

HOT-BUTTON HISTORY

From the fight over gun control to the resurgence of “fake news,” the Minnesota Historical Society’s History Forum lectures bring a ripped-from-the-headlines urgency to the historic ideas that have shaped America.

TV pundits trying to make sense of today’s political moment tend to fall back on such phrases as “unprecedented” and “never before seen,” but the loyal season-ticket holders who never miss the Minnesota Historical Society’s popular History Forum lecture series know better.

“One of my goals for this series is to give people the historical perspective that reminds us that, ‘No, this isn’t the first time this has happened in our country,’” says Danielle Dart, the MNHS public programs specialist who runs the series, which celebrates its 15th anniversary this year. “Especially during an election year, when everything feels so urgent, having that connection to history allows you to take a step back and say, ‘We’ve been here before, but how were the conversations different? What were the motivations? How did we get through it?’ I don’t believe history repeats itself, but it does loop back to these debates and conversations we’ve been having since time immemorial.”

This season’s History Forum lecture topics provide a powerful case in point, covering hot-button issues from the rise of the Ku Klux Klan and anti-immigration movements to the long-simmering rivalry between the United States and Russia. An engaged audience of lifelong learners has a hand in selecting the lecture themes and the historians they most want to hear from year to year. These audience members come well prepared with questions.

“The idea that people will turn out on a Saturday to hear a lecture about American history says so much about what’s going on at the Minnesota Historical Society and, by extension, Minnesota,” says Boston College historian Heather Cox Richardson, who explored the history of the Republican Party in October, her fourth visit to the History Forum series since its start in 2004. “There’s a shared culture and shared sense that the past is important. I always say it’s my favorite gig in the country.”

—Laura Billings Coleman



“Fake news” started trending on Google just before the 2016 presidential election, but debates about partisan media go all the way back to the Gilded Age, a topic that Loyola University historian Michelle Nickerson will explore at the next History Forum lecture on January 12, 2019. For additional information about upcoming lectures, including “The US and Russia, 1917 to 2017” and “The Myth of the Religious Founding,” visit the Featured Events section on the Minnesota Historical Society’s home page at MNHS.org. Ticket prices are \$16 for nonmembers; current Minnesota Historical Society members receive a 20 percent discount.



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