated their time and enthusiasm to help make the day even more enjoyable for families and young readers.

Kellen Moore talked to youngsters about the joy of reading and brought with him recommendations from his own children, whose favorite book series include “The Berenstain Bears” and “The Boxcar Children.”

Among the messages he shared with youngsters: “Learn to read, then read to

learn.”