

Salem Athenæum

These Truths Discussion Series

All sessions meet at 7:00 p.m.
April 23, June 11, September 24, and December 3

Commemorate our 250th anniversary by exploring the founding principles of the United States.
Has the nation lived up to its founding “truths”? Let’s read and find out together!

April 23 at 7:00 p.m.

Part I — The Idea (1492–1799)

Chapters 1–4:

1. *The Nature of the Past* (pp. 3–30)
2. *The Rulers and the Ruled* (pp. 31–71)
3. *Of Wars and Revolutions* (pp. 72–108)
4. *The Constitution of a Nation* (pp. 109–152)

This section traces the origins of American civic identity, showing how political equality, natural rights, and popular sovereignty emerged amid colonization, slavery, and revolution. Readers learn how debates over governance and rights shaped foundational institutions and citizenship itself — critical context for thoughtful citizens today.

June 11 at 7:00 p.m.

Part II — The People (1800–1865)

Chapters 5–8:

5. *A Democracy of Numbers* (pp. 153–188)
6. *The Soul and the Machine* (pp. 189–231)
7. *Of Ships and Shipwrecks* (pp. 232–271)
8. *The Face of Battle* (pp. 272–310)

This part explores how the meaning of citizenship evolved as the nation expanded. Through debates over voting rights, immigration, reform movements, and the Civil War, it shows how ordinary people and excluded groups fought to expand democracy, helping readers understand how civic inclusion changed through conflict and action.

September 24 at 7:00 p.m.

Part III — The State (1866–1945)

Chapters 9–12

9. *Of Citizens, Persons, and People* (pp. 311–360)
10. *Efficiency and the Masses* (pp. 361–420)
11. *A Constitution of the Air* (pp. 421–471)
12. *The Brutality of Modernity* (pp. 472–520)

Here the book looks at how government expanded in response to industrialization, immigration, inequality, and crisis. Through the Progressive Era, the Great Depression, and World Wars, Lepore shows how government structures and civic expectations shifted, helping citizens think about the role of public institutions in everyday life.

December 3 at 7:00 p.m.

Part IV — The Machine (1946–2016)

Chapters 13–16:

13. *A World of Knowledge* (pp. 521–588)

14. *Rights and Wrongs* (pp. 589–645)

15. *Battle Lines* (pp. 646–718)

16. *America, Disrupted* (pp. 719–784)

This section connects postwar politics, civil rights, media, and technology. It shows how television, polling, and later digital media transformed public discourse and civic engagement, helping readers understand how information environments shape democratic participation and public trust.

Epilogue: The Question Addressed (pp. 785–790)

Lepore returns to the book’s central question: Has America lived up to its founding “truths”? By revisiting how ideas, people, and institutions have struggled with that promise, the epilogue gives readers a framework for thinking about their own roles as citizens.

Andrew Darien is Associate Dean for the College of Arts & Sciences at Salem State University, where he has taught as a history professor since 2004. He specializes in modern United States history and oral history. He is the author of *Becoming New York’s Finest: Race, Gender and the Integration of the NYPD, 1935-1980*, and *Building the Sacred and the Progressive: A History of Temple Sinai in Brookline*. He has been the project director for *Student, Citizen, and Soldier*, which has recorded and shared dozens of interviews with college veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. He most recently completed an oral history project to document the queer history of Lynn through a series of gay and lesbian bars going back to the early 20th century. The American Association of State and Local History awarded Darien and United Lynn Pride the Corey Award for the best grassroots public history project in 2025.