

Topical Seminar  
Friday, February 5 at 1:30 pm on Zoom  
From the Lewes, Delaware Library

Registration for the sessions are not necessary. Simply click on the following link roughly 5 minutes before the session starts.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87270373551?pwd=WFd6SUMyeXZ0dGNtUlcvc1pLbmVBdz09>

On Friday February 5, we are going to be discussing :**The Role of Myth in our Current Political Polarity**. To prepare, please read the articles by Frum ([Is America Still the ‘Shining City on a Hill’? - The Atlantic](#)), Finkel et al (<http://pcl.stanford.edu/research/2020/finkel-science-political.pdf> ). and Paul Blumenthal “Trump’s ‘Make America Great Again’ Myth Reaches Its Catastrophic Conclusion.” [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/trump-make-america-great-again-riot\\_n\\_5ff8dc13c5b691806c490ecd?ncid=APPLENEWS00001](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/trump-make-america-great-again-riot_n_5ff8dc13c5b691806c490ecd?ncid=APPLENEWS00001)

**From the David Frum article:**

“Because America was based on articulate texts by which it could judge itself, Macleish wrote to an agreeing [Perry] Miller, ‘An American leader has the prophet’s role to play as well, or should.’”

**From the Finkel et al article:**

“Whereas the foundational metaphor for tribalism is kinship, the foundational metaphor for political sectarianism is religion, which evokes analogies focusing less on genetic relatedness than on strong faith in the moral correctness and superiority of one’s sect.”

“As Americans have grown more receptive to consuming information through a partisan lens, the media ecosystem has inflamed political sectarianism.”

“Politicians...have unambiguously polarized recently on ideological grounds.”

“The ideological divergence of political elites contributes to political sectarianism, especially as these individuals increasingly use disciplined messaging to discuss their preferred topics in their preferred manner.”

**From the Blumenthal article:**

“A political myth is a narrative cast in dramatic form that provides a practical explanation of present events to a specific group at a time or place.”

“‘Make America Great Again’ is an apocalyptic, or eschatological, myth. It is a myth foretelling a great and cataclysmic future event where deliverance will arrive through the exertion and sacrifice of the believers.”

**Please consider the following questions for the seminar discussion:**

1. “We propose here a superordinate construct, political sectarianism—the tendency to adopt a moralized identification with one political group and against another. Whereas the foundational metaphor for tribalism is kinship, the foundational metaphor for political sectarianism is religion, which evokes analogies focusing less on genetic relatedness than on strong faith in the moral correctness and superiority of one’s sect.” In what ways do you agree or disagree with Finkel et al.’s assertion that the foundational metaphor for sectarianism in politics is religion?
2. Using the Frum article’s discussion of the difference between “shining city on a hill” versus “city on the hill.” Discuss how this religious aspect provides a forum wherein mythological language is effective politically? Is it reasonable to make the point, alluded to in the Frum article, that the foundation of the American system of governance is based upon a mythology?
3. Blumenthal states “A political myth is a narrative cast in dramatic form that provides a practical explanation of present events to a specific group at a time or place.” He cites several examples. In the context of intellectual (not experiential) understanding. Explain whether your own interest in politics is based in a mythology and what is it?
4. Finkel et al. write that “Political sectarianism consists of three core ingredients: othering—the tendency to view opposing partisans as essentially different or alien to oneself; aversion—the tendency to dislike and distrust opposing partisans; and moralization—the tendency to view opposing partisans as iniquitous....These three trends—identity alignment, the rise of partisan media, and elite ideological polarization—have contributed to radically different sectarian narratives about American society and politics.” Given our discussion today, is it possible to develop a more universally useful myth that a greater plurality of citizens could rally around and what could that be?

Prepare by David and Aram