

Between Barbie and the Atomic Oppenheimer: Truth, Lies, and Denialism in Contemporary America.

As the polarization of American society in the 21st century demonstrates, the power of myth today is as great as it's always been—echoing the great myths that drove the European settlers in the early centuries. From their beginnings, Euro-Americans have been willing to defend their myths, to die for them, and to kill others for denying them. And they still are. This talk will explore the ongoing necessity of myths and symbols in America, and the psychological power they continue to hold in a society that is at war with itself, where diversity has no room for homogeneity and homogeneity has no room for diversity. Is polarization inevitable? Are we yet again living through the return of the eternal myth? Are these divisions vital to America's creativity as a society? Or has the struggle to control the myths of America reached the point where the core of society has disintegrated and the once unifying symbols lie in ruins and confusion before the brute facts of disorder and chaos, of fire and flood? Is it time for the ultimate Jeremiad, or is the Jeremiad the tedious broken record of American society? And worse yet, for those who would be the saving remnant, what is left for the university and for the humanities in a society that has marginalized the intellectual and cast suspicion on the expert, a society that is torn between a vision of Barbie and a vision of the atomic Oppenheimer?