

The Idea of America Seminar

February 15-18, 2019

Aspen, CO

The Idea of America seminar will undertake a thoughtful review of important documents that have substantially defined our nation's ideals and civic culture, beginning with the Declaration of Independence.

The seminar proceeds from the premise that America from its birth has been substantially defined not by geography or ethnicity, but rather by ideals of liberty, equality and the rule of law. While the achievement of these principles, at the time of our nation's founding, was obviously limited, the broad aspiration to more fully realize these ideals has arguably been the most powerful force in our nation's history. Whatever our differences, often profound, and despite our nation's serious flaws, this philosophical heritage of our exceptional nation remains a source of inspiration and is essential to the American identity.

For various reasons, including increasing political polarization, declining participation in civic associations, limited knowledge of our nation's history and eroding confidence in our national institutions, the appeal of the fundamental principles of liberal democracy can no longer be taken for granted.

Our objective with this program is twofold:

- 1) Through the examination of these texts, we will seek to renew and deepen our common understanding of our nation's founding principles, and perhaps attain as well a fuller understanding of the character of America and its future.
- 2) We will also explore together opportunities across America to advance broader public understanding and appreciation of these ideals, which ultimately bind us together as one nation.

The program will begin at 4 pm on Friday, February 15th and conclude at noon on Monday, February 18th. A brief set of materials for discussion in the seminar will be circulated to participants approximately 3-4 weeks before the seminar. Pre-readings include the Declaration of Independence, as well as selections from *The Federalist Papers*, the Bill of Rights, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, and Abraham Lincoln, and including more contemporary sources, ranging from Eleanor Roosevelt and Martin Luther King to Ronald Reagan. Additional optional readings may also be recommended.

Seminar Moderators:

J. Russell Muirhead is Robert Clements Professor of Democracy and Politics at Dartmouth College. His book *A Lot of People Saying: The New Conspiracism and the Assault on Democracy* (with Nancy L. Rosenblum) will be published by Princeton University Press in the spring.

Diana Schaub is professor of political science at Loyola University Maryland. She teaches and writes on a wide range of issues in political philosophy and American political thought. Among other works, she is the co-editor of *What So Proudly We Hail: America's Soul in Story, Speech, and Song*.

Todd Breyfogle is Director of Seminars for the Aspen Institute. He has published and lectured widely on the great books, political philosophy, theology, literature, and liberal education.