

Understand Eastern USA

EASTERN USA TODAY 610

Same-sex marriage, health-care reform and gun laws are hot-button topics; classic films and books offer further insight.

HISTORY 612

Native Americans, colonists, revolutionaries, civil warriors, Reconstructionists, New Dealers and civil rights fighters have all shaped the region.

THE WAY OF LIFE 622

Learn about the local culture through lifestyles, immigration, religion and sports.

REGIONAL CUISINE..... 626

Don't know your clam bake from cheesesteak, or gumbo from chowder? Get the lowdown on regional eats and drinks.

ARTS & ARCHITECTURE..... 630

Literature, film, theater, painting and architecture provide a window into the region's identity.

MUSIC 633

Blues, jazz, country, folk, rock and hip-hop all morphed out of the eastern USA, in all their beauty and dissonance.

LANDSCAPES & WILDLIFE..... 636

Alligators, whales, manatees and moose are among the creatures sharing the landscape.

Eastern USA Today

A historic ruling by the Supreme Court legalized gay marriage – this on the heels of another high court ruling on health care, a pivotal legacy of President Obama. Meanwhile, mass shootings continue with scary regularity, prompting debates on gun control. And income inequality keeps raising its head across the landscape.

Best in Print

To Kill a Mockingbird (Harper Lee; 1960) Pulitzer winner about racism in Depression-era Alabama.

A Confederacy of Dunces (John Kennedy Toole; 1980) Pulitzer winner about a New Orleans misfit questing for a job.

Freedom (Jonathan Franzen; 2010) Follows a complex, troubled family living in modern-day Minnesota and New York City.

Redeployment (Phil Klay, 2014) National Book Award winner about soldiers and veterans dealing with the Iraq War.

Best on Film

Gone with the Wind (directed by Victor Fleming; 1939) Civil War-era saga of the South.

Mr Smith Goes to Washington (directed by Frank Capra; 1939) Jimmy Stewart gets a crash course in DC politics and corruption.

The Untouchables (directed by Brian De Palma; 1987) Eliot Ness takes down Al Capone in gangster-era Chicago.

12 Years a Slave (directed by Steve McQueen, 2013) A free African American man is kidnapped and sold into slavery in 1841.

A Rainbow Nation

No one who witnessed the Stonewall Riots – which sparked the gay liberation movement in 1969 – could have imagined that he or she would live to see the day when gay marriage would become legal in the United States. Yet on June 26, 2015, that's exactly what happened when the US Supreme Court ruled that all states must recognize same-sex marriage licenses. The historic ruling was the culmination of a long legal battle by gay rights advocates, and there was much euphoria on the streets. Major sites like the Empire State Building, Cinderella's Castle at Disney World – and even the White House – lit up their facades in rainbow colors, in proud support of the ruling. A Gallup poll after the verdict found that nearly 60% of Americans supported same-sex marriage, with some eight in 10 young adults favoring gay marriage.

Health Care for All

The ruling on same-sex marriages came just days after another important ruling. This one related to the Affordable Care Act (ACA), President Obama's program to extend health care through subsidies to millions of uninsured Americans. The court upheld key provisions of the law (the second time the Supreme Court had ruled on it), though ongoing threats to the law remain. Since 2011, Congress has tried (unsuccessfully) to repeal it more than 50 times.

Despite congressional obstructionism, the program has allowed more than 16 million uninsured Americans to obtain coverage. Republican critics of the program claim Obamacare would kill jobs and cripple the US economy – a claim Obama refuted, saying that instead of hurting the economy, the ACA had actually provided a boost. In 2015, Health and Human Services Secretary Sylvia Burwell announced that hospitals had saved