

# 1776-2026: Visions of Freedom

## EAAS 36th Biennial Conference

### Bologna September 1-4, 2026

<https://site.unibo.it/visions-of-freedom/en>

#### Call for Panels and Papers

In the introduction to his book *The Story of American Freedom* (1999), Eric Foner wrote: “Americans’ love of liberty has been represented by poles, caps, and statues, and acted out by burning stamps and draft cards, running away from slavery, and demonstrating for the right to vote. If asked to explain or justify their actions, public or private, Americans are likely to respond, ‘It’s a free country’”. Published at the dawn of the new millennium, this statement poses a lasting challenge, at once historical, cultural, literary and political: what does the idea of *freedom* here imply? What do a series of images mean, considering that they can be appropriated by different if not opposing perspectives? How many *visions* of freedom have been pursued, accomplished, abused or exploited in the past 250 years? EAAS 2026 intends to address these questions, investigating the ever-changing reality of the United States.

The Declaration of Independence (1776) famously recognized three main unalienable rights - Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. Indeed, after pointing out the “tyranny” of the British Crown, the Declaration described the subjects of the colonies as “free people,” deeming the ruler “unfit,” while urging the Colonies to become “free and independent States.” The newly acquired freedom granted the new federated States the power to levy war, sign peace treaties, contract alliances, establish commerce, paving the way to future colonial/imperialist projects. Since the Revolution, pundits and politicians have celebrated the exceptional character of American freedom (and empire), which they interpreted as a pioneering achievement, capable of inspiring other nations, contributing through their example to the larger cause of “liberty” and “democracy” around the world. From this moment onward, American cultural productions, literature, visual art and film have constituted a precious output to observe, map and question this national mythmaking, each time celebrating or problematizing the nation’s ability to hold on to its promises and premises: from the transcendentalists to the masters of American Renaissance, from the novels and pamphlets of the Gilded Age, to the voices emerging from many margins (African Americans, women, Indigenous people, Asian Americans, among others). American artists of all genres and disciplines have contributed to redefine the very idea of American freedom.

Despite the importance granted to both freedom and liberty, since that beginning, the US articulation of freedom has been exclusive, as gender, race, religion, and class have determined who could benefit from such unalienable rights and in what manner. Notably, in different ways, women, Black and Indigenous people would not be granted the rights promised by the Constitution, and neither the 13th (abolition of slavery), nor the 14th amendments (right to citizenship) passed soon after the Civil War brought about a truly equal and just society. The promises of citizenship granted by the Constitution were quickly

jeopardized. Racial divide was complicated by industrialization, urbanization, and Jim Crow. While class conflicts sometimes led to outbreaks of violence.

Despite such evident contradictions between the universal ideals professed and the law, the centrality of freedom as a defining characteristic of US national identity has been confirmed and renewed by its constant retooling for diverse propaganda purposes. “The land of the free, the home of the brave” is an identity statement proudly sang by a variety of audiences; yet increasingly during the 20th century, it was one that was consistently reappropriated by marginalized groups, as well as by counter-cultural narratives, social movements and discourse, to question the nation’s founding ideals in light of evolving and complex international scenarios. The visions of (American) freedom were problematized after 9/11, affecting not only politics inside and outside the nation, but also the rhetoric of the nation’s ideals, in turn questioning the solidity, as well as the actual meaning of *American democracy*. “How do we imagine and struggle for a democracy that does not spawn forms of terror, that does not spawn war, that does not need enemies for its sustenance? [...] How do we imagine a democracy that does not thrive on this racism, that does not thrive on homophobia, that is not based on the rights of capitalist corporations to plunder the world’s economic and social and physical environments?” asked Angela Davis in *The Meaning of Freedom and Other Difficult Dialogues* (2012). These questions are even more urgent today in the frame of a growing democratic backsliding, and considering the threat posed by the illiberal regimes around the world.

EAAS 2026 invites scholars to address the above by investigating the role that freedom played/plays in the conceptualization of the United States as a real and an imagined community. Possible topics include but are not limited to:

- (American) Freedom / American Liberty
- Freedom, Peace, War
- “Land of the Free, Home of the Brave”: Freedom & Militarism
- The Rhetoric(s) of Freedom: Then, Now, Next
- Systemic Freedom and/or Systemic Slavery
- Academic Freedom
- Freedom of Speech, Free Will, Censorship, Dissent
- Freedom, Media, Communication
- Technology and Freedom (as in Printing, Propaganda and the Dissemination of Ideals)
- Freedom/Unfreedom and Digital Media (AI, Language Models, Algorithmic Biases, Data Collections, Open Access, Open Sources)
- Freedom of Movement, Immigration & Mobility
- Freedom, Democracy, Security, Detention

- Economic Freedom (and Inequality), Consumerism, the Market
- Individual Freedom, Societal Wellbeing
- Freedom & Race and Ethnicity
- Indigenous Perspectives on Freedom: Sovereignty and Resistance
- Freedom, Labor & Social Movements
- The Limits/Borders of Freedom
- Freedom of Choice (Euthanasia, Abortion, Stem Cell Research, etc.)
- Freedom from Fear & National Security
- Freedom and Human Rights
- Religious Freedom, Conscience Claims, Tolerance
- Freedom, Federalism, Political Institutions (Presidency, Courts, etc.)
- Freedom & (National) Sovereignty
- Freedom in Art and Literature
- Freedom and Education
- Women and Freedom
- Teaching Freedom
- Freedom and Sustainability *or* Climate Change as a Challenge to National and Global Freedoms
- Health as Freedom (Disease, Epidemics, and Medicine) and Freedom from Illness (Public Health and Access to Care)
- Freedom and the Frontier: Expansion, Indigenous Displacement, Settler Colonialism, and Indigenous Sovereignty
- Freedom and the Family
- Gender and Sexual Freedom
- LGBTQIA+ Interpretations of Freedom
- Freedom: Global Perspectives and Legacies (e.g. Anti-colonial Movements and Comparative Freedoms)
- The commemoration, contestation, and denial of American values and rights of freedom
- The use and abuse of the American Civil Religion in freedom discourses

**Scientific Board:** UNIBO: Raffaella Baritono, Matteo Battistini, Elena Lamberti, Giacomo Manzoli, Mattia Arioli, Chiara Patrizi, Angela Santese. AISNA: Andrea Carosso. EAAS: Kate Dossett.

**Organizing committee:** Raffaella Baritono, Martina Basciani, Matteo Battistini, Elena Lamberti, Mattia Arioli, Federico Gabriele Ferretti, Chiara Patrizi, Angela Santese, Paolo Viganò

### **Conference Format**

EAAS 2026 will be held primarily in-person. We will, however, reserve a limited number of slots for online panels. These panels must be wholly online (all presenters and the chair will participate online). If you wish your panel to be delivered wholly online, please explain briefly when making your submission why this needs to be the case and/or why the panel would benefit from this form of delivery. Individual paper submissions will not be accepted for online delivery.

### **Submission instruction**

IMPORTANT: All proposals are to be sent starting **from August 1st** through the link posted on [this platform](#): **Deadline October 15.**

Panel proposals (three to four presenters and a Chair - with the possibility of one person fulfilling both roles) are strongly encouraged and will be given priority. Proposals must include:

- 350-word overview of the panel theme
- 350-word abstracts for each paper
- 150-word author biography

Individual proposals must include:

- 350-word abstracts for each paper
- 150-word author biographies

In addition, EAAS 2026 will include a poster exhibition presenting thematic explorations in a different format, also proofed and selected. Posters will be on display online (conference website) and in one of the conferences venues. Poster proposals must include:

- 350-word poster rational
- Graphic Pre-view (Format: pdf)
- 150-word author(s) biography/biographies

## **IMPORTANT DATES**

- Abstract Submission from **August 1, 2025**
- Deadline: **October 15, 2025**
- Notification of Acceptance/Rejection: **December 15, 2025**
- Registration deadline for authors: **April 30, 2026**
- Conference Dates: **September 1-4, 2026**

For additional information please contact: [visionsoffreedom@unibo.it](mailto:visionsoffreedom@unibo.it)