

UNC Chapel Hill Dept of History, UNC Press and UNC System Offer Free Digital Access to Foundations of American Democracy

Prize-winning UNC historians trace 250 years of American and North Carolina democracy in a new book—free digital edition available statewide via NC LIVE.

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“

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*Peter Hans, UNC System
President*

September 18, 2025 – To support the University of North Carolina System’s new [“Foundations of American Democracy”](#) graduation requirement, prize-winning historians at UNC Chapel Hill have created a new reader of foundational documents from American and North Carolina history, in partnership with UNC Press.

The volume, [“Foundations of American Democracy: A Critical Documents Reader”](#), has been released in print and digital editions. And with support from the UNC System, the volume will be available for free to students and faculty

across the statewide public university system, K-12 teachers and students, community colleges, and public libraries through a [free digital edition](#) on NC LIVE.

Studying the nation’s founding documents—and understanding their historical context—offers vital insight into today’s debates over governance and democracy. Foundations of American Democracy traces 250 years of democratic thought through twenty-one key texts, from the Declaration of Independence to the Supreme Court’s Brown v. Board of Education decision. The volume also includes key documents from North Carolina history, like the 1776 state constitution.

Each chapter pairs a primary document with a concise introduction, discussion questions, and suggestions for further reading, placing classics such as the Federalist Papers and the Emancipation Proclamation alongside lesser-known works that expand our understanding of America’s democratic experiment.

“The Press was eager to support a publishing opportunity to take cutting edge scholarship

originating within the department of history at Chapel Hill and make it broadly available to students across the state,” said UNC Press Spangler Family Director, John Sherer.

Developed as a core resource for UNC System courses in American democracy, the volume features contributions from eleven UNC–Chapel Hill historians, including editors W. Fitzhugh Brundage, William B. Umstead Professor of History; Kathleen DuVal, Carl W. Ernst Distinguished Professor of History; Joseph T. Glatthaar, Stephenson Distinguished Professor of History; Miguel La Serna, Department Chair and Bowman & Gordon Gray Distinguished Term Professor; and Sophia Howells, administrative associate in the Department of History.

“This was a team effort from beginning to end,” said Miguel La Serna, chair of UNC–Chapel Hill’s History Department. “The fact that so many faculty, staff, and students dropped everything to make this resource available speaks to the powerful role that history and the public humanities can play in educating students and the general public about issues that matter to us all.”

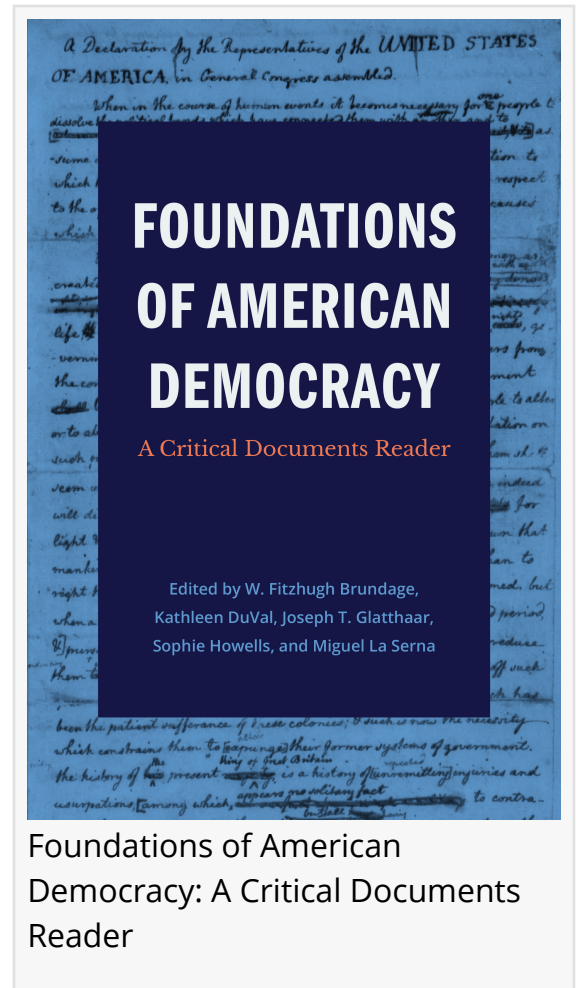
“Our state’s public universities have always embraced their role of educating students to become thoughtful citizens,” said UNC System President Peter Hans. “The Foundations reader is a great resource for understanding our shared history and our shared responsibility for shaping American democracy.”

To mark the release, UNC Press and the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources will host “Teaching the Foundations of American Democracy” on Wednesday, October 1, 2025, from 5:30–7:00 p.m. at the State Archives Auditorium, 109 E. Jones Street, Raleigh. Part of America 250 NC, the free public program will feature a panel with historians Kathleen DuVal, W. Fitzhugh Brundage, and Joseph T. Glatthaar, moderated by Dr. Darin Waters, Deputy Secretary for the Office of Archives and History. Foundational documents from the State Archives will also be on display.

About UNC Press

Founded in 1922 as the first university press in the South, the University of North Carolina Press advances the research, teaching, and public service missions of a great public university by publishing work that makes a lasting impact in both the academy and the wider world.

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