BOLOGNA
1-4 SEPTEMBER

1776
VISIONS OF FREEDOM
2026

36th Biennial
EAAS Conference

CONFERENCE AT A GLANCE

Tuesday 1

EAAS POSTGRADUATE AND ECR NETWORK
14:30 - 16:00

EAAS BOARD MEETING
09:30 - 16:00

REGISTRATION
14:00 - 20:00

WELCOME ADDRESSES, CONFERENCE OPENING & EAAS GENERAL MEETING
17:00 - 18:00

KEYNOTE
18:00 - 19:30

WELCOME COCKTAIL
19:30 - 21:30

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PARALLEL SESSIONS
09:00 - 10:30

PARALLEL SESSIONS
11:00 - 12:30

PARALLEL SESSIONS
13:30 - 15:00

PARALLEL SESSIONS
15:30 - 17:00

KEYNOTE
17:30 - 19:00

17:30 - 19:00
KEYNOTE

Friday 4

PARALLEL SESSIONS
08:30 - 10:00

PARALLEL SESSIONS
10:15 - 11:45

KEYNOTE
12:00 - 13:30

CLOSING REMARKS
13:30 - 13:45

Tuesday, September 1st

DAMSLab - Dipartimento delle Arti
Piazzetta P. P. Pasolini, 5/b

EAAS POSTGRADUATE AND ECR NETWORK

14:30 - 16:00

Auditorium

EAAS BOARD MEETING

09:30 - 16:00

Sala Seminari

REGISTRATION

14:00 - 20:00

WELCOME ADDRESSES, CONFERENCE OPENING & EAAS GENERAL MEETING

17:00 - 18:00

KEYNOTE SPEECH: DESMOND KING

BAKED IN:
POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND THE AMERICAN NATION

CHAIR: RAFFAELLA BARITONO

18:00 - 19:30

WELCOME COCKTAIL

19:30 - 21:30

Wednesday, September 2nd

09:00 – 10:30

- WESTERING IN/ THE DISCIPLINE; OR, WHY THE AMERICAN WEST MATTERS MORE THAN EVER
- CONTESTED FREEDOM: RACE, SECURITY, AND THE CARCERAL BORDER
- FEELING FREE(DOM): AFFECTS AND/OF LIBERTY IN US LITERATURE
- "WHY 1963?": REIMAGINING RIGHTS AND PROTESTS IN A WATERSHED YEAR
- MOBILITY IN CONTEMPORARY BLACK ATLANTIC WRITING
- WHOSE FREEDOM, WHOSE WEST?
- FREEDOM, UNIVERSITY AND CRITICAL THINKING
- REFLECTIONS FROM AMERICAN LITERATURES: CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE THREAT TO VISIONS OF FREEDOM
- PATHOGRAPHIES AND THE POLITICS OF FREEDOM: WOMEN'S BODIES, ILLNESS, AND INEQUALITY

11:00 – 12:30

- ALIENATION AND FREEDOM AT MIDCENTURY
- PRISONS IN CALIFORNIA
- ATLANTICS: FREEDOM NARRATIVES IN ENTANGLED WATERS
- IN THE SHADOWS OF SLAVERY: FREE BLACK CITIZENSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES, 1783-1865
- CONTESTED FREEDOM: REPRODUCTION, FAMILY, AND BODILY AUTONOMY IN U.S. HISTORY
- PERFORMING FREEDOM IN SPACE FROM CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD TO CONTEMPORARY CINEMA
- SAFE FOR DEMOCRACY? AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES AND THE (UN)MAKING OF THE GLOBAL ORDER
- "FREE FROM DEATH, FREE FROM EARTH": POST-PLANETARY FREEDOM IN THE AGE OF TECHNOCAPITALIST AUTHORITARIANISM
- ROADS TO FREEDOM? CONTROVERSIAL AUTOMOBILITIES IN AMERICAN MODERNISM

12:30 – 13:30

FREE LUNCH

EAAS WOMEN'S NETWORK MEETING

13:30 – 15:00

- THE LIFE, LITERATURE AND LEGACY OF LUIS J. RODRÍGUEZ: IN THE LONG RUN
- FAMILY, FREEDOM AND CONSERVATISM
- VISIONS OF BLACK FREEDOM: BORDERS, ART, AND PRISON WALLS
- ALTERNATIVE FUTURES: VISIONS OF FREEDOM IN THE AMERICAN LEFT
- RELATIONAL SOVEREIGNTIES: INDIGENOUS (RE)VISIONS OF FREEDOM ACROSS LAND, BODY AND IMAGINATION
- CONSTRUCTING NARRATIVES OF FREEDOM: AMERICAN EXHIBITS AT HOME AND ABROAD IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY
- CONTESTED VISIONS OF AMERICAN FREEDOM IN THE CIVIL WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION ERA
- FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM IN THE ANTHROPOCENE? ECOLOGY AND WARFARE IN CONTEMPORARY US CULTURE
- MOTHERING LIBERTY: MATERNAL VISIONS OF FREEDOM IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

15:30 – 17:00

- IMMERSIVE LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION: THE TREND PROJECT
- EAAS POETRY NETWORK
- STORIES OF UNFREEDOM: NEW APPROACHES TO THE AMERICAN SLAVE NARRATIVE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
- ALTERNATIVE FUTURES: VISIONS OF FREEDOM IN THE AMERICAN LEFT
- RELATIONAL SOVEREIGNTIES: INDIGENOUS (RE)VISIONS OF FREEDOM ACROSS LAND, BODY AND IMAGINATION
- RECLAIMING FREEDOM BEYOND BORDERS
- BLACK SOLDIERS, VISIONS OF FREEDOM AND MEMORY IN WORLD WAR II
- TRANSFORMATION AND MALFORMATION OF MOVEMENT IN AMERICAN OUTDOOR SPACES
- MOTHERING LIBERTY: MATERNAL VISIONS OF FREEDOM IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

17:30 – 19:00

KEYNOTE SPEECH: **JORIE GRAHAM**

VISIONS OF FREEDOM: JORIE GRAHAM IN CONVERSATION WITH ANTONELLA FRANCINI

CHAIR: **PHILIP MCGOWAN**

Thursday, September 3rd

09:00 - 10:30	FREEDOM, ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY	BOUND TO BE FREE? MARKET FREEDOM AND POLITICAL CONSTRAINTS AFTER THE NEOLIBERAL TURN	THE HAUNTING LEGACY OF TONI MORRISON: CELEBRATING BLACK FREEDOM AND THE ETHICS OF CARE AND RESISTANCE	VISIONS OF (UN)FREEDOM: AFRICANS, AMERICANS, AND THE FATE OF DEMOCRACY FROM THE AGE OF REVOLUTIONS TO THE GILDED AGE	FREEDOM TO BE ME: STRUGGLES WITH STEREOTYPES, DISSENT, AND CELEBRATION OF DIFFERENCE IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN WRITING	NATIVE AMERICAN MIGRATIONS: FREE AND COERCED	MEDIATED FREEDOMS	FREEDOM OF CHOICE? AMERICAN CHILDREN'S CONSUMER CULTURE AND THE CONTRADICTIONS OF LIBERTY	SOUTHERN WOMEN WRITERS AND EMANCIPATION STRATEGIES	
11:00 - 12:30	ACADEMIC MOTHERING/ PARENTING ROUND TABLE	AMERICAN STUDIES, PRESENT AND FUTURE: VISIONS FROM EUROPEAN JOURNAL EDITORS	CREATIVE INSURGENCIES: REIMAGINING FREEDOM FROM BELOW IN LATINX LITERATURE AND ART	THE REVOLUTION OF 1917 AND AMERICAN FREEDOM	FREEDOM OF SPEECH ACROSS (POST) DIGITAL SPACES AND CONTEMPORARY US NARRATIVES	UNEXPECTED BATTLES FOR LIBERTY: THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOMS DURING WARTIME	MEDIATED FREEDOMS	VEGAN READINGS, US FREEDOMS: CHATTEL, CATTLE, CAPITAL	VAEMPIRE: ANTI-COLONIALIST RHETORIC IN THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM	
13:30 - 15:00	DEFENDING ACADEMIC FREEDOM: TRANSATLANTIC PERSPECTIVES ON AMERICAN STUDIES	MINOR REVOLUTIONS: VIET THANH NGUYEN AND THE UNMAKING OF AMERICAN FREEDOM	"DISCOURSES OF FREEDOM: HISTORY-MAKING SPEECHES, ESSAYS, AND MANIFESTOS IN AMERICAN LITERATURE"	PAST AND PRESENT BOUNDARIES OF PRISON	CONFRONTING THE FOURTH GHOST: VISIONS AND CRITIQUES OF TOTALITARIANISM IN SOUTHERN FICTION	FREEDOM, MOVEMENT, AND THEIR LIMITS FOR MARGINALIZED PEOPLE IN THE AMERICAN WEST	RE/ GENERATION, VIOLENCE, AND AMERICAN CULTURE WARS: SETTLER FREEDOMS IN YELLOWSTONE	JEWISH AMERICAN WRITING AND THE UNITED STATES' REGIMES OF MIGRATION: REIMAGINING NARRATIVES OF IMMIGRATION	COUNTER-VISIONS OF FREEDOM: CONTEMPORARY DOCUPOETIC INTERVENTIONS IN THE COLONIAL ARCHIVE	
15:30 - 17:00	FUTURE FREEDOMS IN SCIENCE FICTION	A LONG QUEST FOR FREEDOM IN AFRICAN AMERICAN WRITING	ACADEMIC WELL-BEING	AGAINST THE TYRANNY OF LANGUAGE. THREE (POST)MODERN QUESTS FOR LIFE, LIBERTY, AND HAPPINESS	1920S–2020S: VISIONS OF UNFREEDOM	THE AMERICAN WEST - A LAND OF FREEDOM? REVISIONS OF THE MYTH	UN|BANNING BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS	VISIONS OF REPRODUCTIVE (UN)FREEDOM		
17:30 - 19:00	KEYNOTE SPEECH: **GIORGIO MARIANI** ***DO YOU CONDEMN BABO? THINKING OF BENITO CERENO AT A TIME OF GENOCIDE*** CHAIR: **TBC**									

Friday, September 4th

08:30 - 10:00	TEACHING AMERICAN STUDIES WHEN FREEDOM IS UNDER ATTACK	THE AESTHETICS AND POLITICS OF FREEDOM IN THE ERA OF JIM CROW	KEYWORDS FOR FREEDOM(S) IN THE U.S.	FREEDOM AND IDENTITY	FEMINIST FREEDOMS AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY FASCISM	TRANSCULTURALITY UNDER NEOLIBERALISM IN 21ST CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE: BETWEEN LIBERATION AND CAPTURE	WHEN THE WORLD CLOSES IN ON YOU: FREEDOM, GAMEPLAY, AND VIDEOGAMES	A TENUOUS GRASP ON FREEDOM: COMPETING IDEAS FOR WOMEN'S SELF-DETERMINATION
10:15 - 11:45	UNMADE AND REWRITTEN: COUNTERNARRATIVES TO DOMINANT HISTORIES COUNTERNARRATIVES	ENDURING VISIONS OF FREEDOM: A RETROSPECTIVE OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE	EAAS AMERICAN STUDIES NETWORK	CONSTRAINTS OF FREEDOM IN AMERICAN CINEMA: GANGSTERS, SOLDIERS, INSTITUTIONS	ALTERNATIVE LOOKS: VISION AND COUNTER-VISION IN AMERICAN POETRY			

12:00 - 13:30

KEYNOTE SPEECH: KARSTEN FITZ

COMMEMORATING THE FIRST MARTYR OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION ACROSS TIME: THE VISUAL MEMORY OF CRISPUS ATTUCKS

CHAIR: INGRID GESSNER

CLOSING REMARKS

13:30 - 13:45

KEYNOTE SPEECHES

BAKED IN: POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND THE AMERICAN NATION

Tuesday 01
18:00 - 19:30
AUDITORIUM

KEYNOTE SPEECH

DESMOND KING

CHAIR: RAFFAELLA BARITONO

Desmond King is the Andrew W. Mellon professor of American Government at Nuffield College, Oxford. King was elected to the American Philosophical Society in 2022. He was elected a Member of the National Academy of Sciences in 2025.
He received the Bastable Prize (Trinity), the Minar Award (Northwestern), and a Choice "Outstanding Academic Book" 2012 for Still a House Divided: Race and Politics in Obama's America with Rogers M Smith, Princeton University Press. He has held a Major Research Fellowship, Leverhulme Trust 2005-2008 (3 year buy-out) and a Research Readership, British Academy, 2000-2002 (2 year buy-out). He has been elected a Fellow the British Academy (2003), a Member of the Royal Irish Academy (2014) and a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society (2015).He is an Associate Member, Centre d'Etudies Europeennes, Sciences Po, Paris.
He is the author over a 100 papers in professional journals in such journals as American Political Science Review, British Journal of Political Science, Cambridge Journal of Economics, Comparative Political Studies, Du Bois Review, Ethnic & Racial Studies, Governance, Journal of Politics, Minerva, Past & Present, Perspectives on Politics, Political Studies, Political Research Quarterly, Public Administration, Theory and Society, West European Politics, and World Politics, 7 coedited books and 10 books including Fed Power: The Federal Reserve and the Great Recession (with Lawrence R Jacobs (Oxford University, April 2016), Making Americans: Immigration, Race and the Diverse Democracy (Harvard University Press, 2001), and Actively Seeking Work? The Politics of U and Welfare in Britain and the US, (U of Chicago Press, 1995).

VISIONS OF FREEDOM: JORIE GRAHAM IN CONVERSATION WITH ANTONELLA FRANCINI

Wednesday 02
17:30 - 19:00
AUDITORIUM

KEYNOTE SPEECH

JORIE GRAHAM

CHAIR: PHILIP MCGOWAN

Jorie Graham is the author of numerous collections of poetry, including Hybrids of Plants and Ghosts (1980), Erosion (1983), The End of Beauty (1987), Region of Unlikeness (1991), The Dream of the Unified Field: Selected Poems 1974-1992 (1995) winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, Never (2002), Sea Change (2008), Place (2012), winner of the Forward Poetry Prize for best collection, From the New World (2015), Fast (2017), and Runaway (2020) among others. She has taught for many years at Harvard University as the Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory, the first woman to be given this position, which was previously held by Seamus Heaney and many other writers dating back to the first Boylston Professor, John Quincy Adams.
Born in New York City, Graham was raised and educated in Italy and France. She attended the Sorbonne in Paris, where she studied philosophy, and New York University, where she pursued filmmaking. While in New York, she began writing and studying poetry, and went on to earn an MFA from the Iowa Writer's Workshop. She later taught at the Writers' Workshop, leaving to join the faculty at Harvard. When her collection Place won the Forward Poetry Prize in 2012, she was the first American woman to receive the UK award. When she was awarded the International Nonino Literary Prize in 2013, she was only the third US recipient since the award was established. In 2017 she was awarded the Wallace Stevens Award from the Academy of American Poets.

DO YOU CONDEMN BABO? THINKING OF BENITO CERENO AT A TIME OF GENOCIDE

Thursday 03
17:30 - 19:00
AUDITORIUM

KEYNOTE SPEECH

GIORGIO MARIANI

CHAIR: TBC

Giorgio Mariani taught, until his recent retirement, Anglo-American literature at the Department of European, American and Intercultural Studies at Sapienza University of Rome, where for many years he coordinated the PhD in Studies in English Language and Literatures. In his career he has focused mostly on 19th-century American literature (in particular Herman Melville and Stephen Crane); he has investigated the relationship between war, violence and literature; he has written extensively on contemporary American Indian literature. He was president of the I.A.S.A. (International American Studies Association) from 2011 to 2015, and then directed its journal, RIAS—The Review of International American Studies, for several years. He is a member of the editorial board of Ácoma. Rivista internazionale di studi nordamericani (of which he was co-director from 2001 to 2021). For several years he co-directed the book series "Le Balene" (La Scuola di Pitagora) and "Studies in American Literature and Culture" (Sapienza Università Editrice).
He has been a four-time faculty member of the Futures of American Studies Institute, Dartmouth College (2005; 2013; 2015; 2018); a Visiting Professor at the École Normale Superieur in Lyon (2012); and a several-times Visiting Scholar at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. He has lectured at numerous Italian and foreign universities, including the Université Diderot in Paris, the Université Lumière Lyon 2; the Ècole Normale Superieur in Lyon; the University of Poznan; the Technische Universitat in Dortmund; the University of Manheim; the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign; Yeshiva University in New York; Haverford College (Pennsylvania); the California Institute of Technology; the Etvos Loran University in Budapest; the University of Silesia; the University of Timisoara.

COMMEMORATING THE FIRST MARTYR OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION ACROSS TIME: THE VISUAL MEMORY OF CRISPUS ATTUCKS

Friday 04
12:00 - 13:30
AUDITORIUM

KEYNOTE SPEECH

KARSTEN FITZ

CHAIR: INGRID GESSNER

Karsten Fitz is Professor of American Studies / Culture and Media Studies at the University of Passau. He studied American Studies and Political Science at the University of Hannover (M.A., Ph.D.) and at the University of Washington, Seattle. Fitz is the recipient of the Fulbright American Studies Fellowship (2002-03), during which he spent a year at Harvard University and the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts. He completed his 'Habilitation' at the University of Regensburg, where he has taught for ten years. His monographic works are Negotiating History and Culture: Transculturation in Contemporary Native American Fiction (2001) and The American Revolution Remembered, 1830s to 1850s: Competing Images and Conflicting Narratives (2011). He has edited the anthology Visual Representations of Native Americans: Transnational Contexts and Perspectives (2012). Together with Birgit Däwes and Sabine Meyer he is the editor of the book series Routledge Research in Transnational Indigenous Perspectives, of which he co-edited the first volume, Twenty-First Century Perspectives on Indigenous Studies: Native North America in (Trans)Motion (2015). His research on issues of privacy led to the conference volume Cultures of Privacy: Paradigms, Transformations, Contestations (2015). His interest in transatlantic cultural exchange inspired the conference volume Transatlantic Cinema: Productions – Genres – Encounters – Negotiations (2020). In addition, Fitz has published articles on American popular visual culture, cultural memory, American political culture, and the teaching of American Studies in the EFL-classroom in various journals and conference volumes. Most recently he co-edited (together with Susanne Lachenicht and Volker Depkat) the conference volume Representations and Uses of the American Revolution in Past and Present (2025). Fitz has been Vice President of the German Association for American Studies (2017-2020) and is currently on the board of the European Association for American Studies and of the Bavarian American Academy.

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DETAILED CONFERENCE PROGRAM

WESTERING IN/THE DISCIPLINE; OR, WHY THE AMERICAN WEST MATTERS MORE THAN EVER

Wednesday 02
09:00 - 10:30
AULA

EAAS WEST OF THE REST NETWORK

First on-site/in-person group meeting

As the fastest-growing geo-cultural region in North America across most metrics, the American West matters to the future of the United States of America and the global community. The West of the Rest network is dedicated to facilitating and promoting an invigorated and sustainable study of the West, its meaning to Americans and to people in the most far-flung locales, as its connections span the globe. Chiefly informed by New/Post-West and Global West schools of thought, our network's efforts are geared toward (re)centering scholarly attention on the American West along decidedly hemispheric, historical, transnational, multicultural, gender-diverse, and intersectional lines. While scholarly in intent and practice, our network also seeks to promote broader public engagement with Western lifeworlds.

The West of the Rest network cordially invites and welcomes scholars of all ranks who actively work and/or are interested in one or more of the following:

The multicultural geographies and lifeworlds of the West --- Visual and other art of the West --- Popular culture Wests (across a range of media, including television and film) --- The literary and lyrical West --- Western lifewriting and oral traditions --- The West as performance (show, stage, re-enactment, in everyday life) --- Silicon, virtual and videogame Wests --- Environmental history, wildlife and plant history, and energy humanities --- The hydrological/hydrographic West --- Material histories and cultures of the West --- Museums and exhibits of the West --- The military-industrial complex and/in the West --- Indigenous Studies perspectives/approaches (activism, negotiation, trade, kinship, syncretism) --- Livestock raising and horsemanship economies/cultures --- Borderlands studies --- Globalism, international ties, and connection --- Gothic and Weird Studies --- Gender-diverse/queer Wests --- Critical regional studies --- Politics and protest --- Paleontological Wests and other non-anthropogenic epistemologies (geology, geomorphology, deep time) --- Etc.

At this point, we actively solicit ideas and suggestions for collaboration, outreach, and knowledge transfer activities which are geared toward helping the network grow.

CHAIR

- Stefan Rabitsch, *Universitetet i Oslo*

CONTESTED FREEDOM: RACE, SECURITY, AND THE CARCERAL BORDER

Wednesday 02
09:00 - 10:30
AULA

Since its founding, the United States has defined itself as a "free country" and a global safe haven for the oppressed, the unfree, or the poor—an ideal famously popularized in Emma Lazarus' sonnet The New Colossus. The freedom to move, however, has always been contested and undermined by exclusion acts, racial quotas, and border regimes. Nineteenth-century nativist sentiments and subsequent policies targeted immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe and Asia; more recently, bans and detention policies have been directed against people from Mexico, Latin America, and Muslim-majority countries. The curtailment of mobility and migration have inextricably been intertwined with and determined by exclusionary perceptions of race, also at the intersection with class, gender, or ability. Despite growing ethnic and racial diversity, the legacies of settler colonialism and chattel slavery continue to define an inherently racialized society and contemporary migration governance, in which the figure of the "migrant" remains racially coded as either "the good immigrant" – "worthy" and "deserving" – or conversely as the "illegal", opportunistic, "dangerous" or "criminal" alien, who presumably threatens national security, the moral fabric, or the domestic labor market.
Adopting a race-conscious lens, this panel documents and theorizes how the freedom of movement and mobility in the U.S. are inherently racialized. Although the boundaries of Whiteness have gradually expanded to include formerly othered immigrant groups (German, Irish, Jewish), and while laws have adopted a prima facie race-neutral language —in what Ibram X. Kendi terms the "progression of racism" —Whiteness remains structurally privileged. Black, Brown, and other non-White racialized migrants increasingly face the punitive realities of criminalization, detention and deportation, as evidenced by current ICE raids. The panel addresses the nexus of racialization, (un)freedom of movement, and state-sanctioned punishment by bringing together studies of migrant imprisonment in literature, the racialized logics of border security and detention, and the contradictions of hospitality in global spectacles such as the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

CHAIR

- Grit Grigoleit-Richter, *Universität Passau*

SPEAKERS

- Georgiana Banita, *Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg* - THE WEIGHT OF WATCHTOWERS: THE CAMP AND THE LITERARY IMAGINATION FROM ELLIS ISLAND TO ALLIGATOR ALCATRAZ
- Grit Grigoleit-Richter, *Universität Passau* - RACIALIZED BORDERS: MIGRANT CARCERALITY IN TEXAS
- Heike Raphael-Hernandez, *Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg* - THE 2026 FIFA WORLD CUP, THE 2028 SUMMER OLYMPICS, AND THEIR CHALLENGES TO U.S. IMMIGRATION RHETORIC
- Isabel Díaz Sánchez, *Universidad de Alicante* - REBORDERING FREEDOM: CONTESTING THE MYTH OF LIBERTY IN US-MEXICO BORDER NARRATIVES

KEYWORDS

RACE, IMMIGRATION, CARCERALITY, BORDER

FEELING FREE(DOM): AFFECTS AND/OF LIBERTY IN US LITERATURE

Wednesday 02
09:00 - 10:30
AULA

While often thought of primarily as a philosophical, political, and legal concept, freedom as an ideal and as a central promise of US culture has also always been and continues to be powerfully charged on an emotional and affective level. In fact, ideas, imaginations, and contestations around freedom and liberty in the US are crucially interrogated and negotiated primarily through the idea of 'feeling free': Mythical constructions of how the US ties the notion of freedom to its national identity, the ways in which personal liberty forms a central part of identity and community formations, or whether something is understood as threatening a particular freedom or liberty is often predominantly a question of feeling, tied to a variety of concomitant emotions that, in turn, orient or attach humans in specific ways toward 'freedom' (as an idea, ideal, and promise).

In this panel, we want to interrogate feelings of freedom in US literature, positioning the literary as one of the dominant realms in which US culture interrogates affective proclamations and contestations of liberty. We will pay particular attention to negotiations of gaps between the promises attached to the idea of freedom and experienced realities of unfreedom, as well as to the different forms, genres, modes, and styles that US literature has used to examine these dynamics. Taking our theoretical cue from affect theory, the panel aims to address literary negotiations of freedom(s)—broadly understood—by suggesting to understand freedom as entangled with 'the promise of happiness' (Ahmed) and 'cruel optimism' (Berlant). As Ahmed notes in reference to the Declaration of Independence, "[h]appiness becomes a question of following rather than finding" if it is understood as a "pursuit [...] augmented as a constitutional right" (32), which aligns the idea of striving for freedom with Berlant's notion that "the object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility actually makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation for which a person or a people risks striving".

In four different case studies, the panel will interrogate specific forms and aesthetics of 'feeling free' in US literature; affective counter-constructions and modes of resistance via (a lack of) freedom; feelings surrounding trust, care, solidarity, and other forms of belonging/community as they relate to freedom; and the affordances and (ideological) ambiguities of particular genres and modes in relation to affects of freedom.

CHAIR

- Annika Schadewaldt, *Universität Leipzig*
- Stefan Schubert, *Universität Leipzig*

SPEAKERS

- Michael Collins, *King's College London* - HOW TO BREAK UP WITH AMERICA: TACT, SOCIALITY, AND THE PROBLEMS OF FEELING FREE IN THE WORK OF LYDIA DAVIS
- Lea Espinoza Garrido, *Freie Universität Berlin* - FROM HARRIET JACOBS TO CATHY PARK HONG: U.S. LIFE WRITING AND THE AFFECTIVE INFRASTRUCTURES OF (UN)FREEDOM AND (DIS) TRUST
- Katja Kanzler, *Universität Leipzig* - FREEDOM AND CARE IN NK JEMISIN'S *GREAT CITIES* DUOLOGY
- Leonie Kratzenstein, *Universität Leipzig* - MONSTROUS BODIES AND STRANGLED FREEDOMS IN GRETCHEN FELKER-MARTIN'S *CUCKOO*

KEYWORDS

AFFECT, EMOTION, LITERATURE, UNFREEDOM, RESISTANCE

"WHY 1963?": REIMAGINING RIGHTS AND PROTESTS IN A WATERSHED YEAR

Wednesday 02
09:00 - 10:30
AULA

In *Why We Can't Wait* (1964), Martin Luther King, Jr pondered why 1963 emerged as the revolutionary year for African Americans. 1963 marked a year in which the Black community claimed space to advocate for their freedoms in ways never seen before. Yet, 1963 was not only a pivotal year in the Civil Rights Movement; Americans both within and without the movement began to conceive of new imaginaries in protest cultures and became increasingly conscious of their own positions in minority subgroups, including those defined by gender, religion, and sexuality, as well as race. In the forthcoming volume *Why 1963?: Reimagining Rights and Protests in a Watershed Year* (University Press of Florida), historians working across multiple sub-disciplines broaden the question King posed: what made 1963 a flashpoint year for a multitude of movements and causes? How did various communities transform their understandings of themselves, their culture, and their audiences? And what does this meeting of different junctures reveal to us about conceptions of 'freedom' at this crucial moment of reckoning in American history?

By focusing on the single year of 1963, this panel demonstrates the breadth of diverse historical actors whose ideals and actions were interwoven with the Civil Rights Movement. The kaleidoscopic nature of 1963 - with interconnected shifts at micro and macro levels - indicates the year's distorting and transforming impact on American life. By considering the New Legacies, New Desires, and New Rights, this panel demonstrates how different junctures combine, and new streams of activism converge. Within this one calendar year, we see the culmination of decades of work for some and the start of new traditions for others. Such a perspective allows for a reframing of canonical moments and a recovery of marginalised ones. Yet this approach avoids a narrative of declension; of 1963 as a highpoint of the decade before decline. Rather, considering 1963 attests to multiple thematic consistencies across evolving protest cultures: a shift towards pragmatism, a generational divide, and the articulation of new rhetorics and tactics to achieve differing goals rooted in the nebulous concept of "freedom."

CHAIR

- Nick Witham, *University College London*

SPEAKERS

- Emily Brady, *University of Oxford* - "250,000 I'S ARE HERE!": PHOTOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVES ON THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON
- Uta Andrea Balbier, *University of Oxford* - THE RIGHT TO PRAY: WHITE EVANGELICALS, FREEDOM, AND CIVIL RIGHTS IN 1963
- Megan Hunt, *University of Edinburgh* - JIM CROW AT THE BOX OFFICE: CINEMA, CULTURE, AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN 1963

KEYWORDS

1963, CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, PROTEST, RELIGION, CULTURE

MOBILITY IN CONTEMPORARY BLACK ATLANTIC WRITING

Wednesday 02
09:00 - 10:30
AULA

This panel explores how contemporary Black Atlantic authors reconceptualize mobility—physical, social, affective, and imaginative—as a site of tension between freedom and constraint. Across diverse geographies and genres, the presenters examine how movement functions not only as displacement or migration but as a political and aesthetic practice shaped by histories of enslavement, segregation, and racialized surveillance. In these contexts, mobility becomes both a measure of exclusion and a mode of resistance—a means of inhabiting history while envisioning liberated futures. The papers engage a range of critical approaches, from ecocritical readings of speculative fiction to analyses of fugitivity, diasporic flânerie, and urban walking. Together, they illuminate how acts of travel, flight, and wandering are continually redefined in the afterlives of the Middle Passage and within contemporary structures of anti-Blackness that regulate global circulation. Through these explorations, the panel foregrounds the complex relationship between movement, belonging, and the Black experience. Drawing on thinkers such as Paul Gilroy, Saidiya Hartman, Fred Moten, and Tina Campt, it asks how Black Atlantic literature maps the possibilities and limits of motion—across borders, oceans, and temporalities. The discussion highlights the interplay between embodied motion and imaginative travel, situating mobility as a key paradigm for reading the poetics and politics of Black life.

CHAIR

- Anna Pochmara, *Uniwersytet Warszawski*
- Dorottya Mózes, *Debreceni Egyetem*

SPEAKERS

- Ágnes Zsófia Kovács, *University of Szeged* - A SOUTHWARD JOURNEY FROM FREEDOM TO BONDAGE IN MAT JOHNSON'S PYM
- Raphaël Lambert, *Kansai University* - BLACK FUGITIVITY AS A PRAXIS OF FREEDOM
- Dorottya Mózes, *Debreceni Egyetem* - BLACK DIASPORIC FLÂNERIE, ESTRANGEMENT, AND DEPRESSION IN SAIDIYA HARTMAN'S LOSE YOUR MOTHER
- Anna Pochmara, *Uniwersytet Warszawski* - WALKING WHILE BLACK: THE URBAN PASTORAL AND RACIAL MOBILITY IN CONTEMPORARY NEW YORK WRITING

KEYWORDS

MOBILITY, BLACK ATLANTIC, FUGIVITY, FLÂNERIE, NEO-SLAVE NARRATIVE

WHOSE FREEDOM, WHOSE WEST?

Wednesday 02
09:00 - 10:30
AULA

The American West, as exposed in the myriad written and cinematographic representations where it has been described and defined, is the epitome of freedom. Personal freedom, spatial freedom, and even, spiritual freedom. However, as it has been similarly proved in myriad written and cinematographic representations, the American West has also been the epitome of the lack of freedom for many: for Native Americans, for women, for Mexicans, for African-Americans, for queer persons, and for several other non-normative groups.

The papers in this panel will look at how the search for freedom has been represented in different places and times related to the West: how women and queer people have been excluded in this search for freedom in traditional "western" representations, and how they are regaining a new position in contemporary Westerns; how even cowboys were excluded in Quixotic Westerns when progress changed the economy of the West; and how the Western formula was used when it travelled to Brazil to describe the search for freedom of the excluded populations from the Northeast in *cangaceiro* films, *nordesterns* and Brazilian post-Westerns.

CHAIR

- Amaia Ibarraran-Bigalondo, *Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea*

SPEAKERS

- Amaia Ibarraran-Bigalondo, *Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea* - FREE IS THE WEST (OR NOT): WESTERNS, WOMEN, QUEERS AND OTHERS
- Jesús Ángel González, *Universidad de Cantabria* - WHOSE FREEDOM IN BRAZILIAN WESTERNS?: FROM CANGACEIRO FILMS TO CONTEMPORARY POSTWESTERNS.
- Alfredo Moro, *Universidad de Cantabria* - FREEDOM, FAILED AMERICAN DREAMS AND QUIXOTIC OTHERNESS: REFLECTIONS ON THE EARLY RECEPTION OF DON QUIXOTE DE LA MANCHA IN THE NORTH AMERICAN WEST

KEYWORDS

AMERICAN WEST, FREEDOM, OTHER REPRESENTATIONS, CINEMA, LITERATURE

FREEDOM, UNIVERSITY AND CRITICAL THINKING

Wednesday 02
09:00 - 10:30
AULA

This panel examines the intensifying struggle over academic freedom, historical memory, and the politics of knowledge production in the United States amid growing political polarization and democratic uncertainty. Bringing together historical, pedagogical, legal, and cultural analyses, the papers explore how contemporary battles over "political correctness," curriculum regulation, patriotic education, and institutional control reflect broader conflicts over who may define national identity, historical truth, and the boundaries of acceptable discourse. The panel also addresses the teaching of history as a central battleground in the struggle over democracy and public memory, situating these developments within a broader framework of democratic backsliding and authoritarian governance. Taken together, the papers illuminate how contemporary conflicts over education and historical interpretation are not merely "culture wars," but fundamental struggles over democratic citizenship, intellectual autonomy, and the future of public knowledge in the United States.

CHAIR

- Giulia Crisanti, *Independent Researcher*

SPEAKERS

- Christèle Le Bihan-Colleran, *Université de Poitiers* - FREEDOM UNDER THREAT ON US CAMPUSES: FROM A LEFT-WING TO A RIGHT-WING "POLITICAL CORRECTNESS"?
- Sandra Tausel, *Leopold-Franzens-Universität Innsbruck* - POLITICS OF ERASURE: THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S ATTACK ON REMEMBERING, TEACHING, AND CRITICAL THINKING

KEYWORDS

ACADEMIC FREEDOM, UNIVERSITY

REFLECTIONS FROM AMERICAN LITERATURES: CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE THREAT TO VISIONS OF FREEDOM

Wednesday 02
09:00 - 10:30
AULA

This panel examines responses in literature to climate change as a threat to visions of freedom and perhaps to any vision of sustaining the present global civilization/order. The CHAIR's introduction and four presentations reflect ideas introduced in the October 2025 special issue of *American Literatures*, *Living and Dying in the Anthropocene: Responses in Contemporary Literature from the Western Hemisphere*. Human-engineered climate change, next to nuclear war, is the greatest threat to our species. "The scientific evidence is unequivocal: climate change is a threat to human wellbeing and the health of the planet," the 2022 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report states. The special *American Literatures* issue explores the question: how has contemporary literature responded to a threat so pervasive that its effects are felt around the world while at the same time the individual human psyche suffers from climate anxiety?
The panel presenters consider a variety of responses from writers that cohere around the idea that climate change calls for radical new ways of *thinking*. Teresa Botelho's presentation suggests the need to reconsider nature—at least in the United States—from the perspectives of African Americans, whose voices have been removed from the country's dominant environmental narratives. Loredana Filip argues that visual representations in literature have privileged the *visual* for centuries, resulting in a limited view of nature and its subsequent commodification, exemplified in our data-driven, mechanical view of our bodies. David J. Cross examines a reconfiguration of human thought to overcome paralyzing states of despair: a holistic approach recognizing interconnections among the individual, nature, economic and political systems, and even time itself.
The presentation will then open to general discussion, with attention to other concepts raised in the special issue of *American Literatures* (copies will be available for attendees).

CHAIR

- Brian Railsback, *Western Carolina University*

SPEAKERS

- Brian Railsback, *Western Carolina University* – CAN ONE REVISE QUICKLY ENOUGH? CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE AND A SPECIAL ISSUE OF AMERICAN LITERATURES
- Teresa Botelho, *Universidade Nova de Lisboa* - FINDING FREEDOM IN NATURE: REWRITING THE SKY AND THE SOIL IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE
- Loredana Filip, *Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg* - DIRT UNDER THE FINGERNAILS: FREEDOM AS RESPONSE-ABILITY AND THE SENSORY ETHICS OF THE EVERYDAY IN RICHARD POWERS
- David John Cross, *Universität Stuttgart* - THE UNCERTAINTY OF PLANETARY DOMESTICITY: LOUISE ERDRICH'S *FUTURE HOME OF THE LIVING GOD*.

KEYWORDS

ENVIRONMENT, AMERICAN LITERATURE, ANTHROPOCENE, ECOPHILOSOPHY

PATHOGRAPHIES AND THE POLITICS OF FREEDOM: WOMEN'S BODIES, ILLNESS, AND INEQUALITY

Wednesday 02
09:00 - 10:30
AULA

This panel explores how contemporary American illness narratives or pathographies articulate and challenge dominant visions of freedom in the United States. Drawing on the Critical Medical Humanities, we argue that health, illness, and the body are not simply biological realities but deeply social, political, and cultural experiences that shape and are shaped by American ideas of autonomy and citizenship.

From the Declaration of Independence onward, "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness" has been celebrated as foundational to national identity. Yet illness and bodily regulation often place individuals outside those ideals, exposing the limits and contradictions of American freedom. Who is free when their body fails, or when the state claims authority over it? How do systemic inequalities in gender, race, class, reproductive rights, and cultural ideals of beauty constrain freedom from pain, freedom of movement, or freedom of choice?

The papers in this panel address these questions through illness narratives across different genres—autobiography, graphic novel, and drama. Together, they examine how women's bodies are disciplined and stigmatized, whether through abortion restrictions, medical interventions, or aesthetic norms that equate beauty with value. By analyzing Lucy Grealy's memoir of disfigurement, Leah Hayes's graphic novel on abortion, and the cycle of monologues *My Body No Choice*, the panel demonstrates how personal narratives become civic interventions, revealing illness and reproductive freedom as contested sites of inequality.

By focusing on critical pathographies, we show how narratives of illness and bodily regulation critique institutional power, medical authority, and structural neglect. Whether confronting reproductive injustice, theatricalizing the politics of abortion, or exposing the tyranny of beauty, these texts illuminate the entanglement of illness and freedom in American culture. Ultimately, the panel argues that illness narratives are not only testimonies of suffering but interventions that expand the very definition of what it means to be "free" in America.

CHAIR

- Isabel Durán Giménez-Rico, *Universidad Complutense de Madrid*

SPEAKERS

- Francisco José Cortés Vieco, *Universidad Complutense de Madrid* - LIMITS OF LIBERTY AND VISUALIZING REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM IN LEAH HAYES'S NOT FUNNY HA-HA
- Noelia Hernando-Real, *Universidad Autónoma de Madrid* - 'MY BODY NO CHOICE' AND THE DEROGATION OF ROE V. WADE: US WOMEN PLAYWRIGHTS AND THE POLITICS OF THE FEMALE BODY
- Isabel Durán Giménez-Rico, *Universidad Complutense de Madrid* - LUCY GREALY AND THE LIMITS OF FREEDOM: ILLNESS, BEAUTY, AND BELONGING

KEYWORDS

MEDICAL HUMANITIES, GENDER, ILLNESS, PATHOGRAPHY

ALIENATION AND FREEDOM AT MIDCENTURY

Wednesday 02
11:00 - 12:30
AULA

Midcentury scholarship was obsessed with "alienation." There was even a joke going around that the editors at *Partisan Review* had special keys installed on their typewriters with the word already spelled-out, so their contributors could save time writing about their favorite theme. Alienation may seem like the opposite of freedom, but it can also be understood as its negative expression. When conformity is perceived as the major threat to freedom, then being alienated from society is one way to be true to yourself. Alienation became popular when freedom began to seem like the privilege of outsiders. Those who ran afoul of McCarthy, those skeptical of advertising and TV, those who dropped out of consumer society: these alienated individuals were supposed to be the guardians of what Isaiah Berlin called "freedom from," even if they did not have the "freedom to" live the lifestyles made possible by postwar affluency.

But even the claim that alienation is a form of freedom must be questioned. Indeed, the term "alienation" was so trendy—an early example of academic jargon—that it inadvertently suggested a kind of intellectual lockstep as "dissident" intellectuals swelled the ranks of the expanding university system. Even worse: alienation might signal intellectual lockstep, but also self-indulgence or self-deception, as a number of the intellectuals complaining about their own (affected) alienation ignored the actual alienation experienced by systematically marginalized groups who had legitimate claims to make, but little possibility—inside the academy or out—to make them.

Taking these paradoxes as its cue, this panel will explore the relation of freedom to alienation in postwar US-American writing and scholarship, analyzing the meaning of the overused term, its shelf-life, its intellectual limitations and legacy, and what its rise and fall as a kind of academic battle cry tells us about the impact of the cold war, the growth of universities, and the significance of intellectual trends in the United States in the years following WWII.

CHAIR

- Andrew Gross, *Georg-August Universität Göttingen*

SPEAKERS

- Philip McGowan, *Queen's University Belfast* - "THE LOST, THE OUTCAST, THE OVERCOME, THE EFFACED, THE RUINED": SAUL BELLOW'S *THE VICTIM* (1947) AND REGIMES OF AMERICAN ALIENATION
- Karin Hoepker, *Universität Konstanz* - MID-20TH CENTURY ALIENATION: CONSTRUCTIONS OF CONFORMITY AND THE 'ORGANIZATION MAN
- Andrew Gross, *Georg-August Universität Göttingen* - ALIENATION AND THE END OF NARRATIVE IN BELLOW'S DANGLING MAN
- Sebastian Groß, *Georg-August Universität Göttingen* - ALIENATION AS A PRINCIPLE OF OBJECTIVISM: THE IDEOLOGY OF FORM IN AYN RAND'S THE FOUNTAINHEAD

KEYWORDS

ALIENATION, COLD WAR, CONFORMISM, INDIVIDUALISM, FREEDOM

PRISONS IN CALIFORNIA

Wednesday 02
11:00 - 12:30
AULA

The earliest form of incarceration in California was reportedly the "Euphemia", a ninety-foot ship that was converted into a floating jail in 1850. Inmates spent their days working in chain gangs on the shore, but at night they were crammed below the ship's decks. The severely overcrowded and unsanitary conditions eventually necessitated a solution, which came in 1852 with the construction of San Quentin State Prison, a foundational event in the history of the Californian Prison System (Delgado, 1981). This panel offers a critical exploration and analysis of the complexities within California's carceral system, a structure historically rooted in the exploitation of poor and marginalized communities. Since the Gold Rush – a transformative process that led to the establishment of the Californian Prison State System (Nash 1998) – to the internment of Japanese Americans in the detention centers during World War II and the rise of the prison industrial complex in the second half of the twentieth century, with the expansion of correctional facilities, the state's approach to incarceration has consistently reflected racial, social, and economic inequalities. This dynamic has further discriminated minority communities and the reinforcement of a system that prioritized punishment over rehabilitation. The systemic failure to rehabilitate individuals, coupled with its devastating impact on prisoners' mental health, has critically underscored the urgent need for reform, a necessity extensively advocated for by scholars such as Angela Davis. This panel brings together voices from three crucial perspectives: individuals with direct experience of imprisonment, authors who have fictionalized or reflected on the experience, and activists dedicated to combating unjust incarceration. The core aim of this discussion is to illuminate the literary testimonies of the jail experience, examining how these narratives function as a profound social experience, a memory to be processed, and a battlefield for claiming fundamental rights.

CHAIR

- Elisa Bordin, *Università Ca' Foscari Venezia*
- Nicolangelo Becce, *Università Roma Tre*

SPEAKERS

- Elisa Bordin, *Università Ca' Foscari Venezia* - JACK LONDON'S *THE STAR ROVER* (1915): A DENUNCIATION OF THE DEATH PENALTY THROUGH TIME AND SPACE
- Nicolangelo Becce, *Università Roma Tre* - RHETORICAL STRATEGIES IN JAPANESE AMERICAN INCARCERATION STORIES: THE CASE OF MANZANAR
- Małgorzata Jarmołowicz-Dziekońska, *Uniwersytet w Białymstoku* - FREEDOM BELONGS TO THE STRONG: SHATTERED LIBERTY AND JAPANESE-AMERICAN INTERNMENT THROUGH THE PRISM OF THE INTERNEES
- Vincenzo Bavaro, *Università di Napoli "L'Orientale"* - ANGELA DAVIS AND THE RADICAL IMAGINATION OF ABOLITION: READING ARE PRISONS OBSOLETE? WITHIN CALIFORNIA'S CARCERAL LANDSCAPE
- Erica De Sutters Summerville, *Los Angeles Valley College* - GENDERED VIOLENCE IN CALIFORNIA'S ICE DETENTION FACILITIES

KEYWORDS

PRISON, CALIFORNIA

ATLANTICS: FREEDOM NARRATIVES IN ENTANGLED WATERS

Wednesday 02
11:00 - 12:30
AULA

Paul Gilroy famously reimagined the Atlantic Ocean not as a void, but as a space of entangled mobility, memory, and creolization – we believe the same can be said about other water geographies. Recently, scholars have engaged comparable systems of Black textualities. *The Black Mediterranean: Bodies, Borders, and Citizenship* (Gabriele Proglio et al. 2021) situates itself "in the wake of the Black Atlantic" (5), honoring Paul Gilroy and Christina Sharpe in one breath. Black Atlantic scholars of the caliber of Gilroy, Wole Soyinka, Ella Shohat and others have turned their attention to Black Mediterranean experiences in "The Black in Mediterranean Blue" (2021), a special issue edited by Alessandra di Maio.

This new work shows how not only oceans, but also seas, lakes, and rivers have been crossed by trajectories of hope and despair, enslavement and freedom, mobility and perpetual fixity. Suicide by drowning itself has been addressed, perhaps problematically, as the ultimate form of escape from oppressive systems such as the slave ship in the Middle Passage, or domestic confinement in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*.

We are interested in the way bodies of water become connected through histories of colonialism, slavery, migrancy, and forced mobility, but also marked by comparable textualities and punctuated with literary convergences. The panel revisits the Atlantic canon placing water entanglements at its core. By laying emphasis on Black lives, intersecting mobilities, embodied practices of being-on-water, submerged archives, and aesthetics of fluidity, speakers in this panel imagine ways to open up canonic Atlantic authors such as Olaudah Equiano and Herman Melville to new, water-bound readings, bring into relief the role of waterways in texts of enslavement and escape, and map literary kinships between water geographies. Our panel seeks to compare freedom narratives that emerge from water and encourages comparative research into in oceanic, maritime, and riverine archives, both tangible and intangible.

Papers in this panel connect freedom and water in the following areas, and beyond: Historical and contemporary Black Atlantic texts --- The materiality of water --- The Atlantic canon --- Comparative oceanic studies --- Entangled water literacies --- Entangled mobilities of selves and texts --- Water-bound literary genres

CHAIR

- Elena Furlanetto, *Universität Duisburg-Essen*

SPEAKERS

- Astrid Haas, *Universitetet i Bergen* - OLAUDAH EQUIANO'S INTERESTING NARRATIVE AS A MARITIME MEMOIR
- Oluwadunni Talabi, *Universität Bremen* - COLONIAL NECROPOLITICS AND LIQUID POTENTIALITIES IN 19TH CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE
- Erin Forbes, *University of Bristol* - LIBERTY BY LAND OR SEA: WILLIAM AND ELLEN CRAFT'S *RUNNING A THOUSAND MILES FOR FREEDOM*
- Sonia Di Loreto, *Università di Torino* & Elena Furlanetto, *Universität Duisburg-Essen* - BLACK ATLANTIC, BLACK MEDITERRANEAN

KEYWORDS

ATLANTIC STUDIES, NINETEENTH CENTURY, TRANSATLANTIC LITERATURE, COMPARATIVE OCEANIC STUDIES, BLACK ATLANTIC

IN THE SHADOWS OF SLAVERY: FREE BLACK CITIZENSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES, 1783-1865

Wednesday 02
11:00 - 12:30
AULA

In the period from the American Revolution through the Civil War, practical and ideological understandings of citizenship and democracy were heavily influenced by the pressing issue of Black freedom. Whereas all of the northern states prohibited slavery between 1777 and 1804—slowly converting their slave populations into free Black populations—the southern states briefly increased manumissions—bolstering free Black communities within their borders—but subsequently redoubled their commitment to slavery, expanding it into the southwestern frontier. As the nation became bifurcated, with one half of the union committed to some version of Black "freedom" and the other half to slavery, disputes within states across the country arose regarding the rights and legal personhood of African Americans who were either legally free (through birth, manumission, or emancipation) or who were legally enslaved but had escaped to free soil. These disputes not only played a significant role in leading the US down the road to civil war in 1861, but they indeed helped the shape the course of that very war, in particular with respect to the status of "contrabands" (refugees from slavery) who reached Union lines.

How were racial landscapes of citizenship and democracy in antebellum and wartime America characterized, and how did free Black populations in various states and regions navigate such landscapes? This panel explores the answers to these questions from a comparative perspective, revealing how various states in the early republic (north and south, east and west) developed different approaches to democracy, based on the ways in which local communities understood and experienced free Black citizenship. Free Black populations, in turn, developed different strategies of survival that helped them navigate the very different landscapes of freedom in which they moved and resided, even in states in which various rights and privileges associated with citizenship were explicitly circumscribed or denied them—strategies that they would later employ during the Civil War as well. In short, this panel examines and underscores the spectrum of citizenship and democracy in 19th-century America by focusing on how these concepts related to free African Americans across time and space, both in theory and in practice.

CHAIR

- Damian Pargas, *Universiteit Leiden*

SPEAKERS

- Bálint Honos, *Universiteit Leiden / Roosevelt Institute for American Studies* - FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM: THE SPATIAL CONTESTATION OF BLACK CITIZENSHIP IN ANTEBELLUM CALIFORNIA
- Femke Fakkeldij, *Roosevelt Institute for American Studies* - FREE BLACK LITERARY SOCIETIES AND THE GENDERED POLITICS OF RESPECTABILITY IN THE ANTEBELLUM NORTH
- Natalie Joy, *Northern Illinois University* - 'OF AN UNCONSTITUTIONAL AND SINFUL COLOR": BLACK ABOLITIONISTS, NATIVE AMERICAN ANCESTRY, AND US CITIZENSHIP IN THE EARLY 19TH CENTURY
- Laura Gillespie, *Liverpool John Moores University* - LABORING FOR FREEDOM: BLACK AGENCY AND LABOR IN "CONTRABAND" CAMPS DURING THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

KEYWORDS

SLAVERY, AFRICAN AMERICANS, NATIVE AMERICANS, CIVIL WAR, ANTEBELLUM

CONTESTED FREEDOM: REPRODUCTION, FAMILY, AND BODILY AUTONOMY IN U.S. HISTORY

Wednesday 02
11:00 - 12:30
AULA

This panel explores the persistent conflict between freedom and constraint in reproduction, reproductive control, and family formation in the United States from the early twentieth century to the 2010s. Across diverse historical contexts, the definition of reproductive freedom and family has been continually contested, often revealing discriminatory undercurrents tied to race, class, gender, and ability. Panelists show how experts and activists set boundaries in unexpected ways and locations. What constituted constraint was sometimes in the beholder's eyes, and the panel explores how ideas of reproductive and family freedom could be at once co-opted and oppositional. In the early twentieth century, gynaecologists advanced medical theories that privileged the white, heteronormative family at the expense of general reproductive freedom. The preoccupation with promoting the fertility of white, middle-class women placed constraints on all women's ability to seek care for non-pregnancy-related health complaints. As the first paper analyzes, prioritization of fertility not only narrowed the research agenda but also served to enforce the racialized two-sex and gender binary. Decades later, during the turbulent 1960s and 1970s, the U.S. became the epicenter for a debate on population control. The push for birth control was framed, on one hand, as a tool for women's liberation. On the other hand, a powerful, utilitarian view—fueled by Malthusian and environmental fears—gained traction. Analyzing archival collections, the second paper investigates how the population control movement advocated for societal control, viewing individual liberties as secondary to the existential threat of overpopulation. The tension between freedom and constraint continued into the closing decades of the twentieth century within the queer families' movement. Facing legal vulnerability, LGBTQ+ activists pursued acceptance by adhering to US hegemonic norms—presenting themselves as devoted couples focused on intensive parenting. While activist efforts and popular culture (like *Modern Family*) generated inclusion for certain married queer households, this acceptance came at a cost. The third paper compares these representations to less popular, more diverse portrayals and concludes by asking if this quest for recognition is truly a form of freedom or a constraint—a subtle acquiescence to heteronormative standards that marginalizes the alternative tradition of the "chosen family."

CHAIR

- Jonathan Bell, *University College London*

SPEAKERS

- Emma Day, *University College London* - CONTESTING REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM IN EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY GYNECOLOGY
- Bruno Walter Renato Toscano, *Università Ca' Foscari Venezia* - "WE MUST HAVE POPULATION CONTROL AT HOME": FREEDOM AND COERCION IN THE U.S. (AND THE WORLD) POPULATION DEBATE (1960S-1970S)
- Kirsten Swinth, *Fordham University* - "LOVE MAKES A FAMILY": FREEDOM AND CONSTRAINT IN QUEER FAMILIES' QUEST FOR INCLUSION
- Aleksandra Kuroś, *Uniwersytet Jagielloński* - FREEDOM FRAMED: THE SUPREME COURT AND THE CONTRACTION OF INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY IN CONTEMPORARY GENDER JURISPRUDENCE
- Silvia Guselli, *Università di Roma "La Sapienza"* - "YEAH, WELCOME TO AMERICA, LAND OF THE FREE". "HOME OF THE SICK BASTARDS": CHILD MARRIAGE AND THE PERILS OF UNRESTRAINED LIBERTY IN AMERICAN CULTURE.

KEYWORDS

REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM, HISTORY OF MEDICINE IN THE UNITED STATES, POPULATION CONTROL, QUEER FAMILIES, FREEDOM

PERFORMING FREEDOM IN SPACE FROM CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD TO CONTEMPORARY CINEMA

Wednesday 02
11:00 - 12:30
AULA

The nature and ideology of the notion of freedom have been a constant preoccupation in the history of U.S. cinema from its beginnings in silent cinema through the periods of classical and New Hollywood to 21st-century films. The general desire to modernize social thinking was the backbone of the ideology promoted by Hollywood in the classical era, when a transnational concept of taste based on morally inoffensive, ideologically neutral messages revolved around wide concepts of democracy, tolerance, and freedom. In the following historical phases, specific genres, constructions of mise en scène, filmic space, and performing traditions have contributed to what we might describe as the stylistics of "American" freedom.

This panel offers a formal approach to the study of such a cinematic configuration, namely, the analysis of "performance in/of space", that is, the way in which actors' performances and mise en scene combine to produce meanings in films. Pesce articulates a theoretical framework re-examining a long tradition of film analysis that treats human figures as inseparable from their environment, drawing on acting styles and the meanings attached to the star persona in contemporary Hollywood. *One Battle After Another* (2025) reveals how the interface between performance and mise-en-scène functions as a privileged vehicle for conveying stratified cultural conceptions of freedom. Deleyto crosses the Atlantic to explore how the close interconnection between performance and space speaks to national and transnational notions of freedom within present-day ideas of Europe in *Before Midnight* (2013). In this case, certain types of acting combine with the use of real locations to construct a filmic space that speaks, from a hybrid American-European perspective, to debates around the present and the future of the EU. Salvi examines the ambivalences of the nation's founding ideals, observing how Humphrey Bogart's performance in *Casablanca* (1942) constructs a concept of freedom for its turbulent times. While Bogart embodies the national ideology of individualism, Rick's Bar represents a cosmopolitan view that challenges the notion of unlimited freedom. The internal dynamics between space and character reveal how the film reverses the traditional treatment of the primacy of the individual over the environment.

CHAIR

- Michele Fadda, *Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna*

SPEAKERS

- Sara Pesce, *Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna* - ONE BATTLE AFTER ANOTHER. LAYERED ARTICULATIONS OF AMERICAN FREEDOM THROUGH SPACE AND PERFORMANCE.
- Celestino Deleyto, *Universidad de Zaragoza* - PERFORMING THE MEDITERRANEAN: THE ACTOR, THE LOOK, SPACE AND PLACE IN *BEFORE MIDNIGHT*
- Costanza Salvi, *Independent Researcher* - HUMPHREY BOGART AND RICK'S CAFÉ AMERICAIN: A PARADIGM TO READ AMERICAN FREEDOM IN CASABLANCA (MICHAEL CURTIZ 1942)
- Pablo Gómez Muñoz, *Universidad de Zaragoza* - TRAJECTORIES OF FREEDOM? THE INTERSECTION OF BODIES AND SPACES IN VILLENEUVE'S *DUNE* (2021) AND *DUNE: PART TWO* (2024)

KEYWORDS

SPACE, PERFORMANCE, FREEDOM, CONTEMPORARY CINEMA, CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD

SAFE FOR DEMOCRACY? AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES AND THE (UN) MAKING OF THE GLOBAL ORDER

Wednesday 02
11:00 - 12:30
AULA

The panel investigates the international and transnational dimensions of U.S. political history and thought, tracing how debates over international projection and global power were articulated across different periods and at multiple levels of intellectual and political life. In particular, it examines how core concepts of American political vocabulary — "freedom," "democracy," and, following the First World War and the Wilsonian moment, "SELF-DETERMINATION" — were deployed and contested in relation to the colonial and semi-colonial world. Both imperial apologists and anti-imperialist activists engaged in these debates, in ways that resonate with Ian Tyrrell and Jay Sexton's formulation of anti-imperialism in American history as, in many instances, the "empire's twin."

The panel addresses these issues by focusing on moments of global redefinition of power, such as the collapse of the Ottoman, Tsarist, and German empires after World War I, the anticolonial revolutions that swept much of the world in the second half of the twentieth century, and the conflicts of the Cold War era. These historical conjunctures highlight how the affirmation of U.S. imperial ambitions both capitalized on and responded to the decline or opposition of other world powers. Adopting varied chronological frameworks and scales of analysis, the papers examine how U.S.-based actors across distinct periods registered and responded to these epochal transformations. Government officials, political activists, philanthropic enterprises, and academic institutions alike bore witness to the making and unmaking of international order, grappling with its implications as they sought in different ways to shape, oppose, or justify new imbalances of power. In doing so, they often invoked the paradox of a world "safe for democracy" pursued through imperial means.

Through this focus, the panel sheds light on the material and ideological contradictions that shaped American political debate during the era of U.S. ascendance and consolidation on the world stage. Thus, it enriches our understanding of international and transnational history by showing how U.S. actors framed their ideas and strategies in global terms while remaining deeply rooted in national political traditions.

CHAIR

- Kate Dossett, *British Association for American Studies*

SPEAKERS

- Emanuele Nidi, *Università di Napoli Federico II* - W.E.B. DU BOIS AND THE BLACK RECONSTRUCTION OF THE AFRICAN CONTINENT
- Sarah Dunstan, *University of Glasgow* - "THE STATE OF AFRICA": ANNA ARNOLD HEDGEMAN, PAULI MURRAY, AND THE POSSIBILITIES OF PANAFRICANISM.
- Oli Charbonneau, *University of Glasgow* - OWNERSHIP AND EVASION: RECOVERING EMPIRE AT THE MOHONK MOUNTAIN HOUSE
- Daniel Scroop, *University of Glasgow* - WILLIAM E. LEUCHTENBURG, HISTORY AS NATIONAL SYNTHESIS, AND THE TRANSNATIONAL PROJECTION OF US POWER

KEYWORDS

EMPIRE, INTERNATIONALISM, TRANSNATIONAL HISTORY, ANTICOLONIALISM, WORLD ORDER

“FREE FROM DEATH, FREE FROM EARTH”: POST-PLANETARY FREEDOM IN THE AGE OF TECHNOCAPITALIST AUTHORITARIANISM

Wednesday 02
11:00 - 12:30
AULA

The rise of technocapitalist authoritarianism in the North American context is marked by the promise of creating a technoliberal future in which humanity is “free from death, free from Earth, free from gravity [...] and free from international regulation” (Musk qtd. In Carruth, *Novel Ecologies*). This vision of freedom of cosmic proportions is quite obviously linked to Elon Musk’s and the entire “broligarchy’s” space venturing efforts and their promise that literally abandoning Earth allows humanity to transcend the category of the human, solve our anthropogenic polycrisis, pursue capitalism beyond terrestrial limitations, and even achieve immortality (cf. Ganser, cf. Rubenstein). The right-wing withdrawal from the idea of a jointly inhabited world (cf. Latour), which is in entangled in eugenics and capitalist feudalism, is not, however, only directed towards envisioning a future beyond our planet but is also aimed at systematically “freeing” humanity from its planetary embeddedness in the present (cf. Mühlhoff 90; cf. Temmen; cf. Ganser).
This panel explores how the notion of human futurity as “post-planetarity”(cf. Tabas 64) is founded, as Musk himself elaborates in the abovementioned quote parodying Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms Speech” (ironically articulated in response to the rise of fascism in the Third Reich), on the unraveling of scientific standards and ethics (“free from gravity”), the authoritarian erosion of laws and regulations to unleash neoliberalism (“free from regulations”) and eugenical transhumanist visions of a digitalized humanity that transgresses biological boundaries (“free from death”) (cf. Rubenstein 4; Mühlhoff 89). Our panelists also ask pertinent questions about how to envision post-planetarity otherwise i.e., in ways that re-imagines planetary relations not through the lens of escape, abandonment, or simple expansion, but rather as renewed responsibility for our planetary entanglements in light of current challenges.
Drawing on perspectives from cultural studies, ecocriticism, gender studies, post-colonial studies, and mobility studies, our panelists critically interrogate the reproduction and negotiation of as well as resistance to this POST-PLANETARY vision across science, literature, culture, and technology and how it relates to the messy discourse of “freedom” in the North American and specifically US context.

CHAIR

- Claire Cazajous-Augé, *Université Toulouse-Jean-Jaurès*
- Jens Temmen, *Katholische Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt*

SPEAKERS

- Maxine Broich, *Katholische Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt* - “HUMANS LEFT THEIR PLANET NOT AS ONE, BUT IN FRAGMENTS”: PLANETARY EXODUS AND THE MAKING OF HODGEPODGE HUMANITY IN BECKY CHAMBERS’ *THE LONG WAY TO A SMALL, ANGRY PLANET*.
- Brad Tabas, *ÉNSTA / Institute Polytechnique de Paris* - ON MAKING A VIOLENT AND REPULSIVE PLANET: MARS, ASTROCOLONIALISM, AND FRONTIER MYTH.
- Alexandra Ganser, *Universität Wien* - CONQUEST V. (POST-)PLANETARY CARE IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN ASTROFUTURISMS
- Judith Rauscher, *Universität zu Köln* - FEMALE FUTURITY AND THE PITFALLS OF ECOFASCIST POST-PLANETARITY IN THE WORK OF KATHERINE V. FORREST

KEYWORDS

TECHNOCAPITALISM, AUTHORITARIANISM, POST-PLANETARITY, SECOND SPACE AGE

ROADS TO FREEDOM? CONTROVERSIAL AUTOMOBILITIES IN AMERICAN MODERNISM

Wednesday 02
11:00 - 12:30
AULA

A highly idealistic rhetoric of freedom, doubled by visions of a better and brighter future, generally endorsed the arrival of the automobile at the dawn of the “American century.” Yet among all the technological innovations of modernity, the automobile was one that most significantly complicated pre-existent notions of freedom at the crossroads of different cultural discourses, mentalities, and ideologies. An alluring, yet by no means unproblematic promise of autonomy and renewal, this newly-gained form of freedom on the road was not free from hidden constraints, downsides, and biases casting a shadow over the “novel and thrilling experience” (Merriman: 2012) of automobility in the modern era.

By looking at American modernist literature, we trace such controversial aspects of automobility with regard to environmental issues, social equality, gender and racial identity. We argue that modernist American literature constituted a key venue for the discussion of problematic entanglements that still appear controversial today: Tensions between rapid technological development and environmental concern, but also questions of access, privilege, participation, democracy, and justice still fuel contemporary debates around automobility. Our panel points out that such persistent controversies are already present in the writings of canonic modernist writers (Sinclair Lewis, F. Scott Fitzgerald, W. C. Williams, William Faulkner), as well as in the works of more marginalized authors (Jessie Redmon Fauset, Wallace Thurman). We envisage literature about early automobility as a lens that allows us to address early twentieth-century implications of freedom in the relationship between: the environmental experience and the human body --- physical mobility and class expectations --- modern modes of vision and manifestations of desire --- consumerism and racial discrimination.
Our analysis will therefore show how modernist American literature both consolidated and critiqued visions of freedom inherent in mainstream discourses around early automobility.

CHAIR

- Pascal Ehrlich, *Universität Konstanz*

SPEAKERS

- Timo Müller, *Universität Konstanz* - FREE AIR? AUTOMOBILE AESTHETICS AND THE EXPOSED BODY IN THE MODERNIST NOVEL
- Frances Rowbottom, *Heriot-Watt University* - ASPIRATIONS OF AUTOMOBILITY IN WILLIAM FAULKNER’S SOUTH
- Otilia Teodorescu-Stadler, *Universität Konstanz* - “IN PASSING WITH MY MIND”: AUTOMOBILITY AND DESIRE IN W. C. WILLIAMS’ EARLY POETRY
- Samson Thozer, *University of Manchester* - AUTOMOBILITY AND SOCIAL DIVISION IN THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

KEYWORDS

FREEDOM, AUTOMOBILITY, AMERICAN, MODERNISM, CONTROVERSIAL

EAAS WOMEN'S NETWORK MEETING

Wednesday 02
12:30 - 13:30
AULA

The mission of the EAAS Women's Network is to facilitate contact among EAAS members interested in subjects and issues dealing with women and gender. It seeks to enhance cooperation among European Americanists by establishing a network of scholars with common research interests. It also encourages collaboration on projects, and works towards organizing parallel lectures, workshops, panel discussions, roundtables, performances, exhibits, and keynote addresses at EAAS meetings, with the end goal of increasing the visibility of women and women's and gender issues.
This meeting serves to connect existing and new members of the Women's Network; update attendees on upcoming events and the Women's Network's activities over the past two years; and facilitate conversation on the needs and desires of EAAS members interested in women's and gender studies. Everyone is welcome!

Chairs

- Anna Kurowicka, *Uniwersytet Warszawski*
- Abigail Fagan, *Leibniz Universität Hannover*

Further Steering Committee Members

- Christelle Ha Soon-Lahaye, *University Rouen Normandie*
- Nina De Bettin Padolin, *Universität Graz*
- Laura de la Parra Fernández, *Universidad Complutense de Madrid*
- Anne-Marie Evans, *York St John University*

THE LIFE, LITERATURE AND LEGACY OF LUIS J. RODRÍGUEZ: IN THE LONG RUN

Wednesday 02
13:30 - 15:00
AULA

This panel involves five contributors to the recently-published anthology, *The Life, Literature and Legacy of Luis J. Rodríguez: In the Long Run* (Edinburgh University Press, 2025), co-edited by Josephine Metcalf (Hull University) and Ben Olguín (University of California, Santa Barbara). This 250,000-word volume includes 37 essays, testimonial reflections, and verse by activists, scholars, academics, and artists from a dozen countries. As we write this panel abstract, Rodriguez himself has just turned 70, an author who has established himself as a prominent Latinx poet and memoirist, perhaps most well-known for *Always Running – La Vida Loca*; *Gang Days in LA* (1993), which was recently republished as a 30th anniversary edition. His literary merit and accolades are intertwined with his activist work: he is preoccupied with any form of marginalization and constantly seeks collective approaches to empowerment that has led him into prisons across the world and even into politics with two gubernatorial elections in California.
Both Rodriguez's writings and his activism push for freedom from inequality, exploitation, poverty, police violence and discrimination. Just as bell hooks spoke about 'education as the practice of freedom', Rodriguez regularly speaks about the need for 'connected and imaginative teachers' who may be found in a range of locations beyond the traditional classroom. In more recent years, Rodriguez's work has taken him ever further down the Red Road, whereby his struggle for freedom has become embedded in his role as a scribe of the sacred spiral of life. Thus, these four papers seek to highlight the wide range of Rodriguez's activities, thinking in particular about his work in European contexts, his recently established archives, his foundations in Marxist politics, and his push for a new understanding of masculinity. In the conference papers across this panel, we explore a range of Rodriguez's life and work from his earliest years to the present, including his renowned writings as well as less-known activities.

CHAIR

- Nicholas McGuinn, *University of York*

SPEAKERS

- Amanda Naylor, *University of York* & Nicholas McGuinn, *University of York* - TEACHING GLOBAL IMMIGRATION; LUIS J. RODRÍGUEZ, *NEMACHTILLI* (THE SPIRIT OF LEARNING) AND THE GERMAN SCHOOL CURRICULUM
- Josephine Metcalf, *University of Hull* - RE-ENCOUNTERING RODRÍGUEZ; IT CALLS YOU BACK AND DRAWS YOU IN—THE PERSONAL PAPERS OF LUIS J. RODRÍGUEZ
- Amaia Ibarraran-Bigalondo, *Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea* - BECOMING A 'NEW MAN'; EVOLVING NOTIONS OF CHICANO MASCULINITY IN LUIS J. RODRÍGUEZ'S *THE REPUBLIC OF EAST LA*

KEYWORDS

LUIS J RODRIGUEZ

FAMILY, FREEDOM AND CONSERVATISM

Wednesday 02
13:30 - 15:00
AULA

This panel investigates how "freedom" has been mobilized, contested, and redefined within contemporary American conservatism across political rhetoric, legal doctrine, gender ideology, and sexual politics. Rather than treating freedom as a stable or self-evident value, the contributions demonstrate how it functions as a deeply contested conceptual terrain through which struggles over family, authority, and social norms are articulated. Together, the papers trace how conservative thought has increasingly linked freedom to competing visions of moral order, from libertarian individualism to the defense of traditional gender hierarchies and religious liberty claims. The panel shows that contemporary conservatism constructs freedom not as a singular principle but as a field of competing claims—between individual autonomy and moral order, religious liberty and civil equality, sexual SELF-DETERMINATION and normative family structures. By placing political rhetoric, legal struggles, and feminist theory in dialogue, the contributions reveal how "freedom" has become a central yet unstable concept through which the boundaries of family, citizenship, and social legitimacy are continuously negotiated in the United States.

CHAIR

- Elisabetta Vezzosi, *Università di Trieste*

SPEAKERS

- Alf Tomas Toennessen, *Universitetet i Agder* - THE REPUBLICAN PARTY AND RHETORIC OF FREEDOM
- Eglantine Zatout, *Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3* - TWO VISIONS OF FREEDOM ON FAMILY VALUES
- Christen Bryson, *Université Sorbonne-Nouvelle* - IN DEFENSE OF THE HOUSEWIFE: FROM FAMILY VALUES TO PARENTAL RIGHTS
- Zésar Arranz Conte, *Universidad de Zaragoza* - REVISITING THE CONCEPT OF FREEDOM IN BARRY GOLDWATER'S 1964 CAMPAIGN: MORE LIBERTARIAN THAN CONSERVATIVE
- Joanna Szymaniak, *Uniwersytet Warszawski* - "YES. NO. MAYBE. I DON'T KNOW. CAN YOU REPEAT THE QUESTION?": RETHINKING AMERICAN NOTION OF SEXUAL FREEDOM IN THE POST-METOO THEORIES OF CONSENT

KEYWORDS

FAMILY, CONSERVATISM

VISIONS OF BLACK FREEDOM: BORDERS, ART, AND PRISON WALLS

Wednesday 02
13:30 - 15:00
AULA

This panel explores how Black voices have revealed the persistent flawed design of the promise of freedom and equality by dominant ideologies, and have pushed back against the many borders drawn by U.S. systemic perceptions of containment. Instead, the nation's 'Visions of Freedom' are reappropriated by those excluded from it, criticised, and reconfigured. Ranging from enslavement and incarceration to artistic expression and heritage, the panel's four papers pave the way for an alternative which fundamentally challenges the systems that seek to immobilise, contain, or isolate Black life within racially charged cartographic, institutional, and cultural borders.

The first paper focuses on literary texts by and about Black women who sought freedom in the 19th century. It challenges conventional mappings of the journey North to 'freedom' against the static coordinates of the Underground Railroad, proposing instead a cartography that reconfigures fixed political borders. The second paper explores how Ted Joans's art and poetry further expose the colonial limitations of Eurocentric approaches, specifically in the representation of Black art in museums and collections. It discusses Joans's argument for alternative modes rooted in African traditions to be used in localising and preserving Black heritage. The panel then turns to the more overt borders - those of U.S. carceral systems, with a paper on Angela Davis and Assata Shakur's autobiographies. The paper positions the texts as seminal counter-narratives that informed critiques of systemic carcerality, especially within Black feminist abolitionist movements. Building on a conversation between Chester Himes and Walter Mosley's texts, the fourth paper formulates literary iterations of the Black U.S. convict and ex-convict; it examines further the delineation of spaces of freedom versus those of 'containment' against a racially charged and at times, absurd, backdrop of the U.S. carceral landscape. Overall, this panel contributes to the wider conversation around 'Visions of Freedom' by proposing alternative configurations of its lines across borders, culture, and prison walls. By turning to art, poetry, narratives, fiction, and autobiographies, the panel demonstrates how Black voices have consistently re-appropriated the meaning of American freedom, challenged its spatial understandings, and expanded it to include a pathway towards liberation.

CHAIR

- Bruno Walter Renato Toscano, *Università Ca' Foscari Venezia*

SPEAKERS

- Nadine Barakat, *University of Edinburgh* - RECONFIGURING THE MAP: BLACK WOMEN'S NARRATIVES AND THE GEOGRAPHY OF FREEDOM-SEEKING
- Anna De Vivo, *University of Cambridge* - SPACE AND CONTAINMENT IN TED JOANS' ART COLLECTIONS.
- Arianna Parisi, *London School of Economics and Political Science* - ANTI-CARCERAL CRITIQUES IN ANGELA DAVIS'S AND ASSATA SHAKUR'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES, 1974-1987
- Keith Hughes, *University of Edinburgh* - THE CONVICT/EX-CONVICT AS THE LOAD-BEARING SUBJECT IN SOME WORKS BY CHESTER HIMES AND & WALTER MOSLEY

KEYWORDS

ABOLITION, BLACK GEOGRAPHIES, BLACK HERITAGE, BLACK FEMINISM, BLACK STUDIES

ALTERNATIVE FUTURES: VISIONS OF FREEDOM IN THE AMERICAN LEFT

Session 1

Wednesday 02
13:30 - 15:00
AULA

This panel explores ideas of freedom among workers, trade unionists, radicals and intellectuals of the American Left (broadly conceived). What does it mean to be free? Is the United States delivering on its promise to be "the land of the free"? Answers to these questions animate our six presentations. Our panel presents a multitude of themes and approaches, spanning labor history, history of political thought, cultural and intellectual history. Through this range of points of view, a problematized and shifting notion of freedom emerges.
Far from the shiny ideals of the Declaration of Independence, one of our case studies reveals "freedom" as synonymous with enslavement— a potent denunciation of the abysmal working conditions endured by some workers in the nineteenth century (Stanley). The lines between free and unfree labor also blur in another case study, which examines textile manufacturers sponsored by slaveholders in the 1850s (Sell). Notions of "freedom" likewise resonate through music and song, shaped by memory and resistance in the antifascist movement (Waldron), and can be traced through the long history of American radicalism, focusing on the Declaration of Independence and its legacy (Costaguta). The US Left features its own contradictory understandings of "freedom," with public services invoked without consideration for their cost (Giordano Drake). According to C.L.R. James, "freedom" is a "struggle for happiness" emerging in the everyday practices of workers, blacks and women against the social – racial and sexual – conditions imposed by the welfare state organized around the Fordist factory (Battistini).
In Karl Marx in America (University of Chicago Press, 2025), Andrew Hartman argues that "Marx gained purchase in American life because he offered a powerful theory of freedom— one that doubled as a map of an alternative American future." (7) Whether inspired by Marx or not, the imagination of an "alternative future" lies at the heart of the multitude of interpretations, critiques and explorations of "freedom" that our panel seeks to investigate.

CHAIR

- Lorenzo Costaguta, *University of Bristol*

SPEAKERS

- Zachary Sell, *University of Notre Dame* - SLAVERY'S FACTORY: TEXTILE MANUFACTURING AND SLAVERY EXPANSION IN THE MIDWESTERN UNITED STATES
- Janine Giordano Drake, *Indiana University* - THE IMPLICIT MORAL PHILOSOPHY OF TAX REVOLTS IN THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN LEFT
- Matthew Stanley, *University of Arkansas* - "VOLUNTARY SLAVES": CONTRACT, COMPETITION, COERCION, AND THE MEANING OF "FREE LABOR" IN THE ILLINOIS COAL FIELDS

KEYWORDS

LEFT, FREE AND UNFREE LABOR, SLAVERY, POPULAR CULTURE, LABOR HISTORY

RELATIONAL SOVEREIGNTIES: INDIGENOUS (RE)VISIONS OF FREEDOM ACROSS LAND, BODY AND IMAGINATION

Session 1

Wednesday 02
13:30 - 15:00
AULA

What does it mean to speak of freedom in a world founded on unfreedom? The conference theme—Visions of Freedom—invites reflection on how the very notion of liberty, which is central to U.S. nationhood, has been imagined, pursued, and betrayed. Modernity has conceived freedom as separation, as articulated in the autonomous subject, the sovereign state, or the unbounded frontier. This settler colonial logic is articulated through dispossession, enclosure, and extraction. Recognizing that the meanings and contradictions of liberty can only be understood through their entanglement with colonial history, this double panel intervenes in the debate from the perspective of Indigenous studies to foreground intellectual traditions that unsettle the conceptual foundations of freedom itself.
The panel brings together a group of Indigenous studies scholars—some established, others emerging—from a variety of European universities. Its main objective is to engage Indigenous creativity as a site of theoretical encounter and to argue that freedom can and should be reimagined through Indigenous philosophies of relation. The settler-colonial paradigm emphasizes autonomy, ownership, and mastery. Against this, the panel offers a redefinition of freedom as the capacity to sustain reciprocal and responsible relations with land, community, and the more-than-human world. This project centers on relational sovereignty, which encompasses Indigenous theories of freedom that conceive sovereignty as interdependence rather than control.
From a variety of approaches that include literary criticism, visual culture, cognitive studies, Indigenous philosophy, and decolonial theory, the papers examine how Indigenous writers and artists articulate these concepts through narrative, poetry, conceptual art, and life writing. Together, they offer new visions of freedom that reveal its historical exclusions while reimagining its ethical and ecological possibilities. The first session explores artistic, ecological, and affective redefinitions of freedoms. The second examines freedom as struggle within oppressive systems—religious, medical, psychological. Together, they suggest that relational sovereignty is not a metaphor but a framework for thinking freedom otherwise—as care, continuity and participation in shared worlds.

CHAIR

- Silvia Martínez-Falquina, *Universidad de Zaragoza*

SPEAKERS

- David Stirrup, *University of York* - PROTOCOL. PLAYERS ARE EXPECTED TO RESPECT THE INTEGRITY OF THE CIRCLE": DECOLONIAL BOARD GAMES AND SOVEREIGN AESTHETICS IN BETH PIATOTE'S *WINDIN!*
- Aitana Monzon, *Universidad de Zaragoza* - LOVE MOVED STONES: VISUAL SOVEREIGNTY, AND THE MORE-THAN-HUMAN IN LOUISE ERDRICH'S IN/ACTIVE POETICS
- Elena Cortés Farrujia, *Universitat de Barcelona* - (LAND)ESCAPING "MANIFESTALGIA": RE-INDIGENIZING IMAGINATION
- Silvia Martínez-Falquina, *Universidad de Zaragoza* - REIMAGINING FREEDOM: RESONANCE AND MINO-BIMAADIZIWIN IN MARCIE RENDON'S *WHERE THEY LAST SAW HER*

KEYWORDS

RELATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY, INDIGENOUS AESTHETICS, DECOLONIAL IMAGINATION, RECIPROCITY

CONSTRUCTING NARRATIVES OF FREEDOM: AMERICAN EXHIBITS AT HOME AND ABROAD IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Wednesday 02
13:30 - 15:00
AULA

Exhibits not only provide a platform for further dialogue and transcultural exchange, but organisers also use them to peddle narratives. U.S. agents and institutions have long relied on exhibits to present what they understand as American norms, values and ideas to domestic and foreign audiences. Across the twentieth century, notions of freedom underpinned these displays. What the conception of this idea entailed, however, changed according to the location of exhibitions, the intended audience demographic, and geopolitical issues. In some cases, such as the New York and San Francisco expositions of 1939, U.S. government-affiliated exhibits presented a vision of democratic Pan-American freedom to combat Nazi German and Fascist Italian propaganda in the western hemisphere. In others, such as 1950s and early 1960s south-east Asia, Cold War concerns resulted in exhibits framing American military interventions against perceived Sino-Soviet territorial incursions as national security-driven attempt to preserve individual freedoms. In others still, like in Iran, curators framed freedom in purely economic terms to underline the benefits of American-led rural development projects.

This panel accordingly examines how U.S. diplomats, officials, and curators constructed and peddled ideas of freedom in exhibits. Focusing on cases in the United States, South-East Asia, and Iran, the papers illustrate the concept's malleability, specifically how notions of freedom U.S. displays espoused shifted according to the setting. In so doing, the panel aims to (I) chart the development of how American policymakers conceived and presented concepts of freedom to publics at home and abroad; (II) highlight concurrent overarching themes across exhibits; and (III) reflect upon how audiences perceived or understood these articulations of freedom.

The papers proffer a new interpretation to the study of American exhibits and exhibitions. Whereas works usually focus on displays in isolation, this panel's comparative reflections enable the highlighting and identification of hitherto overlooked overarching themes to domestic and foreign audiences. Works, moreover, have refrained from interrogating curatorial representations of freedom which underpinned many exhibits, with histories underlining how mid-twentieth century exhibits reflected, and exacerbated, technological developments and Cold War concerns.

CHAIR

- Gaetano Di Tommaso, *Roosevelt Institute for American Studies*

SPEAKERS

- James Fortuna, *Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen* - ¡SALUDOS AMIGOS! HEMISPHERIC SECURITY AND PAN-AMERICAN IDENTITY AT THE WORLD'S FAIRS OF 1939
- Emilia Sánchez González, *Université du Luxembourg* - EXHIBITING FREEDOM: U.S. CULTURAL DIPLOMACY AND THE GLOBAL TOUR OF THE FAMILY OF MAN
- Darius Wainwright, *University of Bristol* - EXHIBITING FREEDOM? THE UNITED STATES INFORMATION SERVICE AND IRAN, 1953-68

KEYWORDS

EXHIBITS, CONCEPTS OF FREEDOM, TWENTIETH CENTURY

CONTESTED VISIONS OF AMERICAN FREEDOM IN THE CIVIL WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION ERA

Wednesday 02
13:30 - 15:00
AULA

James McPherson titled his history of the American Civil War *Battle Cry of Freedom*. He chose the title from George Frederick Root's popular Civil War song of the same name. The song of course called Americans to "rally around the flag" and proclaimed: "The Union forever, hurrah! Boys, hurrah!" Yet, as Christian McWhorter noted, the song became popular and powerful because it linked the Union with ending slavery. Welcoming all "to our numbers" who were "loyal, true and brave" the song welcomed African Americans concluding "although he may be poor, he shall never be a slave." The song became so popular that the Confederate side adapted their own version calling to "rally 'round their Bonnie flag" with: "'To the tyrants never yield!' Shout, shout the battle cry of Freedom!"

Historians like McPherson have long recognized the dissonance between US and Confederate definitions of freedom. Union victory, however, meant, as President Abraham Lincoln put it in the Gettysburg Address, "a new birth of freedom," expressed best perhaps in the War and Reconstruction constitutional amendments (13th, 14th and 15th) ending chattel slavery and proclaiming, "equal protection of the laws." This panel complicates the view of the Civil War as purely the triumph of freedom. The lines between freedom and slavery remained blurred, especially in how certain Americans envisioned this "new birth." Ideas of freedom, its extent and its limits, remained contested even as racial slavery collapsed. This panel does so by examining three groups of Americans deeply affected by the war and its aftermath; Confederate whites, African Americans, and immigrant Americans. For ex-Confederates, above all else, they still sought to preserve their control over the labor they had once owned, whatever ideological and legal defeats their racialised vision of freedom suffered. For African Americans legal freedom did not necessarily mean freedom to prosper as they sought to build new lives after slavery. And, for immigrant Americans, they had not necessarily become, as Christian Samito put it, "Americans under fire," during the Civil War. They too had to struggle with the new meanings of freedom for what it meant to be American.

CHAIR

- John Quist, *Shippensburg University*

SPEAKERS

- Anders Bo Rasmussen, *Syddansk Universitet* - EMBATTLED MEANINGS OF FREEDOM AMONG IMMIGRANTS IN MISSOURI
- David Gleeson, *Northumbria University* - 'I SEE TODAY THE FIRST COTTON BLOOM IN CORNUCOPIA': PRESERVING SLAVERY IN THE ERA OF EMANCIPATION.
- Amy Murrell Taylor, *University of Kentucky* - ENVISIONING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN FREEDOM AFTER THE U.S. CIVIL WAR

KEYWORDS

CIVIL WAR, RECONSTRUCTION, FREEDOM

FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM IN THE ANTHROPOCENE? ECOLOGY AND WARFARE IN CONTEMPORARY US CULTURE

Wednesday 02
13:30 - 15:00
AULA

This panel seeks to examine some of the interconnections between US imperial warfare – often waged in the name of freedom – and ecology through the lens of recent literary and cultural representations. The panel engages with the conference theme by revealing the sometimes conflicting discourses of freedom that emerge from the entanglements between war and ecology. It does so by focusing on what Elisabeth Anker has termed ugly freedoms, including freedom as legitimization for military action and freedom as climate destruction.
Apart from the environmental effects of armed conflict, the panel equally explores what Pierre Charbonnier has recently termed "war ecology," by which he means a constellation in which ecology itself has come to be used as a weapon. Drawing on ecocritical theory, the blue humanities, and critical military studies, the individual contributions cover topics ranging from biowarfare in recent pandemic fiction, water as a weapon of mass destruction, and the intricate interconnections between petroculture and the military.

CHAIR

- Katharina Gerund, *Universität Zürich*

COMMENTATOR

- Ingrid Gessner, *Pädagogische Hochschule Vorarlberg*

SPEAKERS

- Katharina Gerund, *Universität Zürich* - FROM ARAMCO KID TO NAVY SPOUSE: PETROCULTURE AND MILITARY LIFE IN RACHEL STARNES' MEMOIR *THE WAR AT HOME* (2016)
- Frank Mehring, *Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen* - AQUATIC BATTLEGROUNDS: WATER, WAR, AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMAGINATION
- Michael Boyden, *Université de Fribourg-Universität Freiburg* - "WE ARE GOING TO SAY THAT WE DID THIS TO OURSELVES." BIOWAR, VIRAL SOVEREIGNTY, AND PLANETARY HEALTH IN RECENT PANDEMIC FICTION

KEYWORDS

CRITICAL MILITARY STUDIES, ECOCRITICISM, BLUE HUMANITIES, WAR ECOLOGY, PANDEMIC IMAGINARIES

MOTHERING LIBERTY: MATERNAL VISIONS OF FREEDOM IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Session 1

Wednesday 02
13:30 - 15:00
AULA

In July 1848 a group of abolitionist and suffragist women led by Elizabeth Cady Staton met at Seneca Falls, New York, to elaborate and sign the groundbreaking document *Declaration of Sentiments*. Following the *Declaration of Independence* structure, the text starts with the self-evident truth "that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." The resolutions derived from this claim for women's rights and freedom in a "history of mankind" that, at that moment, was "the history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her," created the foundational text for the future suffragist movement in the United States and the pursuit of women's freedom in every social stratum. In her work *Of Woman Born* (1986), Adrienne Rich recuperates Elizabeth Cady Staton's thoughts about "the burdens of mothering her sons" and motherhood (208) to discuss the need to liberate the idea of motherhood from its relationship to male ideology. The institution of motherhood controlled by both the patriarchal and colonialist systems has always deprived women of their freedom to experience and exercise mothering as a way to control not only the maternal thinking but especially the maternal body. Women's freedom and its limitations have always been a fundamental topic in the construction of the maternal experience, the maternal space and consequently crucial for matrifocal narratives as it conditions women's gender identity. Also, the maternal experience of freedom changes its literary representations when engaged in the context of other matrilineal or matricentric cultures such as Native American or many African American communities, among others, whose relational understandings of maternal freedom clash against those of colonialist/mainstream America. The intention of this panel is to discuss the maternal visions of freedom in American literature from an intersectional perspective since the 19th century until nowadays. Thus, this panel will study the evolution of motherhood and mothering experiences in literature in relation to women's freedom and as a space in which gender, class, age and race issues change the perception and as a narrative and political space in which gender, class, age, ethnicity, and sexuality, significantly change our perception of the matrifocal experience.

CHAIR

- María Laura Arce Álvarez, *Universidad Autónoma de Madrid*

SPEAKERS

- Eulalia Piñero Gil, *Universidad Autónoma de Madrid* - KATE CHOPIN'S "DÉSIRÉE'S BABY" AND THE EXPERIENCE OF IMMIGRATION AND TRANSRACIAL MOTHERHOOD IN THE ANTEBELLUM AMERICAN SOUTH
- Isabel Castelao-Gómez, *Universidad de Educación a Distancia* - FREEING MOTHERHOOD AND THE FREEDOM OF MOTHERING IN BOHEMIA: DIANE DI PRIMA AND MINA LOY'S MATERNAL PRACTICES AND POETICS
- Ana Fernández-Caparrós, *Universitat de València* - VISIONS OF (LIMITED) FREEDOM: GROUNDED MOTHERS ON THE TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY AMERICAN STAGE
- María Laura Arce Álvarez, *Universidad Autónoma de Madrid* - RECOLONIZING THE MATERNAL BODY: MATRIFOCAL NARRATIVES OF EXCLUSION IN JOANNE RAMOS' THE FARM

KEYWORDS

MATRIFOCAL NARRATIVES, MATERNAL STUDIES, FEMINIST AND QUEER THEORY, INTERSECTIONALITY

IMMERSIVE LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION: THE TREND PROJECT

Wednesday 02
15:30 - 17:00
AULA

This session presents TREnD (Teaching Resilience and Environmental Democracy), an Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnership that develops immersive teaching approaches for higher education by combining Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), critical mapping, and virtual/extended reality (VR/XR). Bringing together partners from Europe and the United States, TREnD explores how these methods can strengthen environmental awareness, intercultural communication, democratic engagement, and resilience in a time of accelerating socio-ecological crisis and environmental misinformation.
The session examines how virtual exchange can foster transnational dialogue on sustainability challenges, how critical mapping can reveal power relations and contested environmental narratives, and how VR/XR can support place-based, experiential engagement with environmental change and community responses. It also reflects on curriculum design, assessment, accessibility and inclusion, ethics, and staff development. Operating primarily at a transatlantic level, TREnD offers a scalable model for integrating immersive learning into education for sustainable development by connecting pedagogy, technology, and civic agency.

SPEAKERS

- Angela Santese, *Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna*
- Dario Fazzi, *Universiteit Leiden*
- Gaetano Di Tommaso, *Roosevelt Institute for American Studies*

TREnD
Teaching Resilience and Environmental Democracy

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EAAS POETRY NETWORK MEETING

Wednesday 02
15:30 - 17:00
AULA

European Association of American Studies Poetry Network

The Poetry Network brings together academics and postgraduates from across Europe and further afield with the aim of deepening our readings, knowledge, and understanding of North American poetry. The network engages with work from Early American poets to the present day, from print cultures to digital contexts. In doing so, we seek to map and re-map significant and neglected legacies within literary history, thereby tracing new forms of inclusion. We understand our work to renew the vital role poetry plays in the study of North American culture, society, politics and aesthetics. At its core, the Poetry Network offers space for scholars across Europe to reflect more deeply on shared intellectual practices and our responsibility as educators.

We are committed to facilitating cross-institutional collaborations as they evolve. Since 2022, the group has been meeting on a monthly basis to close read poems and pursue collective idea exchange, which is carried to biennial meetings of the EAAS in the form of roundtables and panel discussions. As a result we also share our various pedagogies with the aim of negotiating best practices.

CHAIR

- Lucy Cheseldine, *University of York*

STORIES OF UNFREEDOM: NEW APPROACHES TO THE AMERICAN SLAVE NARRATIVE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Wednesday 02
15:30 - 17:00
AULA

How to study and teach the slave narrative—a genre central to American negotiations of freedom and unfreedom—at the nation's semiquincentennial? This panel explores new approaches to the American slave narrative that honor foundational scholarship while insisting on the need for methodological, theoretical, and pedagogical innovation. John W. Blassingame's pioneering work of recovery (*The Slave Community*; *Slave Testimony*) and Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s editorial and interpretive canon-building (*The Classic Slave Narratives*; *The Slave's Narrative*) established indispensable premises: centering firsthand testimony, historicizing voice, and attending to rhetorical strategy. Twenty-first century scholarship is moving beyond these "classical" approaches by broadening the archive (including letters, court testimonies, WPA interviews, pension files, legal records, material traces), by examining the slave narrative within a literary ecology shaped by a variety of genres (essays, novels, novellas, poetry, and drama), by mapping it against new geographies (the American West or the Caribbean), and by placing it within the global context of slavery archives in European empires. Interdisciplinary insights (gender and sexuality studies, environmental and landscape history, media studies and book history, translation studies, the history of emotions, memory studies, legal history, Atlantic and hemispheric studies) as well as new methodological experiments (performance?attentive readings, digital mapping of circulation, reparative public pedagogy) provide the backdrop for the panel.
The panel's four papers discuss and extend these innovations. Paper 1 assesses the most recent developments in slave?narrative scholarship. Paper 2 offers an emotional history of nineteenth-century slave correspondences and freedom suits, recovering affective registers and juridical testimony often elided by canonical slave narratives. Paper 3 examines the role of slavery in contemporary comedy, tracing how comedic forms negotiate memory, and commodification in popular culture. Paper 4 explores pedagogies that teach the slave narrative alongside fiction and drama, and argues for innovative curricula that cultivate empathetic literacy and performance?based critique. Comments by Prof. Claire Parfait, co-editor of the French „Slave Narratives" series, will bring together the various insights suggested by the papers and underline perspectives for the future.

CHAIR

- Marie-Jeanne Rossignol, *Université Paris-Cité*
- Hannah Spahn, *Freie Universität Berlin*

COMMENTATOR

- Claire Parfait, *Université Sorbonne-Paris-Nord*

SPEAKERS

- Michaël Roy, *Université Paris-Cité* - (RE)VISIONS OF THE SLAVE NARRATIVE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
- Laura Martin, *Université Toulouse-Jean-Jaurès* - REFRAMING LIBERTY: ENSLAVED WOMEN'S EMOTIONAL RESISTANCE IN THEIR CORRESPONDENCE
- Nele Sawallisch, *Universität Trier* - FROM "WASHINGTON'S DREAM TO "SLAVERY, WE'RE SORRY": COMEDIC NEGOTIATIONS OF THE AMERICAN PARADOX
- Claire Bourhis-Mariotti, *Université Paris 8* - VOIX D'ESCLAVES/VOICE(S) OF THE ENSLAVED": SLAVE NARRATIVES AS TOOLS FOR HISTORICAL RESEARCH, PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND PEDAGOGICAL INNOVATION

KEYWORDS

SLAVE NARRATIVES, HISTORIOGRAPHY, EMOTIONS, COMEDY, PEDAGOGY

ALTERNATIVE FUTURES: VISIONS OF FREEDOM IN THE AMERICAN LEFT

Session 2

Wednesday 02
15:30 - 17:00
AULA

This panel explores ideas of freedom among workers, trade unionists, radicals and intellectuals of the American Left (broadly conceived). What does it mean to be free? Is the United States delivering on its promise to be "the land of the free"? Answers to these questions animate our six presentations. Our panel presents a multitude of themes and approaches, spanning labor history, history of political thought, cultural and intellectual history. Through this range of points of view, a problematized and shifting notion of freedom emerges.

Far from the shiny ideals of the Declaration of Independence, one of our case studies reveals "freedom" as synonymous with enslavement— a potent denunciation of the abysmal working conditions endured by some workers in the nineteenth century (Stanley). The lines between free and unfree labor also blur in another case study, which examines textile manufacturers sponsored by slaveholders in the 1850s (Sell). Notions of "freedom" likewise resonate through music and song, shaped by memory and resistance in the antifascist movement (Waldron), and can be traced through the long history of American radicalism, focusing on the Declaration of Independence and its legacy (Costaguta). The US Left features its own contradictory understandings of "freedom," with public services invoked without consideration for their cost (Giordano Drake). According to C.L.R. James, "freedom" is a "struggle for happiness" emerging in the everyday practices of workers, blacks and women against the social – racial and sexual – conditions imposed by the welfare state organized around the Fordist factory (Battistini).
In Karl Marx in America (University of Chicago Press, 2025), Andrew Hartman argues that "Marx gained purchase in American life because he offered a powerful theory of freedom— one that doubled as a map of an alternative American future." Whether inspired by Marx or not, the imagination of an "alternative future" lies at the heart of the multitude of interpretations, critiques and explorations of "freedom" that our panel seeks to investigate.

CHAIR

- Janine Giordano Drake, *Indiana University*

SPEAKERS

- Caroline Waldron, *University of Dayton* - FIGHT SONGS AND FREEDOM: MUSIC AND MEMORY OF ANTIFASCIST RESISTANCE IN THE MID-20TH CENTURY
- Matteo Battistini, *Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna* - FREEDOM DOES NOT EXIST: *THE STRUGGLE FOR HAPPINESS* IN THE AMERICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT OF CLR JAMES
- Lorenzo Costaguta, *University of Bristol* - THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE AND THE AMERICAN LEFT, 1776-2026
- Gül Varlı Karaarslan, *Başkent Üniversitesi* - ARCHIVING FREEDOM: THE PERFORMATIVE SELF AND GENDERED RESISTANCE ASSATA SHAKUR'S ASSATA: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

KEYWORDS

LEFT, FREE AND UNFREE LABOR, SLAVERY, POPULAR CULTURE, LABOR HISTORY

RELATIONAL SOVEREIGNTIES: INDIGENOUS (RE)VISIONS OF FREEDOM ACROSS LAND, BODY AND IMAGINATION

Session 2

Wednesday 02
15:30 - 17:00
AULA

What does it mean to speak of freedom in a world founded on unfreedom? The conference theme—Visions of Freedom—invites reflection on how the very notion of liberty, which is central to U.S. nationhood, has been imagined, pursued and betrayed. Modernity has conceived freedom as separation, as articulated in the autonomous subject, the sovereign state, the unbounded frontier. This settler colonial logic is articulated through dispossession, enclosure and extraction. Recognizing that the meanings and contradictions of liberty can only be understood through their entanglement with colonial history, this double panel intervenes in the debate from the perspective of Indigenous studies to foreground intellectual traditions that unsettle the conceptual foundations of freedom itself.

The panel brings together a group of Indigenous studies scholars—some established, others emerging—from a variety of European universities. Its main objective is to engage Indigenous creativity as a site of theoretical encounter and argue that freedom can and should be reimagined through Indigenous philosophies of relation. The settler-colonial paradigm emphasizes autonomy, ownership, and mastery. Against this, the panel offers a redefinition of freedom as the capacity to sustain reciprocal and responsible relations with land, community, and the more-than-human world. This project centers on relational sovereignty, which encompasses Indigenous theories of freedom that conceive sovereignty as interdependence rather than control. From a variety of approaches that include literary criticism, visual culture, cognitive studies, Indigenous philosophy and decolonial theory, the papers examine how Indigenous writers and artists articulate these concepts through narrative, poetry, conceptual art, and life writing. Together, they offer new visions of freedom that reveal its historical exclusions while reimagining its ethical and ecological possibilities. The first session explores artistic, ecological, and affective redefinitions of freedoms. The second examines freedom as struggle within oppressive systems—religious, medical, psychological. Together, they suggest that relational sovereignty is not a metaphor but a framework for thinking freedom otherwise—as care, continuity and participation in shared worlds.

CHAIR

- Silvia Martínez-Falquina, *Universidad de Zaragoza*

SPEAKERS

- Deborah Madsen, *Université de Genève* - INDIGENOUS FREEDOM IN THE SHADOW OF US CHRISTIAN ZIONISM: WILLIAM APESS AND THE "LOST TRIBES OF ISRAEL"
- Joanna Ziarkowska, *Uniwersytet Warszawski* - ASSIMILATING INDIANS: SIOUX SAN SUN, A TB SANATORIUM PAPER, AND THE TRADITION OF OFF-RESERVATION BOARDING SCHOOL PERIODICALS.
- Rosa Segarra Montero, *Universitat de València* - READING BODY DYSMORPHIC DISORDER: A THEORETICAL APPROACH TO COGNITIVE VULNERABILITY AND EMBODIED SIMULATION IN INDIGENOUS NON-FICTION
- Nicole Koenigsknecht, *Universität Zürich* - "FREEDOM FROM WHAT?"—RUPTURING COLONIAL CONTAINMENT IN/THROUGH NOOPIMING: THE CURE FOR WHITE LADIES

KEYWORDS

INDIGENOUS SOVEREIGNTY, SETTLER COLONIALISM, DECOLONIAL IMAGINATION, RESISTANCE, RECIPROCITY

RECLAIMING FREEDOM BEYOND BORDERS: ETHNICITY, GENDER, AND ECONOMY IN ASIAN AMERICAN CULTURAL PRODUCTION

Wednesday 02
15:30 - 17:00
AULA

Under EAAS 2026's "Visions of Freedom" umbrella, this panel interrogates how Asian American cultural production contests, redefines, and expands the meaning of "American freedom" by contesting the racial, gendered, and economic boundaries of American identity. We interrogate the myths of American liberty, often conceptualised as a universal, inherent right, and expose the structural and discursive forces that limit its reach. Moving beyond a simple diagnosis of exclusion, we examine how Asian American novels, poetry, film, and television reimagine freedom as a dynamic process of self-authorship, affective expression, and resistance within systems of racial capitalism and cultural hierarchy.

Paper 1 (Liu), examining Charles Yu's award-winning novel, *Interior Chinatown* (2020), argues that Yu uses a second-person, screenplay format to expose the racialised limits of Asian American representation and employs a narrative shift to model the reclamation of discursive agency. Paper 2 (Jin) traces the poetic liberation of Chinese American poet Shen Rui, exploring how American confessionalism and global influences empowered her to move beyond Confucian aesthetics and achieve the freedom to lyricise female experience. Paper 3 (Chang) compares *Chan is Missing* (1982) and *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2022) to show how Asian American film visualises fragmentation and multiplicity to reject a singular, static identity. Paper 4 (Liu), focusing on Chinese American novels and media cultural production, critically reflects on the precarious nature of meritocracy and Chinese Americanness manifested in the form of economic (un)freedom. These papers reveal how Asian American cultural productions confront imposed constraints through challenging the rigid, hierarchical gaze of Hollywood, asserting their own complexity against demands for homogeneity and conformity, forging new poetic modes unburdened by external tradition, or exposing the persistence of racialised constraint under capitalism. Through our multi-genre examination of freedom as a contested ethnic right, this panel foregrounds Asian American cultural production as a critical site for reimagining and expanding what it means to be free in the twenty-first-century United States.

CHAIR

- Ruth Maxey, *University of Nottingham*

SPEAKERS

- Shuyue Liu, *University of Nottingham* - "MORE THAN KUNG FU GUY": CONTESTING THE RACIALISED LIMITS OF AMERICAN FREEDOM IN INTERIOR CHINATOWN
- Rose Chang, *Carnegie Mellon University* - THE (IN)VISIBLE AND FRAGMENTED ASIAN/AMERICAN IN CHAN IS MISSING AND EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE ALL AT ONCE
- Gail Kehan Liu, *Temple University* - HE UNPROMISING ECONOMIC FREEDOM: (POST-) NEOLIBERALISMIN CONTEMPORARYCHINESE AMERICAN CULTURAL PRODUCTION
- Defne Tutan, *Başkent Üniversitesi* - FREEDOM FROM THE "ORIENTAL": CHINESE AMERICAN REPRESENTATIONS IN AMERICAN FILMS OF THE 21ST CENTURY

KEYWORDS

ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES, ASIAN AMERICAN LITERATURE, ASIAN AMERICAN FILM, REPRESENTATION, FREEDOM

BLACK SOLDIERS, VISIONS OF FREEDOM AND MEMORY IN WORLD WAR II

Wednesday 02
15:30 - 17:00
AULA

This panel brings together three scholars from three different countries to examine Black soldiers and their visions of freedom in World War II both on the home front and overseas. The three presentations combine various elements of the African American experience of the war, from the domestic struggles surrounding their contributions to the war effort, to the experiences of Black GIs abroad, to the significance of their memories in terms of the "long" civil rights movement. Dr. John A. Kirk (presenter #1 and panel CHAIR) looks at a clash between Black soldiers and white southern law enforcement and civilians in Arkansas in August 1941 as a lens through which to examine how various constituencies in the United States sought to reconcile the inherent contradictions and complications of mobilizing a Jim Crow army to fight a war for freedom and democracy. Dr. Christian O'Connell (presenter #2) dissects the relatively unknown symbolic ceremony of returning the ashes of Christopher Columbus to the Italian city of Genoa in 1945 by Black soldiers of the Ninety-Second Infantry Division. This event was representative of the various ways in which Black Americans experienced being in Italy during the war, and how their transnational experiences helped to shape certain visions and memories of freedom in the long term. Dr. Simona Tobia (presenter #3) focuses on Black soldiers who were taken as prisoners of war in World War II and their experiences of incarceration. Drawing upon extensive oral history interviews with Black veterans, Tobia demonstrates the impact of POW experiences on Black identity and collective memories of the war. Together, the papers offer multidimensional and kaleidoscopic insight into the experiences of Black soldiers in World War II, shaped by different approaches, methodologies and subject matter.

CHAIR

- John Kirk, *University of Arkansas at Little Rock*

SPEAKERS

- John Kirk, *University of Arkansas at Little Rock* - BLACK SOLDIERS AND THE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM IN WORLD WAR II: THE 94TH ENGINEERS, THE NAACP, AND THE "ARKANSAS INCIDENT"
- Christian O'Connell, *University of Gloucestershire* - BRINGING COLUMBUS HOME: BUFFALO SOLDIERS AND ASPIRATIONS OF FREEDOM IN ITALY AT THE END OF WORLD WAR II
- Simona Tobia, *Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour (UPPA)* - "I WAS SCARED AS HELL, YOU KNOW...": AFRICAN AMERICAN POWS AND THE SHAPING AND RESHAPING OF WORLD WAR II MEMORIES OF INCARCERATION AND FREEDOM

KEYWORDS

FREEDOM, MEMORY, AFRICAN AMERICAN, CIVIL RIGHTS, WORLD WAR II

TRANSFORMATION AND MALFORMATION OF MOVEMENT IN AMERICAN OUTDOOR SPACES

Wednesday 02
15:30 - 17:00
AULA

Movement and mobility, literal and figurative, are a hallmark of the American mindset. Though the Constitution does not explicitly state movement as a fundamental right, freedom of movement between states has been upheld through several court cases over several decades. Attached to the idea of freedom of movement is freedom of assembly and of speech, all in the First Amendment. Expectations of being outdoors, whether in a city park, a national park, or one's own garden, is inherent in the idea of being American, bolstered in no small part by the creation of the National Park system, with its stated purpose to "provide enjoyment" of the space for "future generations" (U.S.C., title 16, sec. 1). By extrapolation, digital literary space is assumed to be open to all-comers: it is perhaps the ultimate space for freedoms of (metaphorical) movement and speech, given its potential fluidity for and theoretical inclusion of multiple creators and audiences. The National Endowment for the Humanities, certainly a site of potential funding for some literary artists, recently complied with an Executive order to "remove '"support for . . . diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) initiatives and activities" (https://www.neh.gov/executive-orders). The policing– often quite literal– of movement and mobility, of who is invited into publishing spaces– of people of vulnerable communities is at an all-time high, from threats to academic and publishing freedoms, to people of color being detained by ICE agents, to Black people being threatened for tending their personal outdoor gardens. This panel consists of papers that explore what is at stake when we interrogate the tensions between these putative freedoms and the lived realities of members of vulnerable communities who enter into outdoor spaces, literal or figurative, including: the spaces of electronic literature, where we find an under-representation of African American authors; the idea of city parks as refuge and as social experiments in control of city inhabitants; the garden as refuge from and resistance to policing; and the garden as allegory for cultivation of fascistic control and violence that belies attempts to use garden spaces as sites of renewal.

CHAIR

- Katherine Lynes, *Union College*

SPEAKERS

- Katherine Lynes, *Union College* - "A POLICEMAN HE WANTED ME / TO BEHAVE": GARDENS AND HOME IN BLACK ECOPOETICS
- Mauro Carassai, *California State University, Northridge* - PERMEABLE WALLS, EXCLUSIVE ZONES: RETHINKING DIGITAL LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES
- Renata Morresi, *Università di Padova* - THE NAZI IN THE GARDEN: FROM IDYLLIC SPACE TO HETEROTOPIC VISION IN THE AMERICAN IMAGINATION
- Brando Francesco Bonsanti, *Università Roma Tre* - AN EXPLOITED LAND: ECOCRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON DENISE GIARDINA'S STORMING HEAVEN AND THE UNQUIET EARTH

KEYWORDS

MOVEMENT, TRANSFORMATION, VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES, OUTDOORS

MOTHERING LIBERTY: MATERNAL VISIONS OF FREEDOM IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Session 2

Wednesday 02
15:30 - 17:00
AULA

In July 1848 a group of abolitionist and suffragist women led by Elizabeth Cady Staton met at Seneca Falls, New York, to elaborate and sign the groundbreaking document *Declaration of Sentiments*. Following the *Declaration of Independence* structure, the text starts with the self-evident truth "that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." The resolutions derived from this claim for women's rights and freedom in a "history of mankind" that, at that moment, was "the history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her," created the foundational text for the future suffragist movement in the United States and the pursuit of women's freedom in every social stratum. In her work *Of Woman Born* (1986), Adrienne Rich recuperates Elizabeth Cady Staton's thoughts about "the burdens of mothering her sons" and motherhood (208) to discuss the need to liberate the idea of motherhood from its relationship to male ideology. The institution of motherhood controlled by both the patriarchal and colonialist systems has always deprived women of their freedom to experience and exercise mothering as a way to control not only the maternal thinking but especially the maternal body. Women's freedom and its limitations have always been a fundamental topic in the construction of the maternal experience, the maternal space and consequently crucial for matrifocal narratives as it conditions women's gender identity. Also, the maternal experience of freedom changes its literary representations when engaged in the context of other matrilineal or matricentric cultures such as Native American or many African American communities, among others, whose relational understandings of maternal freedom clash against those of colonialist/mainstream America. The intention of this panel is to discuss the maternal visions of freedom in American literature from an intersectional perspective since the 19th century until nowadays. Thus, this panel will study the evolution of motherhood and mothering experiences in literature in relation to women's freedom and as a space in which gender, class, age and race issues change the perception and as a narrative and political space in which gender, class, age, ethnicity, and sexuality, significantly change our perception of the matrifocal experience.

CHAIR

- Anna M. Brígido-Corachán, *Universitat de València*

SPEAKERS

- Gala Arias Rubio, *Universidad Autónoma de Madrid* - 'WE WILL BE YOUR MOTHERS, YOUR SISTERS, YOUR DAUGHTERS.' MOTHERHOOD, SLAVERY AND LIBERATION IN FOUR WAYS TO FORGIVENESS (1995) BY URSULA K. LE GUIN
- Anna M. Brígido-Corachán, *Universitat de València* - POETS, WARRIORS, MOTHERS: FLUID BECOMING, EMBODIED SOVEREIGNTY, AND INTERGENERATIONAL HEALING IN CONTEMPORARY NATIVE AMERICAN POETRY
- Lucía Aréjula Múñoz, *Universidad Autónoma de Madrid* - THE QUEER MOTHERING VISION: DETRANSITION BABY AND ITS TESTING OF THE LIMITS OF FREEDOM
- Foteini Toliou, *Aristotéleio Panepistīmio Thessaloníkīs* - SEXUAL FREEDOM AND AFFECTIVE CITIZENSHIP FOR JAMAICAN IMMIGRANT MOTHERS IN NEW YORK CITY IN NICOLE DENNIS-BENN'S NOVEL PATSY (2019)

KEYWORDS

MATRIFOCAL NARRATIVES, MATERNAL STUDIES, FEMINIST AND QUEER THEORY, INTERSECTIONALITY

FREEDOM, ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY

Thursday 03
09:00 - 10:30
AULA

This panel interrogates how competing notions of freedom are negotiated at the intersection of environmental crisis, political economy, and more-than-human life. Across theological, literary, and ecological frameworks, the contributions collectively challenge dominant liberal and capitalist assumptions that equate freedom with human control, economic expansion, or individual choice, instead exploring relational, contested, and often paradoxical forms of liberation. Together, the papers propose that freedom in the Anthropocene cannot be understood apart from ecological interdependence and contested economic orders. Whether through theological dispute, hydrological entanglement, or fictional refusal, the panel rethinks freedom not as domination or withdrawal, but as a situated practice of responsibility within more-than-human worlds.

CHAIR

- Dario Fazzi, *Universiteit Leiden*

SPEAKERS

- Melanie Gish, *Hochschule Heilbronn* - DOMINION VS. SERVANTHOOD: COMPETING EVANGELICAL VISIONS OF ECONOMIC FREEDOM AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
- Anna Maria Karczewska, *Uniwersytet w Białymstoku* - FREEDOM AND RIVERS: COLONIAL CAPTURE AND ECOLOGICAL LIBERATION OF THE COLORADO RIVER

KEYWORDS

ENVIRONMENT, ECOLOGY

BOUND TO BE FREE? MARKET FREEDOM AND POLITICAL CONSTRAINTS AFTER THE NEOLIBERAL TURN

Thursday 03
09:00 - 10:30
AULA

In 2005, historian David Harvey titled the first chapter of his *A brief history of neoliberalism* with "Freedom's just another word..." The reference, an incomplete lyric taken from Janis Joplin's song *Me and Bobby McGee* actually reads "freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose" and acts as an introduction for one of the concepts at the very core of neoliberal thought. The idea that individual freedom is guaranteed, almost embedded, in the freedom of the market is the centerpiece of the ideology that took over the United States and the world at large since the end of the 1970s.
Whether it be freedom from market constraints or from the excessive power of governmental institutions, whether brought forward by the liberalization of international markets or the adoption of a favorable rhetoric, neoliberal economic policies were frequently tied back to this core concept. The aim of this panel is to go back to the start of neoliberalism to further explore the connection between freedom and the economic policies that were implemented in the US, from the Reagan Administration to the present one.
Miriam Bettamin's paper, centering on the Federal Reserve and the attempt to reform it in the early 80s, touches on the theme of central bank accountability and independence from other governmental institutions.
Moving forward to the late 80s and the G.H.W. Bush administration, the contribution from Alice Zamai explores how the US government handled a perceived threat to American economic freedom at the dawn of the global age.
Finally, Edward Knudsen's contribution presents a comparative analysis of the different narratives on free trade and protectionism adopted by the various Presidential Administrations, from the 1980s to the present.
Overall, the panel will offer an unusual and diversified point of view on the age of ultimate US economic freedom. Moving past the beaten path of domestic deregulation, it will focus instead on how economic freedom translated and still translates to US economic institutions and to the country's role as the global economic leader.

CHAIR

- Flavia Canestrini, *European University Institute*

SPEAKERS

- Miriam Bettamin, *Università di Torino* - ACCOUNTABLE TO WHOM? FAILED ATTEMPTS TO REFORM THE FEDERAL RESERVE IN THE EARLY 1980S
- Alice Zamai, *European University Institute* - A FOREIGNER IN A FOREIGN MARKET. UNITED STATES' PERCEPTIONS AND REACTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY'S SECOND BANKING DIRECTIVE (1988-1990)
- Edward Knudsen, *University of Oxford* - BOUND TO BE FREE? VISIONS OF CONSTRAINT AND LIBERTY IN US TRADE POLICY DEBATE, 1981-PRESENT

KEYWORDS

MARKET FREEDOM, NEOLIBERALISM, FREE TRADE, CENTRAL BANK INDIPENDENCE, 1980S

THE HAUNTING LEGACY OF TONI MORRISON: CELEBRATING BLACK FREEDOM AND THE ETHICS OF CARE AND RESISTANCE

Thursday 03
09:00 - 10:30
AULA

In *Specters of Marx*, Jacques Derrida introduces the notion of hauntology to describe a legacy or inheritance that is never settled and fully closed. This panel explores the legacy of Toni Morrison, not as something fixed or completed, but as a living presence that carries both responsibility and spectral force. Morrison's fiction has, undoubtedly, become crucial to understand the inner workings of both the complex and enduring legacy of plantation slavery and the counterdiscourse of freedom and hope that substantiates the resistance movement African Americans have led from the birth of the nation. Her powerful contributions to the rewriting of American official historiography effectively underline the perpetuation of racist, sexist and class-biased prejudice as engraved on black bodies, but also the possibility for empowerment and self-expression. We argue that American literature and culture remain haunted by Morrison, the first African American woman to challenge the literary canon and to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993. Nowadays, her multifaceted and rich legacy offers a much-needed ethics of care and resistance that continues to inspire younger generations of writers globally.
In Morrison's literary universe the discourse of freedom is intimately tied to notions of mobility and space which figure prominently in her novels, as she relentlessly reveals the multiple ways in which black bodies are denied the freedom to traverse or inhabit spaces, but also how African Americans have historically claimed their right to mobility and self-definition against systemic racialized surveillance in order to survive and thrive. Other related topics include the intersections of race, gender, and class, the appropriation and reinterpretation of the motif of the journey and wandering, the problematic relationship to home/homeland, the medicalization of race, and racialized neurodivergence and medical experimentation, among others. In the chosen novels Morrison heralds a celebration of the importance of African American collective efforts to resist dominant ideological tenets by proclaiming the validity of communal care and self-affirmation. And her legacy goes on.

CHAIR

- Mar Gallego, *Universidad de Huelva*
- Ewa Barbara Luczak, *Uniwersytet Warszawski*
- Paola Nardi, *Università di Genova*

SPEAKERS

- Paola Anna Nardi, *Università di Genova* - SUBVERSION AND RESISTANCE: TONI MORRISON'S REINTERPRETATION OF THE AMERICAN ROAD JOURNEY TRADITION IN *PARADISE*
- Ewa Barbara Luczak, *Uniwersytet Warszawski* - WANDERING, NEURODIVERSITY AND RACIAL SURVEILLANCE: BETWEEN MORRISON'S *SULA* AND JUNOT DIAZ'S *THE BRIEF WONDROUS LIFE OF OSCAR WAO*
- Mar Gallego, *Universidad de Huelva* - REWRITING (HIS)STORY IN TONI MORRISON'S *HOME*: MOBILITY, SPACE AND THE PROBLEMATIC NOTION OF HOME
- Anna Ferrari, *Università di Roma "La Sapienza"* - BANNING TONI MORRISON: READING THE TRILOGY IN THE TRUMP ERA

KEYWORDS

LEGACY, TONI MORRISON, BLACK FREEDOM, ETHICS OF CARE AND RESISTANCE

VISIONS OF (UN)FREEDOM: AFRICANS, AMERICANS, AND THE FATE OF DEMOCRACY FROM THE AGE OF REVOLUTIONS TO THE GILDED AGE

Thursday 03
09:00 - 10:30
AULA

Inspired by the American Revolution's rhetoric, free people of color struggled to make the United States into a "more perfect union" over its first century. These efforts threatened white male elites who created a nation "for the people" rather than one run "by the people". Although rooted in anti-monarchial, anti-colonial political ideology, what emerged over the course of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was a politically corrupt system rooted in clientelism that undermined African Americans, and other minorities' quest for equality and first-class citizenship. In the South, the dominant political and economic élites developed an excluding idea of democracy. Yet, disenfranchised and oppressed people contested these anti-democratic tendencies, and, in so doing, pushed the boundaries of citizenship beyond the founders' limited imaginations.

To explore this history, our panel focuses on two competing visions of American freedom and (un) freedom that shaped nation-state development in the long 19th Century. On the one hand, it considers the oppressive structural tendencies that, since the Constitution of Philadelphia, were perpetuated by political élites both at national and local levels. On the other hand, it examines the way people of color repurposed this vision of freedom within a transnational perspective. Through a case study of Georgia planters' politics in the Gilded Age, one paper will consider the anti-democratic and patriarchical-paternalistic worldview of white élites that emerged within U.S. democratic administrations during the Long 19th Century. The other two papers will show how people of color reinterpreted American Revolutionary ideology to further their political ends and contested the oppressive structural tendencies of white political elites from the nation's founding through the Antebellum era.

By challenging the memorialization of the American Revolution as the brainchild of "brilliant" white "founding fathers," these papers explore the historical moments/movements that challenged the anti-democratic strand of the racist US political ideology and administrative practices, which perpetuated white supremacy.

CHAIR

- Claire Bourhis-Mariotti, *Université Paris 8*

SPEAKERS

- Ronald Angelo Johnson, *Baylor University* - THE ENTANGLEMENT OF RACE AND FREEDOM IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION
- Ousmane Power-Greene, *Clark University* - "THE LOVE OF LIBERTY BROUGHT US HERE": RECONSIDERING LIBERIA'S INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT IN THE SHADOW OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION
- Cristina Bon, *Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore* - THE CONTROVERSIAL IDEA OF DEMOCRATIC ADMINISTRATION IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN HISTORY

KEYWORDS

AFRICANS, AFRICAN-AMERICANS, HAITI, LIBERIA, DEMOCRACY

FREEDOM TO BE ME: STRUGGLES WITH STEREOTYPES, DISSENT, AND CELEBRATION OF DIFFERENCE IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN WRITING

Thursday 03
09:00 - 10:30
AULA

The meaning of freedom plays a major role in both community's and person's self-identification and development as it involves basic aspects of relationship with self, group, community, and more generally, nation, and humankind. Since its beginnings, American literature has been concerned with self-definition, the complexities of national identity, cultural diversity, power dynamics, and racial and social inequality. The papers will explore how some of these issues are addressed in contemporary American writing analyzing the changes that have taken places in the artistic, ethical and aesthetical approaches over recent decades and examining the proscriptive norms established by the dominant group versus minority groups and various forms of dissent challenging the ethos of equality of the American Dream. Like their predecessors, contemporary authors celebrate difference, plurality, and heterogeneity defying the animosities of the past and emphasizing the connection between various phenomena that underlie human experience. The books under discussion show the importance of self-knowledge for self-empowerment of both a group and a person, which is inherently linked to the freedom of thought as well as the freedom of expression. Commenting on individualism as one of the American values, the writers discuss it in terms of individualism vs. community that is often based on conformity to the existing social structure and show how the system tries to suppress the voices of dissent.

CHAIR

- Yuri Stulov, *Independent Researcher*

SPEAKERS

- Natalia Vysotska, *Kyivskyi natsionalnyi linhvistychnyi universytet* - "AGAINST THE SEA OF TROUBLE": BLACK HAMLET'S QUEST FOR INNER FREEDOM IN JAMES IJAMES' PLAY FAT HAM
- Yuri Stulov, *Independent Researcher* - E.L.DOCTOROW'S NOVEL "THE BOOK OF DANIEL".AS A REFLECTION ON US POLITICAL TURMOIL OF THE 1940S-1970S
- Irina Kudriavtseva, *Bielaruski dziaržaŭny ŭniviersitet zamiežnych moŭ* - POLYPHONY OF VOICES AND CELEBRATION OF DIFFERENCE IN FLASH FICTION AMERICA: 73 VERY SHORT STORIES
- Olga Nesmelova, *Kazanskii federalnyi Suniversitet* & Zhanna Konovalova, *Kazanskii federalnyi Suniversitet* - RETHINKING THE AMERICAN DREAM AND FREEDOM IN AMERICAN LITERARY NONFICTION IN THE LATE 20TH CENTURY

KEYWORDS

FREEDOM, RACE, INEQUALITY, DISSENT, THE AMERICAN DREAM

NATIVE AMERICAN MIGRATIONS: FREE AND COERCED

Thursday 03
09:00 - 10:30
AULA

"It's a free country," is often used to describe the United States of America, but free for whom? Freedoms, some currently under attack, have long been debated in a country built upon the backs of enslaved and Indigenous peoples. Indeed, what does freedom mean for Native American peoples, the original inhabitants of the North American continent, under United States colonialism? As distinct political entities, Native Americans were considered citizens of their nations, later clarified by Chief Justice Marshall as "domestic dependent nations," but not of the United States, and ineligible for the rights and privileges bestowed upon citizens until Congress forced citizenship upon them with the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act. Freedom is even more contentious when one considers the long history of forced and involuntary migrations, separations from families, incarceration, internment on reservations, and government programs (relocation). But Native peoples, like others, also moved voluntarily. Migration and movement, free and coerced, provide a lens to demonstrate how colonialism structured the movement of Indigenous peoples and vice versa. From fleeing village sites to avoid massacres, to forced removals, to runaway students deserting federal custody, and voluntary relocations for economic, environmental, cultural, and leisurely pursuits, Native peoples have always and continue to deploy movement as strategies of survival and resistance.

This panel investigates three migrations to illustrate the themes of agency, resistance, and survival of Native peoples in what is today the United States. In chronological order, Kabl Wilkinson (Citizen Potawatomi Nation) uses the lesser-known Northern Removals to trace the erosion of the social, cultural, and political organization of Potawatomi communities. Benjamin Madley writes about Cherokee miners in the California Gold Rush. They were migrants twice over. US Removal Policy pushed most Cherokee people from the Southeastern United States to new homes in Arkansas and Oklahoma. When news of California gold reached Arkansas and Oklahoma, many Cherokees undertook a second overland odyssey. Preston McBride will present on a lesser-known, but perhaps the largest, forced migration in Native American history, ushering upwards of 250,0000 students away from their families and communities to schools designed to destroy their cultures and communities.

CHAIR

- Paul Rosier, *Villanova University*

SPEAKERS

- Kabl Wilkerson, Harvard University - FROM IRA TO IRA: INDIAN REMOVAL AND INDIAN REORGANIZATION AS IMPERIAL CALL AND RESPONSE
- Benjamin Madley, *University of California, Los Angeles* - "WHAT A STRUGGLE FOR GOLD!": CHEROKEES IN THE CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH, 1848-1860
- Preston McBride, *Pomona College* - "FAMILY SEPARATIONS: NATIVE AMERICAN CHILDREN IN THE UNITED STATES' INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOL SYSTEM"

KEYWORDS

NATIVE AMERICAN, MIGRATION, FORCED REMOVAL, BOARDING SCHOOL, GOLD RUSH

MEDIATED FREEDOMS

Session 1

Thursday 03
09:00 - 10:30
AULA

The two panels proposed in this document, united under the overarching theme of "Freedom, Communication, Media," form part of the EAAS Digital Studies Network. Since the dawn of the twenty-first century, America's image—both within and beyond its borders—has been shaped through an ever-expanding array of media channels. This development marks not only the transition to real-time media coverage of critical events but also the emergence of a digitally mediated reality. Such a transition recalls Manuel Castells's seminal study *The Rise of the Network Society*, which examines the construction of a global reality "oriented towards technological development, that is toward the accumulation of knowledge and towards higher levels of complexity in information processing" (17). Immersed in a twenty-first century world attuned to information channeled and filtered through media networks, we can observe a gradual shift toward mediated forms of human agency, as well as new modes of conceptualizing and articulating freedom. This shift inevitably influences the ways in which democracy is practiced in a reality governed by distributed and ubiquitous media power. It underscores the centrality of digital studies as a critical field for analyzing the complex interplay between technological infrastructures, media ecologies, and cultural practices, and for interrogating how these dynamics reshape power relations, modes of communication, and democratic engagement in the digital age.

The proposed panels aim to explore: the various manifestations of individual and collective media-induced in promoting and articulating human rights as an expression of freedom --- the impact of media and social platforms on public activism --- the role of digitized archives in visualizing past literary and historical struggles for freedom --- the communication of current socio-cultural and political issues through literary, cultural, digital, and artistic production --- the risks and paradoxes of media-driven manifestations of freedom and digitally distributed democracy --- the intersections of human subjectivity, memory, and digital media --- creative freedom in media representations, including how narrative forms and genres engage with technological, cultural, and social imaginaries.

CHAIR

- Stefan Leonhard Brandt, *Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz*
- Frank Mehring, *Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen*

SPEAKERS

- Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello, *Salem State University* - "DIGITAL NATIVES, DIGITAL ARCHIVES AND JUSTICE AFTER 250 YEARS: FROM HASHTAGS TO AGENTS OF CHANGE"
- Rachel Moore, *The Current* - "'IT OFTEN RHYMES': ART CONVERSATIONS WITH US HISTORY"
- Tatiani Rapatzikou, *Aristotéleio Panepistímio Thessaloníkīs* - ""DIGITAL NEGOTIATIONS OF FREEDOM: SAMANTHA GORMAN AND DANNY CANNIZZARO'S PRY (2014)"
- Vasileios Delioglanis, *Aristotéleio Panepistímio Thessaloníkīs* - "DATA RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS": DIGITAL DEMOCRACY, FREEDOM, AND DATA POLITICS IN AMERICAN SPECULATIVE FICTION AND CONTEMPORARY MEDIA
- Oscar Winberg, *Turun yliopisto* - UNFAIR AND IMBALANCED: BROADCASTERS, BALANCE, AND THE BATTLES OVER CBS NEWS IN THE 1970S

KEYWORDS

DIGITAL ARCHIVES, E-LIT, SURVEILLANCE, DATA RIGHTS, ENVIRONMENTAL DEMOCRACY, INTERACTIVE FICTION EMPOWERMENT, SOLIDARITY DISCOURSE, ART AND US HISTORY

FREEDOM OF CHOICE? AMERICAN CHILDREN'S CONSUMER CULTURE AND THE CONTRADICTIONS OF LIBERTY

Thursday 03
09:00 - 10:30
AULA

This panel approaches children's media and material culture through the interdisciplinary lens of American Studies, interrogating how "freedom" operates as both an ideological construct and a market logic in late capitalist culture. Across four case studies—from MTV-inspired cartoons and LEGO's marketing, to post-Communist consumer culture and Disney's multicultural branding—the papers explore how toys and media promise limitless possibility while implicitly constraining children's identities and worldviews. Together, they examine how the rhetoric of freedom can function as a mechanism of consumer socialization, making participation in capitalism feel synonymous with autonomy itself.

The panel begins by considering how the deregulation of American children's television in the 1980s fused entertainment and advertising. MTV-inspired children's programming blurred boundaries between cultural participation and consumer identity. Children learned that individuality could be performed through commodities available at the local mall, with freedom reframed as the ability to buy and display licensed merchandise and subcultural brands. LEGO's evolving marketing campaigns across the same decades extend this logic, revealing how the company's invitation to "build anything" came to rest on gender segmentation and consumer targeting.

The analysis then moves transnationally, showing how American ideals of creative freedom circulated abroad. In post-Communist Romania, the influx of Western toys, pop music, and global branding reframed liberty as consumption, teaching a generation of youth that belonging in the modern world depended on purchasing power. Finally, Disney's twenty-first-century celebration of Latinx identity packages cultural pride and familial resilience within corporate narratives that commodify diversity for global audiences.

Viewed together, these papers illuminate how the American language of freedom—rooted in SELF-DETERMINATION and opportunity—has been transformed into a consumer ideology shaping both domestic and transnational childhoods. By reading toys and media as cultural texts, the panel reveals freedom itself as a branded ideal: one that invites participation while reaffirming the hierarchies of gender, class, and geography.

CHAIR

- Laura Wilson, *University of St Andrews*

SPEAKERS

- Stevie Berberick, *Washington & Jefferson College* - STRANGE PLAYMATES: CHILDREN'S CARTOONS, MTV, AND SUBCULTURAL SELF-EXPRESSION AT THE MALL
- Rebecca C. Hains, *Salem State University* - TOYING WITH GENDER: BRAND EVOLUTION IN LEGO'S MARKETING AND CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF PLAY
- Vlad Sirbu, *University of California, Riverside* - THE WESTERN TEMPEST: FROM PLAYGROUND TO THE PASSPORT OFFICE
- Emily Aguilo-Perez, *West Chester University* - LATINIFAD: BRANDING LATINIDAD AND THE ILLUSION OF CHOICE IN DISNEY'S CHILDREN'S MEDIA

KEYWORDS

CHILDREN'S CULTURE, POPULAR CULTURE, CONSUMER CULTURE, IDEOLOGY, IDENTITY

SOUTHERN WOMEN WRITERS AND EMANCIPATION STRATEGIES

Thursday 03
09:00 - 10:30
AULA

Critics of Southern literature generally agree on there being three major periods when classifying it—the Antebellum period, the Renaissance and the Post-Renaissance—but calling for simplification, it is often the Old v. New South dichotomy that is retained. In its early days, Southern fiction focused mainly on space, the region's flora and fauna; then, defenders of the Southern way of life took center stage before more moderate writing about the South's "mystery and manners" started to emerge and is still strong nowadays. The theme of this year's EAAS conference, "1776—2026: Visions of Freedom" could have led Southern Studies scholars to explore the journey of enslaved people from bondage to freedom but we decided that focusing more specifically on women's emancipatory strategies would enable us to reflect upon other, lesser-known voices that have often been silenced. Riché Richardson's 2021 Emancipation's Daughters: Reimagining Black Femininity and the National Body provides a useful framework to reflect upon African American responses to emancipation up to now, while Patricia Yaeger's 1988 monograph, Honey-Mad Women: Emancipatory Strategies in Women's Writing, offers a stimulating theoretical starting point to discuss the ways writers depict women's experiences. Contributors will explore early or more recent examples of such strategies, delving into works by a variety of writers in order to see how things have changed in the transition between the Old and the New South.

CHAIR

- Hana Ulmanova, *Univerzita Karlova*
- Gerald Preher, *Université d'Artois*

SPEAKERS

- Emma Harlet, *Université Bordeaux Montaigne / University of Louisiana at Lafayette* - BAYOUS AND RIVERS: WOMEN, WATER, AND LIMINALITY IN LOUISIANA LITERATURE
- Hana Ulmanova, *Univerzita Karlova* - BEYOND THE DICHOTOMIES: RE-READING KATE CHOPIN'S "THE STORM"
- Clara Juncker, *Syddansk Universitet* - RICE AND RECONSTRUCTION: EMANCIPATION STRATEGIES IN ELIZABETH W. ALLSTON PRINGLE'S A WOMAN RICE PLANTER (1914)
- Marcel Arbeit, *Metropolitní univerzita Praha* - MARTHA LACY HALL: A FEMINIST AGAINST HER OWN WILL

KEYWORDS

EMANCIPATION, WOMEN WRITERS, GENDER, FEMINISM

ACADEMIC MOTHERING/ PARENTING ROUND TABLE

Thursday 03
11:00 - 12:30
AULA

The ambiguity of this round table's title, "mothering/ parenting," reflects the ambivalent perception of parenting within academia as well as the uncomfortable position of mothering within feminist scholarship. As a patriarchal institution, academia generally casts those who occupy its lecture halls, classrooms, and offices as separate from the nurturing roles of parenthood. Mothering is frequently conflated with feminism's larger debate about motherhood's role within the patriarchy, as such the experience of mothering is often neglected, sidelined, and discounted within feminist discussions. The Women's Network is interested in opening up a dialogue about how motherhood matters, how the reproductive work women and people with uteruses do affects them as they engage in professional work. The participants will be approaching "parenting/mothering" from two perspectives: first, the ways in which we engage in mentoring and nurturing in our academic work and second, the ways in which our lives as parents/mothers affect our work as researchers, professors, and intellectuals.

CHAIR

- Christen Bryson, *Université Sorbonne-Nouvelle*

SPEAKERS

- Fulvia Sarnelli, *Università di Napoli "L'Orientale"*
- Abigail Fagan, *Leibniz Universität Hannover*
- Izabella Kimak, *Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej*,

KEYWORDS

MOTHERING, MOTHERHOOD, WORK-LIFE BALANCE, PATRIARCHY, WORKPLACE

EAAS WOMEN'S NETWORK

AMERICAN STUDIES, PRESENT AND FUTURE: VISIONS FROM EUROPEAN JOURNAL EDITORS

Thursday 03
11:00 - 12:30
AULA

This panel brings together editors from American Studies journals in France, Italy, Turkey and the UK to consider the state of the field in Europe. What are the challenges faced by and opportunities for European scholars of the United States in the present moment, and how are these being articulated in our field's journals?

The second Trump administration has brought with it chilling attacks on academic freedom and academic institutions in the United States, including, but not limited to, the limiting and revoking of visas for international students, calls for universities to discipline or terminate the contracts of staff who are critical of the administration, and cuts to the funding of institutions who refuse to comply with its demands. It is, of course, too simplistic to frame Europe as a bastion of scholarly freedom, in contrast to an increasingly authoritarian United States: many European institutions and scholars also find themselves facing challenges of declining student enrolments, economic constraints, and the hostile rhetoric and actions of the populist right. Nevertheless, it is a timely moment to consider whether there are certain strands within or versions of the project of American Studies that are more possible in Europe – as a result of particular intellectual traditions and forms of training, trans-national and comparative perspectives, conceptions of academic community and labour, and critical and physical distance from the United States itself.

The editors on this panel represent journals that are both grounded in particular national academic traditions, and committed to fostering conversation and community across scholars and students in Europe. Their talks will consider how their publications speak to the state of the field in American Studies. They will also address the ways in which the intellectual priorities, histories, and structures of their journals shape the visions of and for American Studies that are articulated within them. Looking towards the future, how can European journals – individually and as a group – preserve and grow themselves as a space for the critical interrogation of the histories, cultures, and politics of the United States, for scholars in Europe and in the rest of the world?

CHAIR

- Katie McGettigan, *Royal Holloway - University of London*

SPEAKERS

- Nisa Harika Güzel Köşker, *Ankara Üniversitesi* - AMERICAN STUDIES IN TURKEY AND THE JOURNAL OF AMERICAN STUDIES OF TURKEY (JAST)
- Monica Manolescu, *Université de Strasbourg* - TRANSATLANTICA: FRENCH PERSPECTIVES ON AMERICAN STUDIES
- Marco Petrelli, *Università di Pisa* - JAM IT! (JOURNAL OF AMERICAN STUDIES IN ITALY): STANDARDS, IMPROVISATION, AND THE EDITORIAL COMMONS
- Will Norman, *University of Kent* - THE TEMPORALITIES OF AMERICAN STUDIES PUBLISHING AND SCHOLARSHIP

KEYWORDS

AMERICAN STUDIES, PUBLISHING, STATE OF THE FIELD, TRANSNATIONAL, JOURNAL EDITING

CREATIVE INSURGENCIES: REIMAGINING FREEDOM FROM BELOW IN LATINX LITERATURE AND ART

Thursday 03
11:00 - 12:30
AULA

This panel explores evolving conceptions of freedom in U.S. literature and art, foregrounding Latinx writers and artists who reimagine liberty not as a state-sanctioned right, but as a bottom-up, micropolitical practice rooted in collective survival, care, and resistance. Rather than invoking institutionalized liberal individualism or the mythic promise of American freedom—once symbolized by the Statue of Liberty and Emma Lazarus's "The New Colossus"—these works confront the exclusions and violences that fracture that ideal. In the face of racialized policing, deportation regimes, and authoritarian resurgence the artists and authors featured here reclaim freedom from below: as a lived, relational, and insurgent force. Each contribution in this panel resists fixed categories and embraces formal experimentation as a strategy of liberation. Genre hybridity becomes a tool for unbinding dominant narratives and enacting freedom through aesthetic rupture and political intervention. These works displace abstract, universalist notions of liberty with situated, embodied practices that emerge from the margins through care, solidarity, and creative reconstitution. Set in a post-apocalyptic time, Amalia L. Ortiz's *The Canción Cannibal Cabaret and Other Songs* (2019) fuses protest song and speculative narrative into a decolonial manifesto, staging freedom as insurgent and performative—a praxis of survival and resurgence that rises from the ruins of neoliberalism and patriarchy. Tanya Aguiñiga's *Metabolizing the Border* (2020) transforms the U.S.–Mexico border from a site of exclusion into a space of ethical encounter. Through participatory performance, Aguiñiga enacts gestures of conviviality and co-creation, proposing freedom as an affective, embodied practice that resists the logic of division. ire'ne lara silva's "Flesh to Bone" and "Hibiscus Tacos" (2021) deploy the fantastic to transmute violence into healing, asserting that freedom is forged through relational care and the reimagining of broken bodies and communities. Giannina Braschi's *Putinoika* (2024) blends epic drama, satire, and multilingual poetics to dismantle colonial entanglements and envision existential unbinding. Written during the Trump era, Braschi's work challenges readers to conceive of freedom as creative resistance—linguistic, political, and radically imaginative. Together, these works articulate freedom not as a static entitlement, but as a dynamic, insurgent process of unmaking and remaking—of borders, bodies, and languages. Rejecting the constraints of genre and the exclusions of the democratic ideal, in their hands, freedom becomes a verb: a micropolitical act of resistance, transformation, and radical care that insists on renewal from below.

CHAIR

- Esther Álvarez-López, *Universidá d'Uviéu*

SPEAKERS

- Esther Álvarez-López, *Universidá d'Uviéu* - INSURGENT AESTHETICS: PERFORMING FREEDOM AND DECOLONIAL IMAGINATION IN AMALIA ORTIZ'S PUNK ROCK OPERA
- Ewa Antoszek, *Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej* - METABOLIZING THE BORDER: ART, HOSTIPITALITY, AND THE REDEFINITION OF FREEDOM IN THE BORDERLANDS
- Cristina Garrigós, *Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia* - THE LIBERATION OF WIRES: CREATIVE RESISTANCE, POWER, AND FREEDOM IN GIANNINA BRASCHI'S *PUTINOIKA*
- Maria Antonia Oliver, *Universitat Pompeu Fabra* - DEATH, HEALING, AND LIBERTY IN IRE'NE LARA SILVA'S 'FLESH TO BONE' AND 'HIBISCUS TACOS'
- Beatrice Colina, *Università Ca' Foscari Venezia* - ARTICULATING FREEDOM: SPEECH AND SUBJECTIVITY IN GLORIA ANZALDÚA'S BORDERLAND THEORY

KEYWORDS

LATINX LITERATURE AND ART, FREEDOM FROM BELOW, AESTHETIC RUPTURE, CREATIVE RECONSTITUTION, RESISTANCE

THE REVOLUTION OF 1917 AND AMERICAN FREEDOM

Thursday 03
11:00 - 12:30
AULA

This panel examines how the Russian Revolution of 1917 reshaped American debates about freedom, democracy, and political legitimacy throughout the twentieth century. Rather than treating "freedom" as a stable ideological category, the contributions explore its continual redefinition across journalism, political rhetoric, and transatlantic intellectual exchange, revealing how competing models of liberal and revolutionary liberty emerged in response to war, inequality, and global political upheaval. The panel argues that the Revolution of 1917 functioned not only as a geopolitical rupture but also as a lasting epistemological challenge to American self-understandings of freedom. Across journalism, political discourse, and diasporic intellectual exchange, "freedom" emerges as a contested and unstable concept, continually reshaped through encounters with Soviet ideology and its global reception.

CHAIR

- Federico Chiaricati, *Università di Trieste*

SPEAKERS

- Sara Prieto, *Universidad de Alicante* - REIMAGINING FREEDOM: AMERICAN JOURNALISTS AND THE SOVIET REVOLUTION OF 1917
- Loredana Bercuci-Murariu, *Universitatea de Vest din Timișoara* - "A WONDERLAND": THE REPRESENTATION OF THE USSR IN THE ALICE CHILDRESS PAPERS
- Pavla Veselá, *Univerzita Karlova* - REVOLUTION IN EXILE

KEYWORDS

1917, RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

FREEDOM OF SPEECH ACROSS (POST) DIGITAL SPACES AND CONTEMPORARY US NARRATIVES

Thursday 03
11:00 - 12:30
AULA

Digital spaces take up a consistent part of our contemporary every-day life. The pervasiveness of the digital is so prominent that scholars define it as "banal" (Dinnen 2018) or delineate it within the "post-digital" to highlight practices characterized by ontological hybridity (Jordan 2021). It is on social media and other digital platforms that events are discussed, opinions are exchanged, and storytelling has bloomed. These digital practices often trigger self-reflexive debates about what can/should be said online and what shouldn't/couldn't. Particularly in the United States, public discourse such as the debate around the so-called "woke" culture has kindled on social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) and has been examined in contemporary literary texts. This panel looks at how contemporary US narratives have been interrogating the limits and the affordances of digital platforms with regards to freedom of speech and on how these limits circle back into the texts' formal choices. Exploring novels, short stories, digital platforms, and comics, the papers in this panel ask: how does literature stage the ethical tensions raised by catfishing and, more generally, lying online? What formal literary strategies are employed to convey freedom of speech online in recent literary productions? Within a social media landscape that "does not simply entail 'post- truthfulness'" but the erosion of "the relevance of an authentic source while the distinction between the original and alteration is simultaneously being blurred" (Roine 2024, 113), how do contemporary US narratives test their own limits and offer new ways to express authenticity? How does post-postmodernist US fiction mirror the new signposts of fictionality online and what does this say about the state of the First Amendment?

CHAIR

- Simona Adinolfi, *Universiteit Gent*

SPEAKERS

- Simona Adinolfi, *Universiteit Gent*
- Virginia Pignagnoli, *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona*
- Andrea Pitozzi, *Università di Bergamo*

KEYWORDS

FREEDOM OF SPEECH, FREEDOM AND DIGITAL MEDIA, (POST)DIGITAL FICTION, CONTEMPORARY U.S. NARRATIVES

UNEXPECTED BATTLES FOR LIBERTY: THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOMS DURING WARTIME

Thursday 03
11:00 - 12:30
AULA

Writers about America often wish to find struggles for freedom that lead steadily toward a better, freer time. But in reality, struggles for freedom are rarely so simply. Instead, freedom was negotiated, contested, won, lost, given, and taken away. One group winning new rights might mean someone else losing some form of freedom or privilege. Nowhere is this more apparent than during wartime. This panel examines the various and unexpected ways that wartime struggles shaped freedom in American history. W. Fitzhugh Brundage will discuss how Civil War prisoners of war and the fight over who deserved the title (and rights) of prisoner of war reshaped Americans understanding of Citizenship. Laura Sandy will look at how overseers (some free and some enslaved) negotiated loyalty and various "visions of freedom" during the American Revolution. Shae Smith Cox will demonstrate how African American soldiers and veterans used badges, flags, and uniforms to empowered them as they assert their right to various freedoms during and in the aftermath of war. Catherine Clinton will detail how women of various races understood freedom during the Civil War. Individually examining how freedom was approached by prisoners of war, African American Soldiers, overseers of slavery, and women are themselves interesting. Bringing them together and putting them in conversation shows that freedom was rarely as simply as having it or not. With four papers from leading scholars of the American South each examining how freedom and war interplay leads to a wide range of potential approaches to studying history. It promises to be an amazing panel that touch on a variety of topics requested by organizers including militarism, slavery, women, gender and the commemoration of freedom.

CHAIR

- Elijah Gaddis, *Auburn University*

COMMENTER

- Adam Domby, *Auburn University*

SPEAKERS

- William Fitzhugh Brundage, *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill* - PRISONERS FOR FREEDOM: CAPTIVITY AND RETALIATION IN THE CIVIL WAR
- Laura Sandy, *University of Liverpool* - OVERSEERS OF SLAVERY AND A "PREDATORY WAR": FREEDOM, CONFLICT, AND DIVIDED LOYALTIES DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION
- Shae Smith Cox, *Texas A&M University* - "AN EMBLEM OF LIBERTY": THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN CIVIL WAR SOLDIERS AND VETERANS
- Catherine Clinton, *University of Texas in San Antonio / Queen's University Belfast* - REVOLUTIONS IN BLACK AND WHITE: WOMEN AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

KEYWORDS

FREEDOM, AMERICA, CIVIL WAR, REVOLUTION

MEDIATED FREEDOMS

Session 2

Thursday 03
11:00 - 12:30
AULA

The two panels proposed in this document, united under the overarching theme of "Freedom, Communication, Media," form part of the EAAS Digital Studies Network. Since the dawn of the twenty-first century, America's image—both within and beyond its borders—has been shaped through an ever-expanding array of media channels. This development marks not only the transition to real-time media coverage of critical events but also the emergence of a digitally mediated reality. Such a transition recalls Manuel Castells's seminal study *The Rise of the Network Society*, which examines the construction of a global reality "oriented towards technological development, that is toward the accumulation of knowledge and towards higher levels of complexity in information processing" (17). Immersed in a twenty-first century world attuned to information channeled and filtered through media networks, we can observe a gradual shift toward mediated forms of human agency, as well as new modes of conceptualizing and articulating freedom. This shift inevitably influences the ways in which democracy is practiced in a reality governed by distributed and ubiquitous media power. It underscores the centrality of digital studies as a critical field for analyzing the complex interplay between technological infrastructures, media ecologies, and cultural practices, and for interrogating how these dynamics reshape power relations, modes of communication, and democratic engagement in the digital age.
The proposed panels aim to explore: the various manifestations of individual and collective media-induced in promoting and articulating human rights as an expression of freedom --- the impact of media and social platforms on public activism --- the role of digitized archives in visualizing past literary and historical struggles for freedom --- the communication of current socio-cultural and political issues through literary, cultural, digital, and artistic production --- the risks and paradoxes of media-driven manifestations of freedom and digitally distributed democracy --- the intersections of human subjectivity, memory, and digital media --- creative freedom in media representations, including how narrative forms and genres engage with technological, cultural, and social imaginaries.

CHAIR

- Tatiani Rapatzikou, *Aristotéleio Panepistímio Thessaloníkīs*
- Frank Mehring, *Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen*

SPEAKERS

- Maria Giannouli, *Aristotéleio Panepistímio Thessaloníkīs* - DATAFIED LIVES AND SOCIAL SCORING: INTERMEDIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF SURVEILLANCE IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN CULTURE
- Thomas van Gaalen, *Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen* - CORPUS ANALYSIS FROM BELOW? CHARTING SOLIDARITY DISCOURSE IN THE INTERWAR CARIBBEAN
- Gaetano Di Tommaso, *Roosevelt Institute for American Studies* - EXPANDING ENVIRONMENTAL DEMOCRACY THROUGH VIRTUAL EXCHANGES: FREEDOMS, FRAMEWORKS, AND FUTURES IN TRANSNATIONAL DIGITAL EDUCATION
- Evgenia Kleidona, *Aristotéleio Panepistímio Thessaloníkīs* - RESISTING NORMS, EMPOWERING SELVES THROUGH DIGITAL MEDIA: HOW TWINE GAVE VOICE TO QUEER EXPERIENCE
- Mats Carlsson, *Stockholms universitet* - FREEDOM, MEDIA, COMMUNICATION: IMAGE AND VIDEO PROVENANCE IN THE AGE OF GENERATIVE AI

KEYWORDS

DIGITAL ARCHIVES, E-LIT, SURVEILLANCE, DATA RIGHTS, ENVIRONMENTAL DEMOCRACY, INTERACTIVE FICTION EMPOWERMENT, SOLIDARITY DISCOURSE, ART AND US HISTORY

VEGAN READINGS, US FREEDOMS: CHATTEL, CATTLE, CAPITAL

Thursday 03
11:00 - 12:30
AULA

The EAAS 2026 CFP quotes Angela Davis's question about freedom in America: "How do we imagine a democracy that does not thrive on ... 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?" As a practicing vegan, Davis elsewhere connects the quotidian act of eating, and mindless unawareness of the suffering that brings meat to the table, to the entire capitalist industrial system of production that must be challenged in favor of respect for the freedoms of all sentient beings. This panel draws on the etymological commonalities of "capital," "chattel," and "cattle" that stem from the Latin caput (head), and evoke the derivation of wealth and property from the commodified lives of other-than-human beings. By decentering "the human," vegan readings challenge dominant discourses of freedom, proposing that until all beings are free then no beings are truly free. Critical Vegan Studies is a transversal intervention that draws on Critical Race Theory and cuts across recent developments such as the "Animal Turn," the "Affective Turn," Green Humanities, Sustainability Studies, Critical Plant Studies, and Human-Animal Studies. Vegan Studies has much to offer the discipline of American Studies, involving as it does the same emphasis on rights – and the freedoms brought by the exercise of those rights – that characterize the foundational documents of US national formation. Benjamin Franklin's decision to adopt a radical vegetarian diet harmonized individual freedom of choice with emergent US national values of self-reliance, frugality, temperance, alongside patriotism, and civic engagement. These values rely on a discourse of human rights and the freedom to exercise those rights that intersects with a long history of ethical vegan activism. In this (double) panel we explore the importance of rights and freedoms as a legacy of the foundational ideals of the US Republic through vegan readings of a range of historical and contemporary cultural engagements with these questions. Presenters explore the borders of freedom in a society that normalizes the exploitation of the other-than-human, probing the ethics of personal freedoms to choose in such contexts as plantation enslavement and industrial meat production, and questioning the ultimate possibility of American freedom in the physical and discursive environments of stolen and colonized lives.

CHAIR

- Deborah Madsen, *Université de Genève*

SPEAKERS

- Deborah Madsen, Université de Genève - SEEDING THE US REPUBLIC: VEGANISM, FREEDOMS, AND US NATIONAL CHARACTER
- Sune Borkfelt, *Aarhus Universitet* - "TO MAKE MANKIND INTO SAUSAGES": HUMAN FREEDOM AND MEATY TEXTS IN THE VEGAN LENS
- Yagmur Su Kolsal, *Universität Münster* - CAVEMEN, FLEXITARIANS, AND VEGAN ACTIVISTS: THE RHETORICAL USE OF FREEDOM OF CHOICE IN POLITICS OF SUSTAINABILITY, CONSERVATIVE REFUSAL, AND ETHICAL VEGANISM
- Aïcha Bouchelaghem, *Université de Genève* - [M]Y MAMA'S FLESH IS SOFT AS PIG STOMACH": VEGAN PROJECTIONS OF FREEDOM IN JESMYN WARD'S *LET US DESCEND*
- Burak Sezer,*Technische Universität Dortmund* - THE PLAGUE OF CATTLE: A VEGAN READING OF JOHN EDGAR WIDEMAN'S THE CATTLE KILLING
- Ho'esta Mo'e'hahne, *University of California, Los Angeles* - "INFINITY THAT REACHES TO THE STARS": INDIGENOUS COSMOLOGIES, PLANT PEOPLES, AND RELATIONAL WORLDING

KEYWORDS

CRITICAL VEGAN STUDIES, FREEDOMS, SPECIESISM, LITERATURE, RACE

VAEMPIRE: ANTI-COLONIALIST RHETORIC IN THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM

Thursday 03
11:00 - 12:30
AULA

Our panel seeks to explore, in diverse ways and through multimedial material, the concept of "vaempire"—a neologism put forth to depict the pernicious, exploitative and culturally mutating influence exerted upon a native culture by the encroaching colonizer one. Although the image of the vampire has been used extensively in the past in the context of postcolonial identity articulation, especially in readings of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* or in Latin American "postcolonial gothic," it has primarily been established as a reflection of colonialist fears about the possibility of "reverse colonization" and contamination through matriculation on the part of the colonized Other, or as an appropriation of the concept by the colonized for purposes of subversion and resistance (as, for example, in Christina Artenie's 2015 *Dracula Invades England* or the 2012 collection *Transnational and Postcolonial Vampires* edited by Tabish Khair and Johan Höglund). "Vaempire" seeks to reverse this reversal back to its source, articulating a colonizer image that can be used as a weapon in the native struggle for freedom, both physical and cultural. The infectious, unassimilable and parasitic nature of the vampire reflects both the danger of (cultural) erosion and irreversible mutation as well as the seductive element in the process of incorporation of the native nation/group into a larger, more powerful, supposedly "civilized" imperial culture, a dual gesture well exemplified by the hard- and soft- power politics of the USA. Once conceptualized thus, the colonized can claim both legitimation and means to overthrow this vampiric dominion, yet simultaneously be mindful of the caveat (implicit in both gothic and postcolonial thinking) that the return to a situation of former "purity" is impossible, and one must learn to live with the (cultural) bite-marks and the experience of horror—the pinnacle of which may be having to appropriate the vaempire's means to end the vaempire.
The papers comprising the panel explore manifestations of the vaempire in U.S. culture, in terms of both its global relations and its internal domestic clashes, as these are encoded for public consumption in a variety of popular culture texts, namely comics, film, and fiction.
Although there is a teen fantasy fiction novel series by Thomas Winship bearing the same title (and possibly a Vaempire.com board game by Uazzo Perpetual Games), this was not known to us at the time of the inception of the term, which ran a parallel and unrelated course.

CHAIR

- Christina Dokou,*Ethnikó kai Kapodistriakó Panepistímio Athinón*

SPEAKERS

- Christina Dokou,*Ethnikó kai Kapodistriakó Panepistímio Athinón* - MORE THAN ONE WAYS TO SKIN A...VAEMPIRE: EMILY CARROLL'S *WHEN I ARRIVED AT THE CASTLE*
- Katie Googe, *Purdue University* - VAMPIRISM ALONG THE COLOR LINE: P. DJÈLÍ CLARK'S *RING SHOUT* AND THE JIM CROW VAMPIRE
- Tomáš Pospíšil, *Masarykova univerzita* - RESISTING THE VAEMPIRE: BLACK MUSIC, COLONIAL POWER, AND CULTURAL SURVIVAL IN RYAN COOGLER'S *SINNERS*
- Maria Vara, *Anōtátī Scholḯ Kalṓn Technṓn* - GOTHIC AESTHETICS AND THE FALL OF THE VAEMPIRE IN *THE HUNGER* (1983)

KEYWORDS

VAMPIRE, EMPIRE, COLONIALISM/IMPERIALISM, (GRAPHIC) LITERATURE, FILM

DEFENDING ACADEMIC FREEDOM: TRANSATLANTIC PERSPECTIVES ON AMERICAN STUDIES

Thursday 03
13:30 - 15:00
AULA

Hosted by Andrea Carosso, President of AISNA, this roundtable brings together Alex Lubin, outgoing President of the ASA, and Ingrid Gessner, President of the EAAS. The session examines mounting challenges to academic freedom and their impact on transatlantic collaboration in American Studies. More broadly, the panel reflects on how we "do" American Studies at a time when the very notion of freedom is under attack, both within and beyond the United States.

CHAIR

- Andrea Carosso, *Università di Torino*

SPEAKERS

- Alex Lubin, *American Studies Association*
- Ingrid Gessner, *Pädagogische Hochschule Vorarlberg*

KEYWORDS

ACADEMIC FREEDOM; TRANSATLANTIC COLLABORATION; HIGHER EDUCATION; DEMOCRACY; SCHOLARLY NETWORKS; PUBLIC HUMANITIES

EAAS

MINOR REVOLUTIONS: VIET THANH NGUYEN AND THE UNMAKING OF AMERICAN FREEDOM

Thursday 03
13:30 - 15:00
AULA

Through a hybrid voice that fuses criticism and storytelling, Vietnamese American writer and scholar Viet Thanh Nguyen rethinks "freedom" from the vantage point of the refugee, exposing how U.S. myths of liberty rest on racialised borders, heroic self-making, imperial histories and selective memory. In the *Harvard Norton Lectures*, collected as *To Save and to Destroy* (2024), Nguyen develops this vision by theorizing "writing as an other" and "being minor" as ethical and creative acts of resistance.
Taking these lectures as our point of departure, we argue that Nguyen embraces refugee subjectivity as a transformative position from which to reimagine freedom—not as a possession of rights within the nation-state, but as a relational, hybrid, and contested practice emerging from histories of violence and border crossing. His figure of the minor—"unimportant, casually dismissed, [...], vulnerable to danger, in need of protection" (Nguyen 73)—is crucial to unravel the "linear optimism of American myth-making" (64). In conversation with Wendy Brown's account of neoliberal reason (where "liberty and equality are recalibrated from political to economic" and "freedom talk" masks market logics that sort migrants' rights (42)), Judith Shklar's "liberalism of fear" (freedom as protection from abuse and intimidation (21)), and Eric Foner's analysis of freedom as a contested and exclusionary ideal (14), we read Nguyen's fiction, memoir, and essays to show how contemporary democracies manufacture unfreedom while proclaiming liberty. Drawing on postcolonial and diaspora studies, memory and trauma studies, and American studies on liberty and its exclusions, we will address four questions: 1) How does hybridity enable a more inclusive, pluralistic vision of freedom? --- 2) What forms of freedom emerge when personal and collective memories confront hegemonic war narratives? --- 3) How does Nguyen critique heroic immigrant narratives and imagine freedom beyond state borders? --- 4) How do Nguyen's formal innovations—hybrid genres, nonlinear structures, surrealism—constitute a mode of freedom?
In sum, we ground a literary account of how Nguyen's representation of transnational trauma and border crossing generate new, ethically charged visions of freedom and how his "minor" stance makes those visions thinkable.

CHAIR

- Cristina Pividori, *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona*

SPEAKERS

- David Owen, *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona* - DRIVERS, DETOURS, AND DETONATIONS: UNFREEDOM AND MASCULINITY IN "SOMEONE ELSE BESIDES YOU" (THE REFUGEES, 2017)
- Nicholas Spengler, *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona* - SYMPATHY FOR "NOTHING": DOUBLENESS AND FREEDOM IN VIET THANH NGUYEN'S *THE SYMPATHIZER* (2015)
- Cristina Pividori, *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona* - GHOSTS OF FREEDOM: JUST MEMORY IN VIET THANH NGUYEN'S "BLACK-EYED WOMAN" (THE REFUGEES, 2017)
- Andrew Monnickendam, *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona* - BEYOND AMERICAN MEMORIES: VIET THU NGUYEN, BAO NINH, AND DONG THU HUONG

KEYWORDS

FREEDOM AND UNFREEDOM, REFUGEE SUBJECTIVITY, POSTMEMORY AND TRAUMA, HYBRIDITY AND MINOR LITERATURE, AMERICAN MYTH AND NEOLIBERALISM

DISCOURSES OF FREEDOM: HISTORY-MAKING SPEECHES, ESSAYS, AND MANIFESTOS IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Thursday 03
13:30 - 15:00
AULA

This panel investigates how speeches, discourses, and oratorical interventions have shaped, challenged, and redefined narratives of freedom in the United States and beyond. It examines the rhetorical and literary strategies employed by three prominent intellectual figures whose work has significantly questioned and expanded the meaning of freedom in American history.
By engaging with thinkers whose work spans over two centuries, the panel underscores how freedom has always been a contested terrain—both politically and rhetorically—and how its status as an empty signifier requires continuous political and discursive resignification. International panelists will explore the evolving relationship between rhetoric, resistance, and national identity: from Douglass's reimagining of American ideals, to Allen's theorization of Black oratorical authority, to the introduction of Malcolm X's political philosophy on Italian radio in 1968 as a catalyst for postcolonial, Marxist internationalism.
Ultimately, the panel invites reflection on how literary forms of public address contribute to civic life and democratic transformation—and how historical voices continue to echo in contemporary struggles for equity and liberation.

CHAIR

- Maria Cristina Iuli, *Università del Piemonte Orientale "Amedeo Avogadro"*
- Maria Giulia Fabi, *Università di Ferrara*

SPEAKERS

- John Ernest, *University of Delaware* - IMPOSSIBLE ORATORY:WILLIAM G. ALLEN AND THE CONDITIONS OF ELOQUENCE
- Barbara Foley, *Rutgers University-Newark* - FREDERICK DOUGLASS AND THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION: THEN AND NOW
- Maria Cristina Iuli, *Università del Piemonte Orientale "Amedeo Avogadro"* - FREEDOM RADIO: MALCOLM X SPEECHES AND BLACK POWER ON RAI, "TERZO PROGRAMMA"
- Suzanne Enzerink, *Universität St.Gallen* - TRANSATLANTIC ARCHITECTURES OF UNFREEDOM

KEYWORDS

WILLIAM ALLEN; FREDRICK DOUGLASS; MALCOLM X; RHETORIC; FREEDOM

PAST AND PRESENT BOUNDARIES OF PRISON

Thursday 03
13:30 - 15:00
AULA

This panel examines how prisons are constituted not only through walls and legal frameworks, but through shifting spatial, temporal, ecological, and ideological boundaries that extend far beyond the carceral site itself. Bringing together historical, contemporary, and theoretical perspectives, the panel interrogates how imprisonment operates as a flexible system of control while also generating forms of resistance, political imagination, and abolitionist thought. Taken together, the panel argues that prison boundaries are never fixed: they are ecological, spatial, political, and imaginative. From protected wetlands repurposed as detention sites, to the forced mobility of incarcerated activists, to abolitionist redefinitions of freedom itself, the contributions collectively demonstrate how carcerality operates across scales and how it is continuously contested through law, activism, and radical thought.

CHAIR

Matteo Pretelli, *Università di Napoli "L'Orientale"*

SPEAKERS

- Sanna Lehtinen, *Helsingin yliopisto* - ALLIGATOR ALCATRAZ AND THE PARADOXES OF FREEDOM: LEGAL STRUGGLES OVER THE EVERGLADES
- Nicole Haring, *Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz* - CARCERAL IMAGINARIES: BELONGING, FREEDOM, AND ABOLITION DEMOCRACY

KEYWORDS

PRISONS, LEGAL SYSTEM, BOUNDARIES

CONFRONTING THE FOURTH GHOST: VISIONS AND CRITIQUES OF TOTALITARIANISM IN SOUTHERN FICTION

Thursday 03
13:30 - 15:00
AULA

Long before fascism and totalitarianism became global terms, the slaveholding society of the American South depended on an absolute racial hierarchy that can be understood as a proto-fascist order. After abolition, the ideology of a "master race" entitled to authoritarian control persisted through Jim Crow laws, disenfranchisement, and racial terror. Southern white mythology continued to idealize place and racial purity with a fervor resembling the Nazis' celebration of "blood and soil." During the 1930s and 1940s, a lot of discourse connected southern racial practices to those of Nazi Germany. The rise of European fascism inspired critiques of Jim Crow as a form of domestic totalitarianism. Lillian Smith, like Martin Luther King Jr. after her, explicitly compared Jim Crow to Nazism, reframing the South in global authoritarian terms. She fiercely opposed the hierarchical and authoritarian order idealized by the Southern Agrarians, warning white southerners that their racism mirrored the ideology of the Nazis. Smith compared the lynching of Black Americans to the atrocities of the Nazi camps and argued that her native South was as totalitarian as Germany, both being "fascinated by the unquestioned authority of White Supremacy" and dominated by an "authoritarian mythic mind" driven by "primitive myths of blood and sex and race." Smith identified three "ghost relationships" that white southerners refused to acknowledge: between white men and Black women; between white fathers and their Black children; and between white children and their Black mammies. Building on her insight, Robert Brinkmeyer, in his seminal study The Fourth Ghost: White Southern Writers and European Fascism, identified a fourth and unacknowledged specter haunting the white South—the specter of European fascism itself. Southern literature has long confronted and resisted this "totalitarian virus" and the authoritarian power that deforms both communities and individual psyches. The grotesque imagery and haunted landscapes of Southern Gothic fiction expose minds and societies colonized by authoritarian logic. William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor dramatize the afterlives of slavery's authoritarian structures—manifested in religious fanaticism, piety, and moral hypocrisy—that deform their characters and communities. Black southern writers have profoundly documented the experience of living under this authoritarian racial order. The slave narratives of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs exposed the plantation as a totalitarian space of death from which escape signified both freedom and survival. Richard Wright's fiction underscores the psychic and social damage wrought by systemic racial control. In contemporary literature, Jesmyn Ward continues this lineage by confronting authoritarianism through depictions of carceral legacies and state violence that perpetuate the totalitarian heritage of slavery. This panel will explore the presence of the "fourth ghost" in the fiction of Carson McCullers, William Faulkner, and Jesmyn Ward, examining how their works expose and critique the enduring totalitarian tendencies embedded within southern culture and consciousness.

CHAIR

- Constante González Groba, *Universidade de Santiago de Compostela*

SPEAKERS

- Constante González Groba, *Universidade de Santiago de Compostela* - CARSON MCCULLERS'S *THE HEART IS A LONELY HUNTER*: "AN IRONIC PARABLE OF FASCISM
- Elena Miriam Dobre, *Universitat de les Illes Balears* - "ONLY THROUGH THE BLOOD OF OUR MEN": FAULKNER, FASCISM, AND SOUTHERN DECLINE
- Michał Choiński, *Uniwersytet Jagielloński* - THE RHETORIC OF VIOLENCE – THE HYPERBOLIC LANGUAGE OF WILLIAM FAULKNER'S "DRY SEPTEMBER" AND ITS CONTEMPORARY RECEPTION
- Frédérique Spill, *Université de Picardie Jules Verne* - OVERPOWERING WHITENESS, RESISTING BLACKNESS: JESMYN WARD'S APPROPRIATION OF THE NEO-SLAVE NARRATIVE IN *LET US DESCEND*

KEYWORDS

SOUTH, TOTALITARIANISM, MCCULLERS, FAULKNER, WARD

FREEDOM, MOVEMENT, AND THEIR LIMITS FOR MARGINALIZED PEOPLE IN THE AMERICAN WEST

Thursday 03
13:30 - 15:00
AULA

At its inception, the United States expressed principles of SELF-DETERMINATION that much of the world had never seen at the time. As a result, many Americans have spoken of the exceptional nature of their freedom and the opportunities it provided for liberty, democracy, and individual success. Yet, as the call for papers also suggests, the articulation of freedom in the United States has long been limited by exclusions based on Indigeneity, race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. No region has embodied these tensions more than the American West, a place of multiple diasporas. The once dominant narrative of the frontier perfectly embodied idealized concepts of liberty – at least for white settlers who might find opportunity in the region's vast expanses. Dime novels, movies and maps expressed the illusion of freedom to observers around the world and across the decades. At the same time, throughout much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the policies of the state and the culture of settler and straight society worked to dispossess, marginalize, or even erase certain communities. This panel includes four leading scholars of the American West who challenge traditional visions of the West. Across four papers, we contemplate the structures that policed and restricted the movement of different marginalized communities. We also consider the ways in which members of those communities resisted, often attempting to claim the West's offer of individual opportunity through migration and the assertion of cultural identities, often repurposing the tools of the settler state. And we consider the persistent contradictions between myth and reality by discovering those places and means by which certain groups – Latinos, Indigenous peoples, Mormons, and queers - expressed their freedom.

CHAIR

- Kathleen Brosnan, *University of Oklahoma*

SPEAKERS

- Kathleen Brosnan, *University of Oklahoma* - MAPPING MIGRATION AND IDENTITY AMONG INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND MORMONS
- Mary E. Mendoza, *Penn State University* - RACIAL BIAS AND STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE: POLICING LATINOS IN THE AMERICAN WEST
- Jennifer Holland, *University of Oklahoma* - AIDS TOWN: RURAL PEOPLE WITH HIV/AIDS AND MOBILITY IN TEXAS, 1981-1992
- Amy Scott, *Bradley University* - QUEER MOBILITY AND THE TRANSNATIONAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE GAY GAMES: URBAN ORIGINS OF LGBTQ FREEDOM IN THE AMERICAN WEST, 1982-1998
- Daniele Curci, *Università di Siena* - VISIONS OF AMERICA, VISIONS OF FREEDOM, REDEFINING THE POLITICAL SPACE: THE CONTESTED LEGACY OF WOODY GUTHRIE BETWEEN NATIVE AMERICANS AND MEXICAN-AMERICAN CONGRESSIONAL CLAIMS

KEYWORDS

WEST, MOVEMENT, LATINO, INDIGENOUS, QUEER

RE/GENERATION, VIOLENCE, AND AMERICAN CULTURE WARS: SETTLER FREEDOMS IN YELLOWSTONE

Thursday 03
13:30 - 15:00
AULA

This panel critically examines the representations of freedom and (settler) violence in Taylor Sheridan's hit series *Yellowstone* and its prequels 1923 and 1883. From Elsa Dutton's "going native" against better knowledge in 1883, E5 ("Freedom has fangs, and it sunk them into me") to John Dutton's white man's burden in *Yellowstone*, concepts of freedom are written all over *Yellowstone* and its spinoffs: it stages freedom as property rights, self-defense, and local sovereignty, but also as Indigenous SELF-DETERMINATION, corporate 'freedom to operate', and the open range imagined against fences, laws, vegetarian protesters, and federal oversight.

Our panel takes its cue from Richard Slotkin's mythology of the American West as combination of the "need for conquest to establish the nation" and of the economic myth of American capitalist superabundance (Gerund, Paul, and Slotkin). We are specifically interested in contributing an interdisciplinary American Studies perspective on *Yellowstone* that addresses the "branding" (Sperling) of the Western homeland as American sentimental genealogy. The contributions to our panel seek to connect Slotkin's insights to the series' revival and marketing of the Western mythology through a multi-generational settlement narrative that chronicles the history of the Dutton family. We discuss the show's genre aesthetics as "neo Western drama" (Knoetze and Fourie)—its landscapes and settler extractivist takeover of Indigenous territory, it rituals of work and codes of loyalty, alongside its genre borrowings from Western film iconographies and classical *Heimatfilm* tropes. With an eye to the dimensions of domestic and political violence in (and in connection with) Sheridan's series, we seek to address its difficult cultural standing in the present moment as "prestige television [...] conservative fantasy liberals should watch" (McMillan Cottom).

CHAIR

- Stefanie Schäfer, *Universität Mannheim*
- Birgit Däwes, *Europa-Universität Flensburg*

SPEAKERS

- Brigitte Georgi-Findlay, *Technische Universität Dresden* - THE LAND BEFORE HER: VISIONS OF FREEDOM ON THE OVERLAND JOURNEY IN 1883
- Paweł Pyrka, *Uniwersytet* SWPS - DISMANTLING AND DREAMING: TOWARD A MYTHOLOGY OF INDIGENOUS RENEWAL IN THE YELLOWSTONE UNIVERSE
- Kathleen Loock, *Leibniz Universität Hannover* - BACKWARDS INTO THE WEST: SERIAL TEMPORALITIES, SETTLER FREEDOMS, AND THE LOGIC OF THE YELLOWSTONE PREQUELS
- Ralph Poole, *Universität Salzburg* - SOUNDING THE HOMELAND: MUSIC, MYTH, AND AFFECTIVE SPACE IN YELLOWSTONE AS AN AMERICAN HEIMATFILM

KEYWORDS

YELLOWSTONE, WESTERN MYTH, INDIGENOUS CULTURE, VIOLENCE, POPULAR CULTURE

JEWISH AMERICAN WRITING AND THE UNITED STATES' REGIMES OF MIGRATION: REIMAGINING NARRATIVES OF IMMIGRATION

Thursday 03
13:30 - 15:00
AULA

The category of 'the refugee' offers an alternative to easy narratives of immigrant assimilation and ethnic essentialism, focusing attention not on received ideas about various immigrant groups arrival and success but on the ways in which the United States' border regime restricts freedom of movement and shapes citizenship. Jewish American literature has often been understood as paradigmatic of so-called 'successful' immigrant arrival, understood as representing what Benjamin Schreier calls the "breakthrough narrative," the arrival of Jewish Americans into mainstream economic and cultural success, and therefore providing an exemplary model for groups such as Asian Americans.[1] This, however, ignores both more recent Jewish immigration to the United States – in particular, from the former Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact countries – and earlier forms of Jewish immigration which do not fit into this framework, such as those escaping the Holocaust or from areas outside Eastern and Central Europe.
Close attention to these alternative narratives of migration highlights the entanglement of Jewish American arrival in the US with the various legal, economic, and racial regimes associated with immigration to the United States. Far from a clearly defined and monolithic story of Jewish arrival underpinning an essentialised Jewish American identity, these narratives allow for reading Jewish American literature in dialogue with other literatures that engage with the complex overlapping categories of the immigrant, the migrant, and the refugee. These include more contemporary works by Latina/o or South East Asian writers who have experienced the US's restrictive migration regimes, as well as overlaps suppressed by the prevailing narrative, such as continuities between African American slave testimony, accounts from Holocaust survivors, and testimony by refugees from more recent conflicts, including Ukraine (2022-2025) and the Gaza War (2023-2025).
This panel will therefore give attention to the category of the refugee, and the migration regimes associated with it, as a way to reconceptualise the ways in which Jewish American literature is understood in relation to crucial questions of race, identity, and citizenship in a moment in which these are central to the narratives of an authoritarian US government focused on policing their borders in new and violent ways.

CHAIR

- Federico Gabriele Ferretti, *Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna*

SPEAKERS

- Bryan Cheyette, *University of Reading* - BEYOND THE AMERICANIZATION OF TESTIMONY
- Benjamin Schreier, *Pennsylvania State University* - SPECTERS OF LITERARY HISTORICAL DENATIONALIZATION IN JOSHUA COHEN'S *THE NETANYAHUS*
- Karolina Krasuska, *Uniwersytet Warszawski* - LOCATING SOVIET-BORN WRITING IN THE US IN THE AMERICAN LITERARY FIELD: TOWARD A MATERIALIST CRITIQUE
- Nicolas Turner, *Universiteit Leiden* - THE UNIVERSITY AND REGIMES OF MIGRATION IN GARY SHTEYNGART'S *ABSURDISTAN* (2006): ACADEMICS, BORDERS, AND REFUGEES

KEYWORDS

JEWISH, AMERICAN, MIGRATION, REFUGEE, WRITING

COUNTER-VISIONS OF FREEDOM: CONTEMPORARY DOCUPOETIC INTERVENTIONS IN THE COLONIAL ARCHIVE

Thursday 03
13:30 - 15:00
AULA

'Counter-Visions of Freedom' explores recent work by four contemporary poets – Margo Tamez, Anthony Cody, Layli Long Soldier and Jordan Abel – to interrogate the limits of American freedom and the rhetoric of democracy in the US cultural imaginary from colonial times to the present. Using insight from decolonial criticism, we will probe the ways in which their poetries peel back the celebratory veneer of American freedom to reveal the violences and erasures beneath. Whilst Tamez's *Father/Genocide* (2021) layers Indigenous testimony, personal memory and archival material to redefine freedom as survival, Cody's *Borderland Apocrypha* (2020) exposes the "horroristic" violence of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands that resulted from American expansionism and denied freedom, whereas Layli Long Soldier's *Whereas* (2017) and Jordan Abel's *Empty Spaces* (2023) appropriate and challenge settlers' legal discourse and canonical literature.
These four collections, connected through their use of archival disassembly, Indigenous testimony, and documentary poetics, revisit the geopolitical, mythological and narrative foundations of the American nation, along with the buried histories they conceal: genocide, dispossession, captivity, injustice and silence. This panel will show how each of the texts is a counter-archive, an investigative site where fragments, multilingual and multimodal textures, and various acts of refusal re-map and reclaim the past, while at the same time showing how that past has led to the structural inequalities of the present. Together, these papers ask how visions of freedom might be understood differently when narrated from the borderlands and by the communities whose survival is itself an insurgent act. The constellation of docupoetic practices discussed will provide decolonial counter-visions of freedom understood as sovereignty, as relation, as memory that resists forgetting.

CHAIR

- Simone Knewitz, *Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn*
- Niall Munro, *Oxford Brookes University*

SPEAKERS

- Paulina Ambroży, *Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu* - UNSETTLING FREEDOM: INDIGENOUS SURVIVAL AND GENOCIDAL MEMORY IN MARGO TAMEZ'S *FATHER/GENOCIDE*
- Simone Knewitz, *Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn* - APPROPRIATION AS DECOLONIAL GESTURE: THE DOCUMENTARY POETICS OF LAYLI LONG SOLDIER AND JORDAN ABEL
- Niall Munro, *Oxford Brookes University* - '**HANGTHEM**BRINGTHECAMERA': HORRORISTIC VIOLENCE AND THE LIMITS TO FREEDOM ON THE US-MEXICO BORDER

KEYWORDS

CONTEMPORARY EXPERIMENTAL POETRY, DOCUMENTARY POETICS, DECOLONIAL COUNTER-NARRATIVES OF FREEDOM, ARCHIVAL DISASSEMBLY, INDIGENOUS TESTIMONY, MEMORY, SOVEREIGNTY, MARGO TAMEZ, ANTHONY CODY, LAYLI LONG SOLDIER, JORDAN ABEL

FUTURE FREEDOMS IN SCIENCE FICTION

Thursday 03
15:30 - 17:00
AULA

The perennial promise of freedom is central to US imaginaries. Science fiction (SF) is one field in which these imaginaries of freedom are expressed, negotiated, critiqued and re-envisioned in particularly effective ways. Increasingly diverse in terms of authors and readers as well as types of stories told, contemporary speculative fiction now offers a wealth of narratives that help us think differently about both our future and our present. As science fiction scholar Veronica Hollinger notes, "It is SF's capacity metaphorically to distance us from the present that is now its most significant feature, its capacity as discourse to estrange the present" (146). To make the familiar seem strange fosters different ways of seeing the world, and speculative fiction can help us imagine alternatives; in the words of author N.K. Jemisin, its "creators are the engineers of possibility." Importantly, SF narratives can function as what Jémeljan Hakemulder calls "moral laboratories," allowing us to construct scenarios and conduct thought experiments that challenge received truths. This panel will explore SF narratives that all engage with the limits and possibilities of freedom, at both personal and societal levels. They construct futures that decenter the human in important ways but simultaneously center the question of what freedom can mean in such more-than-human contexts. The texts analyzed in this panel all have the potential to help us navigate pressing concerns in the present. These concerns include the impact of climate change and loss of biodiversity as well as the development of robotics and artificial intelligence. The overall aim of the panel is to explore the potential of these narratives in providing insights into how freedom needs to be rethought in an American context characterized by an erosion of some of the most fundamental civic liberties.

CHAIR

- Jenny Bonnevier, *Örebro universitet*

SPEAKERS

- Jenny Bonnevier, *Örebro universitet* - FREE TO BE RESPONSE-ABLE: TERRAFORMING A BETTER LIFE IN ANNALEE NEWITZ'S *THE TERRAFORMERS*
- Maria Lindgren Leavenworth, *Umeå universitet* - A MAP TO FREEDOM: STORYTELLING AND ENTANGLEMENTS IN SAM J. MILLER'S *BLACKFISH CITY*
- Berit Åström, *Umeå universitet* - "SITTING DOWN WITH A HUMAN LIKE THIS WOULD NEVER NOT FEEL STRANGE": PERSONHOOD, BODILY AUTONOMY AND FREEDOM IN *THE MURDERBOT DIARIES*

KEYWORDS

SCIENCE FICTION, MORE-THAN-HUMAN, FUTURE IMAGINARIES

A LONG QUEST FOR FREEDOM IN AFRICAN AMERICAN WRITING

Thursday 03
15:30 - 17:00
AULA

"Is the struggle endless?" When asked this question by Frank Barat, Angela Davis responded that "as our struggles mature, they produce new ideas, new issues, and new terrains on which we engage in the quest for freedom. Like Nelson Mandela, we must be willing to embrace the long walk toward freedom" (2014). This panel seeks to investigate how African American activism and artistic expression have embraced that walk after the Civil Rights Era. Drawing on multiple genres and kinds of narratives, from autobiography to drama to poetry and prose, the panelists explore how the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement is engaged actively by contemporary black authors and activists, and not merely in terms of nostalgia and/or commemoration.
Black identity in the US has variously been assimilated to experiences of enslavement/ "the afterlife of slavery" (Hartman 2006), fugitivity, segregation, and constant struggle for equal rights in a (still) highly racialized society. Black expression has been grappling with and challenging this overimposed understanding of blackness, and yet never forgetting the political and civil struggle for freedom. Thus, the works examined in this panel present "visions of [black] freedom" in which the past is re-enacted creatively as a living archive through which unveil and fight against contemporary injustice with renewed awareness.

CHAIR

- Chiara Patrizi, *Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna*

SPEAKERS

- Vahit Yaşayan,*Erzurum Teknik Üniversitesi* - WHO WRITES AMERICA? FREEDOM, AUTHORSHIP, AND ERASURE IN PERCIVAL EVERETT'S JAMES
- Frank Obenland, *Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz* - "REVOLUTION IS THE MAN IN THE MIRROR" – STAGING THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN AMERICAN DRAMA
- Seda Şen, *Başkent Üniversitesi* - A PAIR OF WINGS AND A HEART FILLED WITH HOPE: REIMAGINING FREEDOM IN THE REPRESENTATIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN FOLKTALES IN POETRY
- Jan Beneš, *Ostravská univerzita* - ARTICULATIONS OF BLACK AGRARIAN FREEDOM IN LALITA TADEMY'S *CANE RIVER*, MARGARET WILKERSON'S *THE REVISIONERS*, AND NATALIE BASZILE'S *QUEEN SUGAR*

KEYWORDS

AFRICAN AMERICAN, CIVIL RIGHTS, BLACK IDENTITY

ACADEMIC WELL-BEING

Thursday 03
15:30 - 17:00
AULA

In recent years, expectations for safe and inclusive workplaces have grown significantly. Yet, creating welcoming and healthy work environments with reasonable work-life balance remains a challenge in academia. Early-career researchers and graduate students, in particular, face increasing precarity and prolonged periods of uncertainty as they navigate transitions from PhDs programs to postdoctoral positions, adjunct roles, and eventually tenure-track or permanent appointments. This round table aims to open up a dialogue about the challenges we face as we seek to foster healthy work environments and to explore strategies that support both personal well-being and professional success.

CHAIR

- Abigail Fagan, *Leibniz Universität Hannover*

SPEAKERS

- Anna Kurowicka, *Uniwersytet Warszawski*
- Enikő Maior, *Partium Christian University*
- Joanna Mąkowska, *Uniwersytet Warszawski*

KEYWORDS

WORK-LIFE BALANCE, WOMEN, CAREER TRAJECTORY

AGAINST THE TYRANNY OF LANGUAGE. THREE (POST) MODERN QUESTS FOR LIFE, LIBERTY, AND HAPPINESS

Thursday 03
15:30 - 17:00
AULA

The tension between constraint and freedom in art and literature, especially in the highly formalized code of the poetic text, has been at the roots of Modernist and Postmodernist poetics ever since the iconoclastic drive of belated Romanticism took the literary institutions by storm. The symbolist challenge of the boundaries between prose and poetry (verse libre, the prose poem) the spatialization of the form advocated by Futurism and Dada, with their experiments in typography (parole in libertà, visual poetry) & performance (sound/polyphonic poetry), and the self-referential loop within writing itself (disruption of genres/forms and self-effacing irony, as with Language Poetry) have revolutionized once and for all the terms of the discussion concerning the rules of the literary game. Either by encouraging unconstrained approaches to composition (the automatic writing of Surrealism and the spontaneous prose of the Beats, who in turn looked at Whitman's hypermeter free verse, modeled after aria d'opera) and techniques perceived as impromptu (stream of consciousness/train of thought) or, at the opposite end of the spectrum, by amplifying the degree of difficulties in the creative process (Oulipo's severe contraintes), explorers of unbeaten paths and cutters of new wood have striven to create free sites for inventiveness beyond the normative tyranny of the canon. In the US, the process has constantly taken place within the dialectics of tradition and innovation and the wider frame of the hybrid identity of the American writer, at one time native and transcontinental. Hence, the peculiar resonances among the three authors here discussed, separated by three generations, subject to peculiar forms of voluntary exiles and in constant opposition to conventions and rules that they perceive as limiting and oppressive of both creative quest and personal identity. Eccentric (Elsa von Freytag-Lorighoven and Abraham Lincoln Gillespie, who exhibited their radical otherness in vestemic, social interaction and even in the transformation of their houses in artworks, along the lines of Kurt Schwitters and his Merzbaum) or seemingly integrated in the New England understated and unassuming public persona (Susan Howe, who in her composite ethnic identity operates in the heart of the Transcendentalist cradle), they enact a wide range of strategies of liberation from form. Whereas their otherness is rooted in gender (von Freytag-Loringhoven and Gillespie) political stance (Gillespie) and feminism (Howe), their artistic forms of rebellion to conventions exploits the interrelations among the arts (sculpture and performance — von Freytag-Loringhoven; music — Gillespie and Howe), the resonances of intermedia (von Freytag-Loringhoven, Howe) and technology (Howe), with their playful blurring of the borders between genres, forms, and the unlocking of the misprison of language (the German-born von Freytag-Loringhoven, the French exile Gillespie, the Irish – from her mother's side – and American Howe) through their relentless practice of multilingualism and/or linguistic deterritorialization.

CHAIR

- Floriana Puglisi, *Università di Catania*
- Salvatore Marano, *Università di Catania*

SPEAKERS

- Giuliana Arcidiacono, *Accademia di Belle Arti di Catania* - BARONESS ELSA VON FREYTAG-LORINGHOVEN AND THE POETICS OF EMBODIED FREEDOM
- Salvatore Marano, *Università di Catania* - EARFLUXSATISVIE-THRU-HEYPERSIEVING': ABRAHAM LINCOLN GILLESPIE'S 'PURPLEXICON DISSYNTHEGRATAIONS' OF SYNTAX
- Floriana Puglisi, *Università di Catania* - "BETWEEN ESCAPE AND ENCLOSURE": UNSETTLING THE TEXT(S) IN SUSAN HOWE'S WRITING

KEYWORDS

FREEDOM AND CONSTRAINT, MULTILINGUALISM AND LINGUISTIC DETERRITORIALIZATION, PERFORMANCE, VISUAL AND SOUND POETRY

1920S–2020S: VISIONS OF UNFREEDOM

Thursday 03
15:30 - 17:00
AULA

This panel explores the antifascist intellectual manifestos of 1925 and 2025; each emerged in moments of escalating nationalism, warning of the dangers posed by repression and censorship. Drawing on intellectual history and biopolitical theory, this panel will trace evolving definitions of *unfreedom*, focusing on the interplay between the two historical periods addressed in the manifestos.
The 1925 manifesto, born in the wake of Mussolini's regime, draws from the concerns voiced by thinkers like Gramsci (the cultural dimensions of hegemony), and Gobetti (anti-authoritarianism). It also resonates with Arendt, who later described the totalitarian impulse to suppress plurality in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. The manifesto reflects early critiques of fascist nationalism as a project of enforced homogeneity and biopolitical control, also bringing out questions of immunity as related to community (Esposito, 2006).
The 2025 manifesto, meanwhile, engages with contemporary challenges: digitally mediated authoritarianism, the weaponization of disinformation, economic injustices, and the climate emergency. It echoes concerns raised by Snyder in *On Tyranny* (2017), particularly about illiberalism emerging from within liberal democracies such as the US. The manifesto also highlights the importance of "the independence of the judiciary, the press, institutions of culture, higher education and science," and, in this sense, it resonates with the notion of "contamination," included in the 1925 manifesto ("contaminare politica, letteratura e scienza è un errore") as a key concern for fascism, both in a constituent and destituent perspective.
Together, the 1925 and 2025 manifestos form a transhistorical dialogue about how visions of unfreedom can imagine or foreclose possibilities of political agency, autonomy, and dissent. Is freedom narrated, contested, and redefined through narratives of resistance and/or complicity? In this regard, can literature be considered a space of freedom—or a site of its undoing? Through this comparative lens, we aim to reconsider what it means to be free in an age increasingly defined by control—both visible and invisible.

CHAIR

- Alice Balestrino, *Università di Roma "La Sapienza"*
- Emanuel Rota, *University of Illinois - Urbana-Champaign*

SPEAKERS

- Alice Balestrino, *Università di Roma "La Sapienza"* - THE AUTHOR'S AUTHORITARIANISM. GERTRUDE STEIN AS OBLIQUE INTELLECTUAL.
- Eli Park Sorensen, *Chinese University of Hong Kong* - PREDICTING THE FUTURE: BIOPOLITICS AND ALGORITHMIC GOVERNMENTALITY
- Silvana Patriarca, *Fordham University* - THE END OF THE INTELLECTUAL AND THE RETURN OF ENGAGEMENT: SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE 'RENEWED OPEN LETTER AGAINST THE RETURN OF FASCISM' AND ITS ITALIAN PRECEDENT
- Emanuel Rota, *University of Illinois* - URBANA-CHAMPAIGN - IT *CAN* HAPPEN HERE: TRANSATLANTIC MANIFESTOS AND THE AMERICAN CRISIS OF FREEDOM

KEYWORDS

FASCISM, AUTHORITARIANISM, BIOPOLITICS

THE AMERICAN WEST - A LAND OF FREEDOM? REVISIONS OF THE MYTH

Thursday 03
15:30 - 17:00
AULA

The myth of the American West as a land of freedom is one of the most firmly entrenched myths of American culture, and it is inseparable from other symbolic constructions of the region, stressing limitless possibilities, individual autonomy, and healthy communal relations. It has its roots in the earliest narratives of the frontier that envisage it as a space of personal and collective renewal. In the late eighteenth century, decades before the beginning of the era of westward expansion, Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, in his famous letter "What Is an American?," wrote about the frontier as a place where European settlers, fleeing oppression and injustice in their native countries, can experience freedom most fully. Some of de Crevecoeur's ideas echo in Frederick Jackson Turner's influential essay *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, which essentially equates freedom with an individualistic pursuit of opportunities. This pursuit defines the exceptional American experience. To Turner, the process of expansion is a manifestation of historical imperative, hence its inevitability. That some people can achieve freedom, prosperity and progress at the expense of the oppression and suffering of others is an example of the logic of history. Turner's frontier thesis shaped the thinking about the history of the American West for decades to come, until it was challenged by the so-called New Western Historians, who have sought, among others, to restore the voices of the disfranchised in the West: women, immigrants, and ethnic groups. The historical counter-narrative thus created had been preceded by revisionist artistic representations of the West. At least since the 1940 publication of Walter Van Tilburg Clark's *The Ox-Bow Incident*, a classic text about lynching in the West, revisionist Western narratives have interrogated key ideas on which mythical constructions of the region are based: freedom, regeneration, individualism, prosperity. Our panel will discuss classic and recent, cinematic literary and photographic, narratives of the American West that have contributed to the revisionist examination of the regional imaginary by problematizing the ambivalence of idea of freedom.

CHAIR

- Marek Paryż, *Uniwersytet Warszawski*

SPEAKERS

- James Deutsch, *Smithsonian Institution* - CONTRASTING FREEDOMS AND CONSEQUENCES IN THE 1969 AND 2010 VERSIONS OF *TRUE GRIT*
- Audrey Goodman, *Georgia State University* - YOUNG WOMEN WARRIORS: ENVISIONING AND EMBODYING THE WEST'S INDIGENOUS FUTURES
- David Rio Raigadas, *Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea* - SEARCHING FOR FREEDOM IN THE AMERICAN WEST THROUGH MOBILITY: WILLY VLAUTIN'S EARLY NEVADA FICTION
- Marek Paryż, *Uniwersytet Warszawski* - THE PRICE OF FREEDOM: THEMES OF OPPRESSION AND VIOLENCE IN RECENT EUROPEAN FILM WESTERNS

KEYWORDS

US WEST, WESTERN NARRATIVE, REVISIONISM, MOBILITY, VIOLENCE

UN | BANNING BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

Thursday 03
15:30 - 17:00
AULA

Current debates about diversity and inclusion in the context of US books for young readers, which index a political rift over questions regarding the representation of LGBTQIA+ and racially minoritized groups in the US, emerged out of an unprecedented constellation of political, social, legal, and economic conditions that have affected publishers, public schools, parents, and political figures in equal measures. While book bans and book challenges have existed for a long time, the current curtailment of intellectual freedom is unprecedented in that it specifically targets books for young readers, vilifies diversity initiatives, and operates through well-organized and politically influential groups such as Moms for Liberty. This ongoing form of book banning is also unprecedented because it coheres around a particular tipping point: The year 2020 brought forth a historical reckoning in the publishing industry with its persistent lack of diversity, fuelled in part by online activism collected under hashtags such as #blackoutbestsellerlists and #publishingpaidme; that same year, the COVID-19-related experiences of involuntary homeschooling meant that many parents engaged more extensively and perhaps more critically with their children's assigned readings and curricula; and finally, the confluence of banning and unbanning activities in online and embodied forms register the dynamic debates between ideologically different counterpublics in the US and beyond.
This panel examines the dynamics of book banning and its counter-movement of unbanning (i.e., forms of commodity activism, book curation, and micro-interventions in the interest of securing the right to read). We examine the current phenomenon of "Un banning Books for Young Readers" from the perspectives of critical race theory, queer and trans studies, and dis/ability studies and approach three select case studies with book studies, literary studies, and cultural studies methodologies. Individually and collectively, the papers analyze how formal aspects such as forms of "legal storytelling," forms of catalogue curation and book activism, forms of promotional materials, and forms of curriculum building contribute to book censorship and the strategic unbanning of books in the times we're in.

CHAIR

- Silvia Schultermandl, *Universität Münster*

SPEAKERS

- Aline Franzus, *Universität Münster* - PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE: A PUBLISHER PUSHING FOR CHANGE?
- Corinna Norrick-Rühl, *Universität Münster* - WALKING THE TIGHTROPE: SCHOLASTIC, CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY, AND BANNED BOOKS

KEYWORDS

BOOK BANNING, INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM, YOUNG READERS, LEGAL STORYTELLING, BOOK ACTIVISM

VISIONS OF REPRODUCTIVE (UN)FREEDOM

Thursday 03
15:30 - 17:00
AULA

In this panel, we focus on various representations and articulations of reproductive (un)freedom, i.e., the freedom, or lack thereof, to make autonomous decisions about one's reproduction and to be able to exercise these decisions. Throughout the history of the United States, reproductive freedom has been highly contested, and reproductive rights, especially those of women of color and marginalized individuals, have been restricted and actively violated. Recently, reproductive freedom has again come under attack as the Supreme Court overturned the constitutional right to abortion. The ruling severely limits access to reproductive healthcare services and curtails the ability of pregnant individuals to decide whether or not to continue a pregnancy. These restrictions on reproductive autonomy not only endanger individual liberties but also undermine fundamental democratic principles. In this context, cultural texts have long served as important contributions to discussions about reproduction and women's rights. By examining historical realities, sociocultural developments, and political contexts, these texts can reinforce, update, or challenge existing assumptions and their underlying ideologies. Furthermore, they illuminate the individual impact of restricted reproductive autonomy stemming from social and intersectional inequalities; as such they may also function as warnings against the erosion of reproductive rights. Importantly, cultural texts enable a nuanced portrayal of complex reproductive experiences and practices, and thus expand and diversify narratives while simultaneously challenging stereotypes and stigmatization.
The panel is structured around a diachronic analysis of reproductive freedom and its limitations in the U.S., tracing its cultural articulation from the period of criminalization to the post-Roe crisis, and engaging with a variety of texts. Specifically, the focus of the four papers lies on the issue of bodily autonomy, voluntary childlessness, and abortion. The papers by Isabel Kalous and Ina Batzke focus the late 19th and early 20th centuries, respectively, and analyze how preventing or terminating a pregnancy was treated both publicly and in fictional and non-fictional texts. The panel then shifts to contemporary engagements with abortion, examining cultural responses to the erosion of reproductive rights: Małgorzata Olsza's paper considers reproductive rights activism in comics, and Jennifer Gouck's paper interrogates the rise of the abortion road trip novel in contemporary Young Adult fiction. Together, the papers reveal continuities and ruptures in the portrayal of reproductive autonomy and demonstrate how cultural narratives serve as sites for negotiating the meaning and implications of reproductive freedom.

CHAIR

- Isabel Kalous, *Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg*

SPEAKERS

- Isabel Kalous, *Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg* - HERBAL REMEDIES, VOLUNTARY CHILDLESSNESS, AND REPRODUCTIVE AUTONOMY IN THE LATE 19TH CENTURY
- Ina Batzke, *Universität Augsburg* - REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOMS? LITERARY ENGAGEMENTS WITH ABORTION IN EARLY 20TH-CENTURY US LITERATURE
- Małgorzata Olsza, *Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu* - DRAWING CHOICE: CONTEMPORARY COMICS AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS ACTIVISM
- Jennifer Gouck, *Universität Münster* - REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS AND THE ROAD: THE ABORTION ROAD TRIP AND/AS RESISTANCE IN AMERICAN YOUNG ADULT FICTION

KEYWORDS

ABORTION, REPRODUCTIVE AUTONOMY, LITERATURE, COMICS

TEACHING AMERICAN STUDIES WHEN FREEDOM IS UNDER ATTACK

Friday 04
08:30 - 10:00
AULA

This roundtable builds on the forthcoming RSAJournal's Forum, "Outside In, Inside Out: Teaching American Studies in a Changing World," which gathers international perspectives on how institutional, cultural, and geographic contexts shape the teaching of American Studies. Contributors to the Forum—from The Netherlands, Austria, Romania, The Bahamas, and Italy—will be joined by a U.S.-based scholar for an open conversation on pedagogy, curricular design, and the broader question of how we teach American Studies at a time when the very notion of freedom is under strain, both within and outside the United States. The roundtable aims to examine teaching as an emancipatory practice. On his first day in office, President Donald Trump signed over 200 executive orders, many of which directly undermined fundamental rights and freedoms. These include attacks on birthright citizenship, on laws ensuring the safety of transgender people, and on the U.S. education system through efforts to dismantle diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives and to restrict the teaching of critical race theory, Latinx and border studies, and gender and queer studies. Academic and educational freedom—at all levels—is being strategically recast as "radical" or "wasteful." As the EAAS Board emphasized in its April 2025 statement on "Developments in the United States Affecting Academic Freedom and International Collaboration," these policies not only endanger U.S. scholars, teachers, and students but also disrupt international research partnerships and create a chilling effect on academic inquiry worldwide. The roundtable takes seriously the responsibility—and the possibility—of teaching American Studies as a practice of critical freedom. Participants will explore how transnational American Studies classrooms can cultivate intellectual resilience and cross-border dialogue despite political pressures and institutional constraints. By reflecting on local pedagogical innovations and global solidarities, the discussion will move from critique to collaboration. Finally, the session will serve as a launchpad for a new Teaching Network within the EAAS, complementing existing thematic networks (Women's, LGBTQ+, Early Career Researchers, Poetry, Digital Studies). The network will provide an ongoing platform for sharing teaching resources, developing collaborative projects, and mentoring across institutions and borders. In keeping with the conference's broader theme, this roundtable understands teaching as both a practice of freedom and a political act—a way of imagining, sustaining, and defending the intellectual and ethical spaces that make transnational American Studies possible.

CHAIR

- Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello, *Salem State University*

RESPONDENT

- Ingrid Gessner, *Pädagogische Hochschule Vorarlberg*

SPEAKERS

- Saskia Fürst, *University of The Bahamas*
- Frank Mehring, *Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen*
- Loredana Bercuci, *Universitatea de Vest din Timișoara*
- René Dietrich, *Universität Rostock*
- Chris Parkes, *King's College London*

KEYWORDS

ACADEMIC FREEDOM, TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION, GLOBAL COLLABORATION, DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION (DEI), TEACHING NETWORK

THE AESTHETICS AND POLITICS OF FREEDOM IN THE ERA OF JIM CROW

Friday 04
08:30 - 10:00
AULA

The panel will examine the meanings of (un)freedom during the Jim Crow Era, focusing on how literature was an important arena where those meanings were contested. We will examine different historical moments of the Jim Crow era, from the post-Reconstruction period to the 1960s, in order to illuminate significant intersections and continuities in the way the beauty and power of the written word were mobilized for emancipatory purposes. Special attention will be devoted to the aesthetic choices and experimental interventions privileged by the artists under consideration.

The panel brings together an international and interdisciplinary group of scholars who explore different literary genres (the short story, the novel, and letter writing) and forms of contamination between the arts (more specifically between literature and music). The panel will start from the "nadir" of African American history, at the turn into the twentieth century, with two papers that discuss how the notion of freedom, the legacy of slavery, and the tensions between generations were explored in the stories published by major protagonists of American realism like Paul Laurence Dunbar and Charles W. Chesnutt. These thematic and formal concerns will then be examined in connection with the Black liberation aesthetic that informs Richard Wright's experimentation with jazz in *The Man Who Lived Underground* and Mary Lou Williams's musical and epistolary practices.

CHAIR

- Maria Giulia Fabi, *Università di Ferrara*
- Maria Cristina Iuli, *Università del Piemonte Orientale "Amedeo Avogadro"*

SPEAKERS

- Amina Gautier, *University of Miami* - THE SEARCH FOR 'FREEDOM' IN CHARLES CHESNUTT'S *THE WIFE OF HIS YOUTH*
- Simone Francescato, *Università Ca' Foscari Venezia* - INTERGENERATIONAL CONFLICT AND FREEDOM IN THE SHORT STORIES OF PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR
- Marco Petrelli, *Università di Pisa* - DESCENT IN BLUE: JAZZ AND THE NARRATION OF BLACK LIBERATION IN RICHARD WRIGHT'S *THE MAN WHO LIVED UNDERGROUND*
- Masayoshi Yamada, *Cornell University* - 'I'M FIGHTING FOR THE FREEDOM OF JAZZ AND FOR THE FREEDOM PEOPLE HEAR IN IT': LISTENING TO MARY LOU WILLIAMS IN THE MAKING OF THE BLACK PUBLIC SPHERE IN THE LONG 1960S

KEYWORDS

AFRICAN AMERICANS, AESTHETICS, POLITICS, LITERATURE, JIM CROW

KEYWORDS FOR FREEDOM(S) IN THE U.S.

Friday 04
08:30 - 10:00
AULA

This roundtable aims at identifying keywords and critical terms that are connected to the broad concept of freedom in the United States across disciplines such as history, literature, and culture. Eight early-career scholars from various fields of American Studies in Italy will debate whether and how it is still possible to conceptualize one of the founding principles of a nation that, in 250 years of history, has constantly interrogated and redefined the meaning of "Freedom," or, in this case, "Freedoms." Our discussion ultimately aims at debunking the main ideas that have always been related to the idealistic notion of freedom by addressing variables of gender, race, class, literary genres, and historical contingencies.

CHAIR

- Maria Ilaria Tonelli, *Università di Torino*
- Rachele Puddu, *Università di Udine / Università di Trieste*

SPEAKERS

- Angelo Arminio, *Università di Roma "La Sapienza"*
- Antonio Di Vilio, *Università di Napoli Federico II*
- Enrico Mariani, *Università Ca' Foscari Venezia*
- Serena Mocci, *Università di Cagliari*
- Emanuele Monaco, *Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna*
- Daphne Orlandi, *Università di Catania*
- Helena Paoli, *Università di Bari*
- Valentina Romanzi, *Università di Torino / Università di Verona*

KEYWORDS

FREEDOM, AISNA

AISNA GRADUATES ROUNDTABLE

FREEDOM AND IDENTITY

FRIDAY 04
08:30 - 10:00
AULA

This panel brings together distinct explorations of the relationship between freedom and identity in contemporary American literature and visual art. Rather than providing a univocal perspective on the topic, the session aims to foreground the multiple ways in which literary and artistic expressions have often served as counterpoints to canonical narratives of national identity and traditional ideas of "American freedom." Each in its own way, the five contributions assembled here move from the alternative visions of America that emerged in the wake of the social movements of the 1960s to compose a mosaic of the increasingly fragmented self-narrative that has defined the United States and its culture throughout the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

By engaging with questions of race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, illness and disability, and the frequent intersections of these categories in the work of minority writers and artists, the panel follows an established tradition of highlighting how the American project has been repeatedly challenged, rewritten, and reimagined by those on its margins and through the perspective of the Other. Individual papers range from a focus on African American speculative revisions of the historical discourse on slavery, to the renegotiation of personal freedom and identity in LGBT literature of the AIDS era, the possibilities for expressive freedom and agency afforded by neurodivergent life writing, and the reshaping of the symbols of American liberty by Indigenous artists asserting cultural sovereignty.

A shared premise uniting these contributions is their insistence on the cultural work of marginalized groups as a privileged site for understanding the limits of US national mythmaking and performing a necessary redefinition of the country's foundational narratives. As the various works examined in this panel show, freedom and identity are not uniform or fixed concepts in American history and culture—they are instead continually subject to questioning, re-embodiment, and re-signification. As a result, the portrait of America that collectively emerges from these papers is never that of a static shot but rather the result of an ongoing, unfinished, and plural process of expanding, complicating, and reshaping the American narrative in light of its shifting meanings.

CHAIR

- Simone Sannio, *Freie Universität Berlin / Independent Researcher*

SPEAKERS

- Iulia-Andrea Milica, *Universitatea din Iași* - REWRITING FREEDOM: OCTAVIA BUTLER'S SPECULATIVE REVISION OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN DISCOURSE
- Simone Sannio, *Freie Universität Berlin / Independent Researcher* - FREE AT LAST? NOTES ON THE AMERICAN UNFINISHED IN THE FICTION OF THE 1990
- Mathieu Duplay, *Université Paris-Cité* - WE, TOO, ARE ITALIAN': FREEDOM AND THE ALLURING OTHER IN ALLEN BARNETT'S *THE BODY AND ITS DANGERS*
- Ruth Maxey, *University of Nottingham* - AUTISM AND EXPRESSIVE FREEDOM IN RECENT AMERICAN LITERATURE
- Katharina Wiedlack, *Universität Wien* - 'THROUGH CREATING I ASSERT MY FREEDOM': LIFE, LIBERTY, AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS IN CONTEMPORARY ALASKA NATIVE VISUAL ART

KEYWORDS

CANON, IDENTITY, MULTIPLICITY

FEMINIST FREEDOMS AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY FASCISM

Friday 04
08:30 - 10:00
AULA

The United States is in the middle of a fight to maintain its democratic status. As Nikole Hannah-Jones reminds us, the US has only been a multiracial democracy for sixty years. That status has always been fragile. For the majority of its history, freedom has been an ethos rather than a reality. So, too, has US society remained resolutely patriarchal, regardless of significant feminist political gains since the 1970s. In the face of the rise of a white nationalist, heteropatriarchal, anti-democratic front in the United States, this panel considers what visions of freedom feminism has to offer today, and how anti-feminist sentiment has evolved in the context of some limited gains toward gender equality. We are specifically interested in mainstream media and popular culture, looking to where popular feminisms can and do push back against the undermining of hard-fought political gains. What kinds of feminist freedoms are able to be articulated in the current context? What is unsayable in the current context? And what new sites (popular, academic, visual, literary) are emerging to offer possibilities of growing feminist resistance?

CHAIR

- Megan Wesling, *University of California, San Diego*

SPEAKERS

- Megan Wesling, *University of California, San Diego* - RECONSIDERING FEMINIST FREEDOMS IN THE CONTEXT OF NEOLIBERALISM
- Claire Sorin-Delpuech, *Aix-Marseille Université* - ANTIFEMINIST WOMEN'S VISIONS OF FREEDOM, THEN AND NOW
- Ariana Vigil, *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill* - WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES AND THE CURRENT REGIME
- Karma Chávez, *University of Texas* - FROM PROTEST TO PEDAGOGY: ATTACKS ON US HIGHER EDUCATION IN AN AGE OF AUTHORITARIANISM

KEYWORDS

FEMINISM, GENDER STUDIES, ANTI-FEMINISM, NEOLIBERALISM, SOCIAL MEDIA

TRANSCULTURALITY UNDER NEOLIBERALISM IN 21ST CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE: BETWEEN LIBERATION AND CAPTURE

FRIDAY 04
08:30 - 10:00
AULA

This panel explores the relationship between transculturality and neoliberalism, examining how contemporary American literature negotiates the liberatory potential of transculturality while resisting neoliberal capture. It thus speaks to the conference's concern with freedom from a capitalism that "plunders" the transcultural environment.

As theorized by Wolfgang Welsch and Mikhail Epstein, transculturality foregrounds hybrid identities that move beyond fixed cultural borders, fostering cross-cultural exchange. Neoliberalism, by contrast, with its emphasis on individualism, market logic, and global mobility, commodifies cultural difference, generating tension between authentic self-expression and economic incorporation.

Exploring transculturality under neoliberalism offers a lens for understanding the interplay between liberation and constraint. In the 21st century, transcultural subjectivities are often celebrated as signs of freedom—through cosmopolitanism, nomadism, and global belonging—yet such freedom often conceals structures of coercion and displacement. The same system that enables transnational movement also erects symbolic and economic barriers that restrict it.

Contemporary American literature mirrors this ambivalence. Writers such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie depict hybrid identities that challenge racial and economic hierarchies within a neoliberal U.S. context. Junot Díaz fuses Dominican and American narratives, exposing how global capitalism shapes both personal and collective identities.

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the "third space" elucidates how transcultural encounters can generate subversive identities resisting homogenization. Yet, as Arjun Appadurai warns, global cultural flows are frequently co-opted into commodified forms, transforming transcultural exchange into marketable diversity. This dynamic is visible in Viet Thanh Nguyen's critique of the commodified refugee narrative and in Colson Whitehead's reimagining of transcultural resistance to systemic oppression.

Such works highlight a paradox: transculturality promises new modes of belonging and solidarity, yet neoliberal structures often repackage these as consumable products. Attending to this paradox across public and private spheres reveals how American literature probes both the possibilities and limits of transcultural freedom under neoliberalism.

CHAIR

- Aristi Trendel, *Le Mans Université*

SPEAKERS

- Maria Pirgerou, *The American College of Greece* - OPEN CITY BY TEJU COLE: A PARALLAX VIEW OF TRANSCULTURAL IDENTITY WITHIN NEOLIBERALISM
- Aristi Trendel, *Le Mans Université* - THE PROMISE AND PERIL OF TRANSCULTURALITY IN CLAIRE MESSUD'S *THE EMPEROR'S CHILDREN*
- Theodora Tsimpouki, *Ethnikó kai Kapodistriakó Panepistímio Athinón* - "THERE IS NO VIEW FROM NOWHERE:" TEJU COLE'S *TREMOR* AND TRANSCULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE GLOBAL NEOLIBERAL ERA

KEYWORDS

TRANSCULTURALITY NEOLIBERALISM, LIBERATION, CAPTURE

WHEN THE WORLD CLOSES IN ON YOU: FREEDOM, GAMEPLAY, AND VIDEOGAMES

Friday 04
08:30 - 10:00
AULA

U.S. culture has long imagined freedom as boundless movement—the right to roam and to shape one's destiny. Videogames, as the perhaps most interactive and participatory of media, would seem to embody this ideal, as they promise agency and control over virtual stand-ins that explore vast worlds: a playable version of the liberal fantasy that freedom is limitless. Yet, as John Durham Peters reminds us in his book *The Marvelous Clouds* (2015), "We are conditioned by conditions we condition. We shape tools that shape us." Indeed, videogames translate freedom into systems, algorithms, and feedback loops, turning the ideal of autonomy into a procedural structure of constraint. The promise of freedom thus becomes inseparable from the operations of code and control, exposing how digital play mirrors the ideological paradoxes of American freedom—its entanglement with discipline, its domination of nature, its dependence on technological mastery, and its blindness to structural inequality. The proposed panel will investigate how videogames represent freedom and procedurally enact it. Bringing together perspectives from media studies, American studies, and game studies, the papers will explore how digital worlds reproduce, complicate, and/or subvert the ideological grammar of freedom that has defined the U.S. self-imagination. Videogames, we will suggest, function as spaces where players rehearse freedom as both desire and discipline, world-building and world-closing. Andrei Moran-Nae's "The Freedom of Limits in Gameplay" will examine the freedom of limits in gameplay, showing how players experience constraint as agency and internalize the disciplinary logic of the game engine as a form of self-directed play. Steve Rabitsch will then turn to the videogame West as a pedagogical and historiographic site, arguing that titles such as *Red Dead Redemption* (2018) and the *Oregon Trail remake* (2021) remediate and contest the frontier myth, translating competing narratives of westward expansion and settler colonialism into interactive form. Marko Jevtic will analyze *Scarface: The World Is Yours* (2006) and *Mafia III* (2016), tracing how the gangster's power fantasy reimagines the American Dream only to confront it with the racial and structural limits of that ideal. Finally, Francesca Razzi will explore *Red Dead Redemption* 2 alongside Bret Harte's frontier fiction to trace transmedia patterns of agency, environmental determinism, and the natural limits of freedom. Taken together, these papers will demonstrate that the digital landscapes of videogames are anything but open: they transform freedom into a set of playable conditions, thereby exposing how, in both code and culture, the world is only yours until it closes in.

CHAIR

- Michael Fuchs, *Leopold-Franzens-Universität Innsbruck*

SPEAKERS

- Andrei Moran-Nae, *Universitatea din București* - T HE FREEDOM OF LIMITS IN GAMEPLAY; OR, WHY PLAYERS DO NOT REALLY WANT TOTAL FREEDOM IN VIDEO GAMES
- Stefan Rabitsch, *Universitetet i Oslo* - "STRETCHED TO THE POINT OF SNAPPING": LIBERATING COMPETING HISTORIOGRAPHIES OF THE AMERICAN WEST THROUGH VIDEO GAMES
- Marko Jevtic, *Universität Konstanz* - "THE WORLD IS YOURS": GANGSTER GAMES AND THEIR FANTASIES OF (BLACK) POWER
- Francesca Razzi, *Università "G. d'Annunzio" Chieti-Pescara* - TRANSMEDIA PATTERNS OF AGENCY: *RED DEAD REDEMPTION* 2, FREE CHOICE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINISM

KEYWORDS

VIDEO GAMES, FREEDOM, GAMEPLAY, PROCEDURAL RHETORIC, AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA

A TENUOUS GRASP ON FREEDOM: COMPETING IDEAS FOR WOMEN'S SELF-DETERMINATION

FRIDAY 04
08:30 - 10:00
AULA

In reading the CfP, the WN steering committee felt that the conference's theme, "Visions of Freedom," resonates particularly with women's as well as gender and sexual minorities' history and representations. Freedom has not only been a quest, it has often proven elusive for American women. Take, for example, the history of feminist activism. "Rights" have been central to claims on freedom and citizenship: the right to vote, the right to own property, the right to divorce, the right to work, the right to open a bank account, the right to abortion, etc. While women have been denied some of these rights or had these rights circumscribed through the law, the place of women in American society has often been a reflection of the supposedly natural relationship between men and women. American women's tenuous grasp on freedom has been compounded by how race and class have been used by some of the most privileged women to advance their own claim to rights at the expense of racialized and working-class women. This social and economic imbalance between men and women and between women has been the site of serious contention between feminists and antifeminists as well as progressives and conservatives from the 19th century to today. The Women's Network hopes to sponsor a panel that can unpack some of these complicated demands and relationships, shed light on their intricacies, and ultimately, provide a nuanced understanding of visions of freedom espoused by American women and gender and sexual minorities.

CHAIR

- Anna Kurowicka, *Uniwersytet Warszawski*

SPEAKERS

- Atalie Gerhard, *Universität des Saarlandes* - CHOOSING LIFE: SELF-DETERMINATION AS MATERNAL RESISTANCE IN *SALVAGE THE BONES* (2011) AND *FUTURE HOME OF THE LIVING GOD* (2017)
- Julia Nitz, *Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg* - MAKING AMERICAN WOMEN HEALTHY AGAIN: ANTEBELLUM FASHION BASHING AND ITS CONTRADICTORY IMPULSES
- Rita Filanti, *Independent Researcher* - WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE IN THE US AT THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY: THE ANARCHIST PERSPECTIVE
- Małgorzata Olsza, *Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu* - VISIONS OF FREEDOM: REPRODUCTIVE BODIES IN REBECCA HALL'S *WAKE: THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF WOMEN-LED SLAVE REVOLTS*

KEYWORDS

MOTHERHOOD, REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE, WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE, ANARCHISM, HEALTH ACTIVISTS

EAAS WOMEN'S NETWORK

UNMADE AND REWRITTEN: BLACK COUNTERNARRATIVES TO DOMINANT HISTORIES

FRIDAY 04
10:15 - 11:45
AULA

In the 2003 preface to his seminal work Orientalism (1978), Edward Saïd put forward the idea that history is not just inherited, it is created and, therefore, it can be unmade: "My argument is that history is made by men and women, just as it can also be unmade and rewritten, always with various silences and elisions, always with shapes imposed and disfigurements tolerated" (xix). Building on this insight, this panel seeks to understand contemporary African American texts as imaginative spaces of freedom and resistance against national narratives of white supremacy. More specifically, we examine how these creative forms confront and challenge white supremacy and racial terrorism in the United States by remaking, reworking, and at times redressing dominant historical narratives. Through the act of story-telling, writers and artists reclaim silenced voices, reimagine the past, and construct alternative histories that center marginalized experiences while asserting cultural and aesthetic agency.
These three papers analyze how contemporary works engage with and respond to pivotal moments and enduring legacies of racial violence and terrorism in American history—the transatlantic slave trade, the institution of slavery, the plantation economy, the brutal lynching of Emmett Till, and the systemic racial segregation of the Jim Crow South. Moreover, these papers focus on the ways Black authors use speculative, dystopic, uchronian, uncanny, or alternate forms of fiction to challenge linear historical narratives, envision radical futures, and disrupt entrenched histories of oppression.

CHAIR

- Frédérique Spill, *Université de Picardie Jules Verne*

SPEAKERS

- Joanna Davis-McElligatt, *University of North Texas* - THE FLYING AFRICANS: FUGITIVITY AND RESISTANCE IN BLACK COMICS
- Solveig Dunkel, *Université de Lille* - PERCIVAL EVERETT'S *THE TREES* (2021): THE SILENCE OF THE ARCHIVES AND THE NOVEL AS A COUNTER-MONUMENT
- Laura Wilson, *University of St Andrews* - "OUR MONTICELLO": BLACK RESISTANCE AND RECLAMATION IN JOCELYN NICOLE JOHNSON'S *MY MONTICELLO*
- Viola Marchi, *Universität Bern* - VISUALIZING OPPRESSION AND PRACTICING FREEDOM IN PAUL BEATTY'S THE SELLOUT AND PERCIVAL EVERETT'S *THE TREES*

KEYWORDS

AFRICAN AMERICAN, HISTORY, CIVIL RIGHTS, PLANTATION, MEMORY

ENDURING VISIONS OF FREEDOM: A RETROSPECTIVE OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE

Friday 04
10:15 - 11:45
AULA

The European Study Group of Nineteenth-Century American Literature is an international research network dedicated to the study of lesser-known and marginalized nineteenth-century American literature of the long nineteenth century. In this open round table discussion, we examine nineteenth-century literature as a formative archive for understanding the roots—and recurring patterns—of our present which is marked by democratic strain, renewed culture wars, racial injustice, widening economic inequality, environmental crisis, and intensified debates over national identity. We are going to debate how much nineteenth-century literature, even in its conventional expressions, is driven by conflicting aspirations for compliance and rupture, formula and freedom. A special focus will be on banned nineteenth-century books.

CHAIR

- Verena Laschinger, *Universität Erfurt*
- Julia Nitz, *Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg*

SPEAKERS

- Daniela Daniele, *Università di Udine*
- Elena Furlanetto, *Universität Duisburg-Essen*
- Yifah Hadar, *Independent Researcher*
- Michaela Keck, *Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg*
- Ralph J. Poole, *Universität Salzburg*
- Antonia Purk, *Universität Mannheim*
- Mariana Teixeira Marques-Pujol, *Université Toulouse-Capitole*

KEYWORDS

NINETEENTH CENTURY, BANNED BOOKS, CENSORSHIP

EAAS EUROPEAN STUDY GROUP OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE NETWORK

EAAS American Studies Network General Meeting

Friday 04
10:15 - 11:45
AULA

The American Studies Network (ASN) is a group of European centers involved in American Studies. The idea of a network of centers arose during the European Association for American Studies (EAAS) meeting in London in April, 1990. The ASN was founded in November, 1990 in Berlin at a meeting of interested directors of American Studies centers. The initial group of eight members has expanded to include 14 institutions from all over Europe and is now welcoming associated members from outside of Europe. All members take an interdisciplinary approach to American Studies; are independent organizations with some of their own sources of funding, not exclusively linked to a university; have some research facilities; and are committed to a role of public service to the community at large.
ASN works in close association with the EAAS. In association with the EAAS the network also awards a biennial book prize. The jury of the book prize consists of scholars affiliated with the member institutions of the ASN.

CHAIR

¤ Martin Lüthe, *John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies*

EAAS AMERICAN STUDIES NETWORK

CONSTRAINTS OF FREEDOM IN AMERICAN CINEMA: GANGSTERS, SOLDIERS, INSTITUTIONS

FRIDAY 04
10:15 - 11:45
AULA

Ever since the on-screen gangster took root in the cultural imaginary at the beginning of the 20th century, this staple of the so-called underworld has displayed an ambivalent relation to the nation's founding ideals. These ideals themselves – enshrined in Thomas Jefferson's unalienable rights of "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness" – were open to interpretation and initially envisioned to pertain only to white men who served as model citizens of the state to come. Classical cinematic portrayals of the gangster, in turn, oftentimes question the very attainability of the *Declaration of Independence*'s premises and promises by featuring as their (anti-)heroes immigrants who ruthlessly and violently pursue power and status. These iconic figures – e.g. Vito Corleone or Tony Montana – are usually depicted as traditionally anti-modern, bound by honor and loyalty, and a striving for acknowledgement. Seeing themselves barred from the freedom that America promises, gangsters find ways and build structures to force it.
Cultural studies and film studies alike have started to question the relevance of the American gangster. "At the beginning of the twenty-first century," in Ingrid Walker Fields' words, "the social reality of one of popular culture's favorite figures—the gangster—is in decline" (611). In this panel, we will challenge the gangster's relationship with ideals of liberty and investigate how they adapt to their cultural context. How do we approach the outdated values, xenophobic tendencies, and aggressive misogyny of many underworld films today? Are we still dealing with the same caliber of tragic hero when mobsters appear on screen as incarnations of comic-franchise villains (*The Penguin*) or when they brake out into campy dance numbers (*Emilia Pérez*)? What kind of freedom do the traditional screen gangsters represent and how does it differ (if at all) from that of more recent texts? We consider the frameworks that enable underworld players to stage themselves as liberators and protectors of freedom as well as the aesthetic strategies used to portray them. The aim is to further probe the traditional gangster figure's enduring allure as well as new interpretations of marginalized characters seeking liberty by means of organized crime.

CHAIR

¤ TBC

SPEAKERS

¤ Robert Winkler, *Universität Salzburg* - "THE MASK / OF MASCULINITY / IS A MASK / A MASK THAT'S WEARING ME": DE/CONSTRUCTING VISIONS OF MALE FREEDOM IN SERGIO LEONE'S *ONCE UPON A TIME IN AMERICA* (1984)

¤ Wibke Schniedermann, *Universiteit Gent* - THE GANGSTER AS INTERFACE BETWEEN LAW AND JUSTICE

¤ Laura Herges, *Heidelberg Center for American Studies* - THE MILITARY-ENTERTAINMENT COMPLEX AND THE DEATH OF CRITICAL FILMMAKING

KEYWORDS

GANGSTER, FILM; CRIME, JUSTICE, LEGALITY

ALTERNATIVE LOOKS VISION AND COUNTER-VISION IN AMERICAN POETRY

Friday 04
10:15 - 11:45
AULA

From John Winthrop's call for the world to watch the 'City on a Hill' to Emily Dickenson's imperative to tell it all at a 'slant' and Elizabeth's Bishop's likening of poetry to her grandmother's glass eye, vision has played a central role in poetry's relationship with national, generational and personal identity. Rather than looking straight on, that vision has relied on being seen as much as seeing, and on truths at once so skewed and literal that the artificial has become the material. This panel considers the literal, figurative and metaphysical role of vision in American poetry by investigating acts of seeing or blindness, considering language as a manifesting force, and exploring poetry's relationship to other media which rely on sight and image. From these starting points, it addresses questions that probe the conference theme: what can vision's complex relationship to poetic form tell us about the affordances and limits of freedom, and what does it mean to make freedom visible in poetic imagery and diction.
These papers bring together Don Mee Choi's visual images of transnational memory, Elizabeth Bishop's visions of an America that sprawls across the continent, and Frost's tightly woven vision of regionality, by scrutinising vision's kinship with America's founding principle of freedom. Vision, this panel suggests, is often grounded in language, but it also alludes words or finds new ways of bringing together communicative forms. The affordances and pressures of poetry's own forms, the panel argues, are crucial to our understanding of vision's power and its place in American Studies.

CHAIR

- Gulsin Ciftci, *Universität Münster*

SPEAKERS

- Mohan Ding, *Georg-August Universität Göttingen* - THE VISION OF TRANSNATIONAL MEMORY IN THE WORKS OF DON MEE CHOI
- Philip McGowan, *Queen's University Belfast* - LEARNING TO SEE WITH ELIZABETH BISHOP
- Lucy Cheseldine, *University of York* - KEEPING WATCH: POETIC VISION AND FORMAL FREEDOM IN ROBERT FROST'S LONGER POEM
- Julius Greve, *Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg*

KEYWORDS

POETRY, VISION, FORM, TRANSNATIONALISM, IDENTITY

EAAS POETRY NETWORK

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Adinolfi, Simona

Universiteit Gent

THE LIMITS OF LYING ONLINE: TONY TULATHIMUTTE'S REJECTION

In her paper, Simona Adinolfi will offer a reading of the short story "Main Character" from the collection *Rejection* (2025) by Tony Tulathimutte. Structured as a series of seven short stories or chapters, the book is mostly centered on the digital lives and online interactions of five main characters, and it can be read as a case of networked fiction (Edwards 2019). In particular, she then zooms in on the fifth and longest story, "Main Character." The story is the complex account of an online scandal/hoax related to a person called Bee who created thousands of Twitter accounts which range from humorous and lewd profiles to fake celebrities' accounts to harmful trolls. Using narrative theory, she shows how Bee's multiple personas and accounts online can be read through a reconceptualization of unreliability that takes into account the idea of untruthfulness (Fludernik and Packard 2021) and the role of technology in the construction of nonfactual narratives online. Simona then argues that the story presents unreliability as both distributed and layered along the distinct levels of the narrative: Bee's unreliability is distributed along all their Twitter accounts, and unreliability itself is present on various narrative levels. Indeed, the whole narrative about the hoax itself is unreliable: firstly, it consists of multiple versions of "The Post", a blog post where Bee confessed their hoax and explains how they did it; secondly, the short story ends with a series of conspiracy theories about hoax presented in a section titled "Appendix". "Main Character," and *Rejection* as a whole, also self-reflexively, through the title and through the questioning of authorship, extends its literary concerns to questions about the boundaries of freedom of speech. By reading this work through media studies, narrative theory and critical posthumanism, she demonstrates how studying the representations of digital platforms online through literary narratives can help us think through the ethics of narrating online and the liminal spaces surrounding freedom of speech.

Simona Adinolfi is a postdoctoral researcher at Ghent University and at the University of Giessen, where she is part of the project MeDiMi – Human Rights Discourse in Migration Societies. Her PhD dissertation examined contemporary novels of migration using a critical posthumanities framework, to show how canonical themes usually associated to narratives of migration are being subverted and complicated on a formal level. Her research focuses on contemporary literary representations of human and nonhuman migration and on the effects of digital technologies on classical narratological concepts.

FREEDOM OF SPEECH ACROSS (POST) DIGITAL SPACES AND CONTEMPORARY US NARRATIVES

Aguilo-Perez, Emily

West Chester University

LATINIFAD: BRANDING LATINIDAD AND THE ILLUSION OF CHOICE IN DISNEY'S CHILDREN'S MEDIA

In recent years, Disney has increasingly centered Latinx characters and stories in its animated media, introducing titles such as *Elena of Avalor* (2016-2020), *Coco* (2017), and *Encanto* (2021). These texts appear to celebrate Latinx identity and cultural diversity, offering young audiences stories that affirm heritage, community, and belonging. Yet behind the vibrant visuals and "authentic" storytelling lies a carefully calibrated branding strategy that markets representation as both inclusion and product. This presentation interrogates how Latinidad is packaged and sold to children through Disney's animation and the broader ecosystems that surround it: merchandise, promotional materials, theme park attractions, and corporate messaging. Through close readings of these texts, I analyze how narratives of freedom—personal expression, cultural celebration, and familial reconciliation—are made central to the plot, even as choices are constrained by the demands of marketability. In these stories, children are invited to see themselves as empowered agents of cultural continuity and change, but only within the bounds of commercial storytelling that flattens specificity into pan-ethnic fantasy. This talk is part of a larger book project in which I coin the term *LatiniFad* to describe the cyclical visibility of Latinx identity in children's media: celebrated in moments of trend-driven appeal, commodified through transmedia synergy, and often relegated to the periphery once the marketing window closes. I argue that the "freedom" these texts promote is filtered through a corporate logic that privileges aesthetic inclusion over structural change. Situating Disney's Latinx turn within broader discourses of neoliberal multiculturalism and the commodification of childhood, this paper contributes to ongoing conversations about cultural representation, consumerism, and the contradictory promises of freedom in American children's media.

Emily Aguiló-Pérez, Ph.D. (Professor of English, West Chester University of Pennsylvania) specializes in youth literatures and cultures. She authored *An American Icon in Puerto Rico: Barbie, Girlhood, and Colonialism at Play* (Berghahn, 2022) and co-edited *Barbie in the Media: The Transmedia Presence of Mattel's Celebrity Doll*, *#Barbie and Social Media: Digital Discourses and Mattel's Celebrity Doll* (both Palgrave, 2025), and *The Cultural Legacy of Disney: A Century of Magic* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2024). Her work has appeared in journals including *Oxford Bibliographies in Childhood Studies*, *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures*, and various edited collections. She holds a Ph.D. from The Pennsylvania State University.

FREEDOM OF CHOICE? AMERICAN CHILDREN'S CONSUMER CULTURE AND THE CONTRADICTIONS OF LIBERTY

Álvarez-López, Esther

Universidá d'Uviéu

INSURGENT AESTHETICS: PERFORMING FREEDOM AND DECOLONIAL IMAGINATION IN AMALIA ORTIZ'S PUNK ROCK OPERA

Amalia L. Ortiz's *The Canción Cannibal Cabaret and Other Songs* imagines freedom amid the ruins of empire, offering alternative futures to neoliberal and patriarchal orders. Conceived as a "punk rock opera," Ortiz's hybrid work fuses speculative fiction, poetry, and performance art to envision a radical vision of liberation grounded in decolonial thought, collective memory, and embodied resistance. This paper examines how Ortiz reconfigures traditional narrative and musical forms—the corrido, the protest song, and the spoken word—into insurgent aesthetic strategies that enact freedom as both political practice and affective experience. Ortiz thus reclaims performance as a space of survival and imagination, where art enacts the liberation it envisions. Through sound, rhythm, and performance, Ortiz transforms art into a medium for revolutionary imagining, what Chela Sandoval terms a "methodology of the oppressed," where aesthetics become "technologies of resistance" (Sandoval 2000, 80).

Set in a post-apocalyptic time and landscape, *The Canción Cannibal Cabaret* follows a Chicana revolutionary who reclaims erased histories to inspire communal resurgence. Ortiz's decolonial futurism reframes freedom not as transcendence but as intervention— what scholars of speculative literature term *decolonial futures*, where imagination itself becomes a site of struggle. Rejecting dystopian fatalism, Ortiz envisions liberation as an ongoing process rooted in healing and solidarity to reassemble the worlds fractured by colonization. Her protagonist, La Madre Valiente, embodies a fluid, hybrid subjectivity that defies Western epistemologies; her voice channels history, ancestral memory, and creative vision to generate a new poetics of emancipation. In this way, Ortiz reimagines the very conditions under which freedom can be imagined and enacted. Drawing on Cherríe Moraga's notion of a "theory in the flesh" (Moraga 1983), this paper argues that Ortiz formulates a vision of freedom that is embodied, performative, and communal. Through allegory and satire, she exposes the entanglements of white supremacy, patriarchy, and ecological collapse while gesturing toward alternative modes of being and belonging. Ultimately, *The Canción Cannibal Cabaret and Other Songs* functions not merely as literature but as a manifesto for decolonial freedom, offering a poetics of becoming that is both visionary and materially grounded

Esther Álvarez-López (eal@uniovi.es) is Associate Professor in U.S. Literature at the University of Oviedo (Spain). Her research examines intersections of gender, class, and race/ethnicity within U.S. literary and cultural studies, with a particular focus on diasporic and Latinx voices, analyzing how their identities are represented and negotiated in artistic works. She has published widely in national and international venues and coedited the volumes *Diasporic Women's Writing of the Black Atlantic: (En) Gendering Literature and Performance* (Routledge, 2014) and *Cosmopolitan Strangers in Contemporary Latinx Literature and Culture: Building Bridges, Not Walls* (Routledge, 2023). Her recent work explores how literature and performance can foster critical empathy, transnational dialogue, and feminist solidarity across borders. Her publications include chapters on Latinx literature in collective volumes (Bill-Rodopi 2023, Palgrave 2024, Routledge 2025), where she explores Latinx identities and migration processes from an interdisciplinary perspective, addressing their social, cultural, and discursive dimensions, and articles in journals as *Papers in Language and Literature* and *Polish Journal for American Studies*.

Ambroży, Paulina

Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu

UNSETTLING FREEDOM: INDIGENOUS SURVIVAL AND GENOCIDAL MEMORY IN MARGO TAMEZ'S FATHER/GENOCIDE

The United States' foundational vision of freedom, enshrined in 1776, was articulated through the language of universal liberty while relying on the dispossession and elimination of Indigenous peoples. Margo Tamez's *Father/Genocide* (Turtle Point Press) confronts this contradiction directly, layering personal testimony, intergenerational memory, and historical record to expose the genocidal underpinnings of American independence. Drawing on decolonial methodologies (Smith; Simpson) and settler colonial critique (Wolfe; Byrd), this paper argues that *Father/Genocide* not only documents violence in the Texas-Mexico borderlands but also enacts a poetic refusal of the settler nation's temporal and narrative frameworks. Through close reading, I analyze selected aspects of Tamez's decolonial poetics: fragmentary form, multilingual texture, and refusal of linear chronology as formal strategies that resist the archival logics of erasure. These aesthetic choices enact what Michel Foucault terms *counter-memory*, or *counter-archive* —an insurgent history that interrupts the celebratory arc from 1776 to 2026. As I shall argue, the work's testimonial mode (Beverley; hooks) situates the personal within the collective, connecting the violence of the past to the structural inequalities of the present. By centering Indigenous women's experiences of colonial and gendered violence (Smith; Moreton-Robinson), *Father/Genocide* reframes "freedom" as a relational, land-based practice grounded in survival, sovereignty, and the transmission of memory. In doing so, Tamez offers a counter-vision to the dominant U.S. narrative: one in which freedom is not a birthright secured in revolution, but a fragile, ongoing act of resistance against the very structures that proclaim it. In dialogue with Anthony Cody's *Borderland Apocrypha* (2020), Layli Long Soldier's *Whereas* (2017) and Jordan Abel's *Empty Spaces* (2023), this paper positions *Father/Genocide* as part of a broader literary movement that dismantles settler-colonial mythologies, reclaiming the right to narrate the meaning—and limits—of American freedom in the twenty-first century

Paulina Ambroży is Associate Professor and Head of The Department of American Studies: Literature and Media, at the Faculty of English, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland. Her research centers on American -(more recently also Canadian and Polish) avantgarde and experimental poetry. She is interested in intersections between poetry, literary philosophy, science, document and the visual arts. She is the author of *(Un)concealing the Hedgehog: Modernist American Poets and Contemporary Critical Theories* (Poznań, 2012), which received the 2014 American Studies Network Book Prize for remarkable research in American studies. With Liliana Sikorska, Joanna Jarząb-Napierała and Marta FrątczakDąbrowska she has authored *Between the Self and the Other: Essays on the Poetry of Paul Muldoon* (2018), a study which fuses four perspectives: autobiographical, geopoetic, postcolonial and intertextual. Currently, she is working on a book project devoted to the spatial form in contemporary North American and Polish poetry.

Antoszek, Ewa

Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej

METABOLIZING THE BORDER: ART, HOSTIPITALITY, AND THE REDEFINITION OF FREEDOM IN THE BORDERLANDS

The U.S.–Mexico border has long stood as a material and symbolic site where freedom is both proclaimed and denied. It marks the limits of belonging and movement, structuring lives through walls, checkpoints, and policies that enforce exclusion. Yet for many Latinx artists, the border is also a space of possibility—a site where creative practices articulate alternative visions of freedom grounded in community, empathy, and care. Tanya Aguiñiga's project, *Metabolizing the Border*, is an apt example of such transformation. Through her performance on the border, the artist reimagines this space not as an impermeable barrier but as a porous threshold where pain can be shared and metabolized into connection, in the artist's words. Building on Jacques Derrida's concept of *hostipitality*—the ambivalent coexistence of hospitality and hostility in the experience of crossing borders—Aguiñiga's work enacts gestures of *conviviality* that resist the logic of division. Her border *artivism* engages freedom as a relational and affective practice: not the abstract ideal of unrestricted movement, but the embodied freedom to coexist, to listen, and to create across boundaries. This form of freedom may be fragile and fleeting, yet profoundly transformative, revealing how artistic expression can unsettle geopolitical constraints, even if for a brief moment.

By examining *Metabolizing the Border* as both a "personal reckoning with the pain caused by the border wall" and a collective act of repair, this presentation situates Aguiñiga's practice within broader conversations about Latinx art, activism, and the redefinition of freedom in borderlands contexts. Aguiñiga's work challenges us to envision freedom not as transcendence from the border but as the capacity to inhabit its contradictions ethically and imaginatively, proposing that true freedom emerges in the shared struggle to transform sites of exclusion into spaces of belonging, dialogue and creative solidarity.

Ewa Antoszek (ewa.antoszek@mail.umcs.pl) is an Assistant Professor at the Department of British and American Studies of UMCS Lublin, Poland. She also holds a Diploma in American Studies from Smith College (Northampton, MA). In her research, she examines the question of ethnic identities, representations of space in literature, border issues, with a particular focus on the U.S.-Mexico border and the situation of Latinx in the United States, as well as migrations and their effects. Her latest research is devoted to the issue of hostipitality. She is the author of *Out of the Margins: Identity Formation in Contemporary Chicana Writings* (Peter Lang, 2012), a co-editor of *Other Drums: Difference and Discord in American Literature and Culture* (UMCS Publishing House, 2013) and many articles devoted to the issue of borders. In 2022-2023, she received research grants from the National Science Center: NAWA, "New aspects of contemporary American literature and culture" and Miniatura 6, "Hostipitality and conviviality: artivism on the U.S.-Mexico border as an example of actions challenging exclusionary practices." She is also the leader of the project MigraMedia at UMCS (Erasmus+: Migration Narratives in European Media: Teaching, Learning, and Reflecting), devoted to the representations of migration in various media.

Arbeit, Marcel

Metropolitní univerzita Praha

MARTHA LACY HALL: A FEMINIST AGAINST HER OWN WILL

Martha Lacy Hall (1923–2009), a Louisiana short story writer, better known as a long-time editor of Louisiana University Press, was frequently labeled by reviewers as a feminist minimalist. She was always renouncing the label, but short stories in her three collections, *Call It Living* (1981), *Music Lesson* (1984), and *The Apple-Green Triumph and Other Stories* (1990), are brilliant and original portrayals of independent women in the traditional southern environment.

Hall's typical protagonists are elderly women, often widows, who try to overcome their factual or mental solitude by turning to their past and rejoining their community, having spent or still spending their life with men who cannot understand their needs and desires. Set mostly in a little town of Sweet Bay, Mississippi, the stories show that memories and returns to the past do not provide the much-needed feeling of belonging and are not a remedy against alienation. It is necessary to collect your inner strength and try to find home in your own mind; only then you can say that "florist flowers smell of death and home-grown ones smell of life" (*Music Lesson* 28, from the story "The Painter"). The main focus will be on "Miss Robbie's Cup of Tea" (1989), a minimalist story introducing a woman who has been for years obsessed with the idea of sharing an afternoon tea with somebody, which will never happen, and her little revenge on her ignorant husband, which made her happy.

The analysis will combine psychological and feminist perspectives but will also mention the historical and geographical backgrounds and contexts of her writings. It will also touch the affinities of Hall's stories with those of Eudora Welty, for whom, however, the role of community for women's life is much more important. Such a comparison can bring interesting results, as Hall's women (a piano teacher and her mediocre student, a widow overhearing from her garden chair a conversation of her neighbors, or a retired teacher in need of a companion) are very similar to Welty's protagonists, but react on the challenges of life in a different, if not an opposite way.

Marcel Arbeit is Professor in the Department of Anglophone Studies at Metropolitan University, Prague, and in the Department of English and American Studies at Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic. He is the author of a monograph on the novels of Fred Chappell and Cormac McCarthy published in 2006 (in Czech) and the main editor of the threevolume Bibliography of American Literature in Czech Translation (2000). He co-edited the Mississippi Quarterly special issue on Lewis Nordan (2007, with Thomas Ærvold Bjerre), The (Un)Popular South (2011, with M. Thomas Inge), and Where Is History Today? New Ways of Representing the Past (2015, with Ian Christie), and edited The South from Elsewhere (2014). His recent publications focus on Fred Chappell, Harry Crews, Lewis Nordan, Flannery O'Connor, Chris Offutt, Ron Rash, and Elizabeth Spencer. Between 2005 and 2013 he was the President of the Czech and Slovak Association for American Studies.

Arce Álvarez, María Laura

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

RECOLONIZING THE MATERNAL BODY: MATRIFOCAL NARRATIVES OF EXCLUSION IN JOANNE RAMOS' THE FARM

In her book *Women The Last Colony* Maria Mies, Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen and Claudia Von Werlhof propose an analysis of how the question of women is related to the colonial question and how "both are related to the dominant, global capitalistpatriarchal model of accumulation" (1). In this sense, they argue that as the colonies, women are appropriated as 'natural resources' since "women (as the 'means of production' for producing people) and land, are goods that can in no way be produced by capital. Control over women and land is, therefore, the foundation of any system based on exploitation" (5). In *The Farm*, Filipina-American author Joanne Ramos presents a polyvocal and matrifocal narrative of different women from different origins and social classes who experience surrogacy. As an example of the recolonization of the maternal body by an extreme form of high capitalism, Ramos' creates a sort of dystopian rest house called Golden Oaks for the surrogate mothers to have a pampering pregnancy that will ensure a safe gestation for the hosts and healthy babies for the clients. By intersecting different identity aspects such as race, class and nationality, Ramos shows how immigrant women are excluded from American society and the American Dream they went to look for, pushing them to a precarious economic situation in which surrogacy becomes the only way to earn a living and a way out of poverty. In the novel, surrogacy shows how social institutions, the heteropatriarchal structure and economics control women's reproductive life. Through the different characters Ramos's creates, the novel becomes a polyvocal space of stories that together interweave in a discourse for the liberation of the maternal body and women's reproductive life. The intention of this presentation is to study how Ramos's novel *The Farm* discusses surrogacy as a recolonization of the maternal body and how it reveals the subjection of the maternal body and maternity to the heteropatriarchal structure in a matrifocal and matricentric narrative of women's reproductive rights liberation.

María Laura Laura Arce is Associate Professor of American Literature in the English Department at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. Her research field focuses on 20th and 21st century Postmodern American Literature, Literary Theory and Comparative Literature with special attention on intersectionality and literature and queer literary theory. Currently, she is writing a book about the importance of maternal roles in 21st century American Literature and she is the research leader of the national research project "Intersectional Maternities: Matrifocal Narratives and New Forms of Family in Anglophone Literature" (PID2024-160004OB-100) funded by the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities, Spain

MOTHERING LIBERTY: MATERNAL VISIONS OF FREEDOM IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Arcidiacono, Giuliana

Accademia di Belle Arti di Catania

BARONESS ELSA VON FREYTAG-LORINGHOVEN AND THE POETICS OF EMBODIED FREEDOM

"Baroness" Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven (1874-1927), "the first American Dada" as Jane Heap dubbed her, formulates a radical counter-narrative to the modernist story of American freedom. Ranging from poetry to assemblage and performance, her work reimagines freedom not only as an abstract ideal but as a material and embodied practice. The radical verse by a German immigrant reconfigures poetry as a lived experience of autonomy binding together her self-fashioned identity with her defiance of social, sexual, and artistic constraints. Experimental poems, visual practices, ready-made artworks, and live performances configure both her language and her body as sites of resistance and refashioning. In her posthumous first poetry collection, *Body Sweats: The Uncensored Writings of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven* (2011), freedom manifests at every textual level. Her verse dismantles syntax, destabilizes spelling, and disrupts grammatical authority, turning writing itself into an act of insubordination. Subversive capitalization, lexical innovations, and extensive use of onomatopoeia become strategies of disobedience that materialize the struggle for self-expression in a fast-changing world. This radical formal freedom echoes the energy of early twentieth-century America, its urban dynamism, its fascination with technology, and its contradictions between self-expression and conformity. By transforming discarded materials into art and herself into a living sculpture, she reclaims both the object and the woman body from commodification and the male gaze. Through costume, gesture, and public provocation, her outrageous self-staging turns visibility into a political act, anticipating later feminist redefinitions of agency while also weaving connections with the fragmented individuality of Haraway's Cyborg. Infused with excess and eccentricity, her poetry, visual art, and embodied practice build together a distinctly American articulation of freedom, where creation itself stands as a declaration of independence.

Giuliana Arcidiacono received her PhD from the University of Catania in 2009. She has taught English and American English and is currently a professor of English at the Academy of Fine Arts of Catania. Her research focuses on a diverse range of literary and linguistic topics, with a particular emphasis on translation studies, varieties of English, electronic literature and modernist literature. She has authored articles on research fields such as self-translation, Chicano-American literature, and modernist female writers. In addition to her academic work, she is a translator and her translation works include the Italian edition of Djuna Barnes' *Ladies Almanack* (2014). Her broader interests also encompass creative projects that explore the intersection of literature and visual arts, especially through the lenses of identity, culture, language and multimedia.

AGAINST THE TYRANNY OF LANGUAGE. THREE (POST)MODERN QUESTS FOR LIFE, LIBERTY, AND HAPPINESS

Aréjula Múñoz, Lucía

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

THE QUEER MOTHERING VISION: DETRANSITION BABY AND ITS TESTING OF THE LIMITS OF FREEDOM

The US 14th Amendment reads "[n]o State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property" (US Const. amend. XIV, sec. 1). However, as Judith Butler concisely hinted at, "[t]o be oppressed you must first become intelligible" (30) and queer individuals and their kinship variations are considered by the US fundamental legislation "perilous to the putative natural and cultural laws said to sustain human intelligibility" (104) and thus, that intelligibility, an impossibility. This recognition, for which queer individuals strive for, is what Reese, Ames and Katrina attempt to conquer in *Detransition Baby*. In this literary piece, Torrey Peters tests the limits of gender, mothering and families by inspecting the limits of American freedom. In this paper, I will argue that *Detransition Baby* is more fittingly analyzed when both the categories of gender and mothering are deconstructed and transformed simultaneously so as to accomplish an analysis that efficiently reflects how 'mother' and gender are open for reconfigurations that aim at ensuring queer mothering practices' intelligibility.

When "Amy did the impossible: She got herself a baby" (Peters 13) after detransitioning and thinking that it was not possible, he renounced an externally imposed idea of how his gender and his mothering should operate. Using Butler's theories of gender deconstruction and new understandings of mothering introduced by Ruddick, O'Reilly, Friedman and Reed among others, this paper explores how these characters' solution "is so awkward and hard and without obvious precedent because [they]'re trying to imagine [their] own solution, to reinvent something for [them]selves" (337). Ultimately, that solution reveals itself as the novel trudges daringly between the limits of seemingly stabilized categories which are, nonetheless, still open for resignification thanks to a man who detransitioned but does not want to be called 'father' (36), a heterosexual woman who is invited to question the traditional idea of family (275) and a trans woman who all she has ever wished for is being a mother (8).

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Arias Rubio, Gala

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'WE WILL BE YOUR MOTHERS, YOUR SISTERS, YOUR DAUGHTERS.' MOTHERHOOD, SLAVERY AND LIBERATION IN FOUR WAYS TO FORGIVENESS (1995) BY URSULA K. LE GUIN

Ursula K. Le Guin's work addresses profound themes such as the impact of humans on the environment, the effects of colonization, alternative social and family organizations, and gender issues. She has also explored motherhood in its various forms. Examples of maternal-filial relationships can be found in novels such as *The Dispossessed* (1974), *Always Coming Home* (1985) and *Lavinia* (2008), as well as in short stories such as 'Solitude' (1994). However, it is in the collection of four short stories, *Four Ways to Forgiveness* (1995) — part of the Hainish Cycle — that we find a greater variety of mothering forms, and where Le Guin reflects more deeply on the relationship between slavery and motherhood. The collection presents two twin planets: Werel and Yeowe, where much of the population (known as 'assets') is enslaved. Building on Barr's (1987) argument that science fiction can serve as a space for critiquing forms of patriarchal motherhood, and drawing on Le Guin's own theoretical approach in *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* (1986) — which asserts that feminist storytelling provides superior tools for reflecting on reality — this paper explores the various forms of mothering in Four Ways to Forgiveness, contrasting them as either liberatin

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Arranz Conte, Zésar

Universidad de Zaragoza

REVISITING THE CONCEPT OF FREEDOM IN BARRY GOLDWATER'S 1964 CAMPAIGN: MORE LIBERTARIAN THAN CONSERVATIVE

The aim of this proposal is to analyse the concept of "freedom" in Barry Goldwater's speeches during the 1964 presidential campaign. The central hypothesis is that Goldwater's lack of a concrete definition of freedom was used by right-wing and conservative thinkers to label him a "conservative". However, an examination of his speeches, books, and pamphlets reveals that his concept of individual freedom was more closely aligned with libertarianism than with conservative political thought.

The concept of "social contract" is one of the key elements of the political vision of Goldwaterism: free citizens who voluntarily decide to organize themselves around political institutions. For Goldwater, "Freedom" was the fundamental right from which all others derived, and it could only be an individual right, neither collective nor institutional. Therefore, no law –except those guaranteeing individual freedom– could justly be imposed on citizens. Although he considered racism "immoral", his concept of freedom obliged him to oppose the *Civil Rights Act*, on the basis that limited freedom of conscience by contravening the freedom to hold racist views. In Isaiah Berlin's terms, Goldwater's notion of freedom can be understood as negative freedom, since he defended minimizing obstacles to the exercise of creative liberty–which he describes as the cornerstone of humanity's progress.

Too often, Goldwater's extreme defence of freedom of conscience has obscured the real meaning of freedom for him. He believed that government intervention in the name of equality could be dangerous and insidious. Since government possesses no rights of its own, no law should be imposed on those who do not consent to it. According to Goldwater, people voluntarily organise themselves into communities, then communities into states, and eventually into the Federal Government. However, the ultimate legislator should always be the individual citizen; therefore, the closer the laws are made to him, the better.

To test this hypothesis, I examine Goldwater's published books *The Conscience of a Conservative* (1960), *Why Not Victory?* (1962) and *Where I Stand* (1964), and the compilation *Barry M. Goldwater Campaign Speeches* (1964), edited by the Republican Party Committee.

I hold a Degree in History from the University of Zaragoza (UNIZAR), with an Honourable Mention for my thesis on the rise of the American Right. I subsequently specialized through the Master in Political and Electoral Analysis at Carlos III University of Madrid, the Master in Secondary Teacher Training (UNIZAR), and the Interuniversity Master in Contemporary History (UNIZAR), earning Honours for my master's thesis on Barry Goldwater's 1964 speeches. I have received both the Extraordinary Degree Award and the Extraordinary Master Award in Contemporary History. Since 2025, I am a predoctoral researcher at the Department of History, University of Zaragoza, funded by an FPU contract. My PhD research focuses on the transnational networks of the American Right and the European Conservative Movement during the Cold War. I have presented papers at national and international conferences on topics including Phyllis Schlafly, the American Christian Right, and the historical study of electoral laws.

Åström, Berit

Umeå universitet

"SITTING DOWN WITH A HUMAN LIKE THIS WOULD NEVER NOT FEEL STRANGE": PERSONHOOD, BODILY AUTONOMY AND FREEDOM IN THE MURDERBOT DIARIES

The Murderbot Diaries (2017-), Martha Wells's popular science fiction series, takes place in a part of human space called Corporation Rim, where indentured labour, slavery, espionage, assassinations and exploitation of humans and resources are commonplace. The titular Murderbot, a SecUnit, is a so-called "construct" – part human tissue, part android. Although it is sentient, it is considered and treated as a tool by the company that owns it and the humans that rent it for protection on mining operations and planet explorations. For example, it travels as cargo and is not allowed to sit down in the presence of humans. It is also not unheard of clients shooting SecUnits when they are bored, since these are easily repaired and not allowed to fight back.

As Colleen Etman has shown, the sentient android (particularly in the *Star Wars*-universe) finds itself in an ambiguous position, somewhere between a slave and a tool. This ambiguity is usually not acknowledged by the narratives. (This stands in stark contrast to the most recent real-world worries about chatbots' emotional life (Booth)). Wells, on the other hand, brings these issues to forefront. Through Murderbot, she explores questions of personhood and freedom, of bodily autonomy and rights, legal and moral, pointing towards a society where individual and collective freedoms can be safeguarded.

Berit Åström is an Associate Professor of English Literature at Umeå University, Sweden. Her research interests include representations of mothers, motherhood and mothering in literature, film and television. Her recent publications include *Analysing American Advice Books for Single Mothers Raising Sons* (2023). Together with Jenny Bonnevier, she is currently working on a project exploring representations of AI and kinship in popular culture and how they speak to issues of infertility/ARTs and aging populations in industrialised countries. A pilot study, entitled "Selfless Servers, Weapons in Waiting: Androids Parenting Human Children in *Raised by Wolves* and *I Am Mother*," is forthcoming in *The Palgrave Handbook on Parenthood in Popular Culture* in October 2025.

Balbier, Uta Andrea

University of Oxford

THE RIGHT TO PRAY: WHITE EVANGELICALS, FREEDOM, AND CIVIL RIGHTS IN 1963

This paper analyses white evangelical responses to the Supreme Court ruling in *Abingdon v. Schempp* in1963 which declared the reciting of the Lord's Prayer and Bible verses in public schools unconstitutional. It argues that it was the specific Civil Rights context of the year 1963 that shaped the white evangelical discourse around the Court's ruling. That it was often opposition to Civil Rights and racial justice that underpinned responses to the prayer rulings of the Court revealed itself in the words of Rep. George Andrews (D-Al) who commented on a preceding Court ruling on school prayer: "They put the Negroes in the schools and now they've driven God out." In the year 1963, controversies over religious freedom became a battleground on which a distinctly racist religious right took shape.

Defining works by Anthea Butler and Randall Balmer date a first manifestation of a racialised discourse connecting demands to religious freedom to states' rights to a later point: the controversy over the cancellation of tax-exemption status for religious schools that refused to integrate after the passing of the Civil Rights Act, such as Bob Jones University. This paper argues instead that it was during the battle over school prayer in the year 1963 that racialized assumptions formed among white evangelicals regarding the relationship between religious freedom and states' rights that predate the controversy around tax-exemption. In a world changed by the Civil Rights Movement, the defence of the right to pray would increasingly substitute for outspoken racism. Using the year 1963 as a crucial point in the long Civil Rights struggle as an analytical lens allows the paper to add to the burgeoning historiography on what Anthea Butler termed "White Evangelical Racism".

Uta Andrea Balbier is Professor of Modern History at the University of Oxford and Tutorial Fellow of St. Anne's College. Her research focuses on religion and America's global relationships. Her most recent monograph *Altar Call in Europe. Billy Graham, Mass Evangelism, and the Cold-War West* (OUP 2021) traces the transnational connections between the revival meetings that the evangelist Billy Graham held in London, Berlin and New York in the 1950s. She has served on the executive committee and as vice chair of BAAS and as chair of HOTCUS.

Balestrino, Alice

Università di Roma "La Sapienza"

THE AUTHOR'S AUTHORITARIANISM. GERTRUDE STEIN AS OBLIQUE INTELLECTUAL.

In a 1934 interview with Lansing Warrenparis, Gertrude Stein stated: "Intellectuals are not suited to directing of government. They are deterred by a mental obliquity." The notion of obliquity certainly applies to Stein's pre-postmodern aesthetics, but I'd suggest – following Barbara Will's argument – that it may have influenced her ethics as well. The indirect yet adaptive nature of obliquity seems to be an antiauthoritarian stance when read in Stein's texts (a radical formal style that refuses hierarchy and linguistic conformity) but it can turn eerily authoritarian when seen against the background of Stein's political positions (her support of Franco's revolution in Spain and of Petain's Vichy regime in France, for instance).

This paper aims at exploring Stein's oblique narrative strategies, including metaliterary frameworks, puns, disrupted chronology, self-reflexive narration, and attention to the act of meaningmaking, as acts of resistance to authoritarian structures of thought, language, and political control. Yet I would also complicate this stance by testing to what degree these experimental devices are truly disruptive of authority (in this case being, literally, the author's agency and will) and asking if, on the contrary, they reinforce and further legitimize (authorize) the author's connections to power. At the core of this reflection lies a question, already raised by Stein's friend Thornton Wilder, about authority, authorship, and "the relations between personality and genius."

These notions converge into the figure of the intellectual, seen by Stein as both a producer of authority and a potential agent of freedom: in *The Making of Americans* (1925), the intellectual emerges as a symbol of inherited authority, often estranged from lived experience and emotional authenticity. Later, in *Lectures in America* (1935), Stein reflects on the institutionalization of knowledge, challenging the academy's claims to authoritative discourse. Finally, *Wars I Have Seen* (1945) presents a wartime meditation on freedom and constraint, where intellectuals are implicated in both the justification of violence and the (im)possibility of its critique. By situating Stein within broader debates about intellectualism in the early 20th century, this paper examines her oblique redefinition of intellectual authority—one controversially ingrained in autonomy and authoritarianism.

Alice Balestrino is assistant professor of Anglo-American literature at Sapienza, University of Rome. She obtained a PhD in Literatures in English, from Sapienza University (2019), and from 2019 to 2022, she was Research Assistant and Program Coordinator of IFUSS (International Forum for US Studies) at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, where she pursued a second PhD in Italian Studies, with the support of the Program of Jewish Culture and Society. Her primary areas of interest include Transnational American Studies, Gender Studies, Jewish-American literature, Italian Theory, Modernism, and Philip Roth. She is currently working on a research project titled "The Female Gene: Gertrude Stein and Margherita Sarfatti Generating Vulnerabilities and Reproducing Power," which explores the controversial ramifications of the modernist works of two pro-fascist female authors of Jewish origins. She is the author of *Extra-Vacant Narratives. Reading Holocaust Fiction in the Post-9/11 Age* (Sapienza UP, 2022), and of articles published, among others, in *Ácoma*, *Philip Roth Studies*, *Altre Modernità*, *RIAS* (Review of International American Studies), and *REDEN* (Revista Española de Estudios Norteamericanos).

Banita, Georgiana

Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg

THE WEIGHT OF WATCHTOWERS: THE CAMP AND THE LITERARY IMAGINATION FROM ELLIS ISLAND TO ALLIGATOR ALCATRAZ

Recent migration scholarship has developed a critical vocabulary – terms such as logistification and carcerality – to contest the management of the "unwelcome," linking border and asylum infrastructures to the longer histories of coloniality. Although urgent in an era of authoritarian drift, this perspective often remains curiously detached from the affective dimensions of migration technologies. To address this gap, the talk explores the material and mental histories of American xenophobia and its built environments, showing how the walls and barricades of these sites weigh on the inner landscapes of camp survivors and their communities.

To chart the moral geography of migrant prisons, the talk moves from Ellis Island's medical screening and eugenic sorting to Angel Island's long detentions under the Chinese Exclusion Act and then to the World War II internment of Japanese Americans; from the Krome facility in Florida and other INS detention centers for Haitian and Central American migrants in the 1980s and '90s to Guantánamo and other post-9/11 legally liminal sites; and finally to the Trump-era expansion of DHS, with family separations, chain-link cages, and facilities such as Alligator Alcatraz. Today, ICE raids extend the camp's logic into open air. To understand what it means to be made governable through containment, the analysis draws on Arendt's reflections on statelessness, Agamben's account of exceptional confinement, and Mbembe's critique of colonial afterlives to frame the migrant camp as a laboratory for racialized sorting and spectacular display. The literary archive spans the poems carved into the barracks of Angel Island, immigrant memoirs, and fiction by Edwidge Danticat, John Okada, and Valeria Luiselli.

Guided by Avery Gordon's *Ghostly Matters*, the talk reads these texts as articulating a hauntology of the camp. They illuminate how the affective tropes of migrant detainment – suspended time, bureaucratic intimacy, the humiliation of the queue, the erosion of belonging – resonate through the narrative registers of migrant memory, sustaining the imaginative energy of a post-carceral political future.

PD, Dr. Georgiana Banita is Senior Lecturer in North American Literature and Culture at the University of Bamberg. Her research explores the intersections of literature, visual culture, and political violence, with a particular focus on policing, race, and migration. She is the author of *Plotting Justice: Narrative Ethics and Literary Culture after 9/11* (2012) and *Phantombilder: Die Polizei und der verdächtige Fremde* (2023), and co-editor of *Artful Breakdowns: The Comics of Art Spiegelman* (2023), which won the Comics Studies Society Prize for Best Edited Collection. Her interests also include the ethics and aesthetics of Auschwitz representation, the cultural psychology of deportation under the Trump administration, and the longer history of conflating migration and crime in U.S. political discourse. Banita serves on the editorial board of the *Journal of American Studies* and writes regularly for public outlets on policing, migration, and the politics of security

CONTESTED FREEDOM: RACE, SECURITY, AND THE CARCERAL BORDER

Barakat, Nadine

University of Edinburgh

RECONFIGURING THE MAP: BLACK WOMEN'S NARRATIVES AND THE GEOGRAPHY OF FREEDOM-SEEKING

Escaping enslavement, or 'freedom seeking' took many forms in the pre-Civil War Union from truancy and 'marronnage' to travelling to States where one is 'free' by law, or can pass as such. The 'Fugitive Slave Law' of 1850 fundamentally altered this geography of freedom, unmooring the freedom line from static state borders and setting it in perpetual motion. While historical records often configure the resulting map across the coordinates of the fixed networks, heroes, and records of the Underground Railroad, this paper uses a Black geographic lens to challenge the predominant two-dimensional approach to mapping freedom seeking. Drawing on *The Bondwoman's Narrative* (1853-1861), Jane Johnson's 1855 speech in court, and the narratives of Ona Judge's escape from the Washingtons, this paper intervenes in the discussion by tracing a reconfiguration of the borders of freedom as ones that are in perpetual movement. It presents freedom seeking as a movement that cannot be mapped within the confines of static and two-dimensional coordinates such as safe houses or fixed points of freedom, demanding instead a dynamised map that transcends policy borders and considers perpetual movement. In conversation with the narratives and records of more established figures such as Harriet Tubman and Harriet Jacobs, a Black geographic study of the selected texts traces a plane that is built on perpetual movement, resulting in a four-dimensional map. While the dominant narratives around freedom seeking center around the different understandings of the Underground Railroad, its known heroes and challenges, and on questioning its position as 'under'- or 'over' -ground, this paper shows how the movement primarily *transformed* ground into a dynamised geographic plane which enabled physical movement to catalyse political movement. With a step back from the Underground Railroad as an established representation of freedom seeking, this paper contends that the imprint left by freedom seekers on the historical landscape must be read according to a reconfigured geographic framework and across a four-dimensional map, one anchored in the narratives which continue to transpire to this day.

Nadine is a third year PhD candidate and Tutor in English Literature at the University in Edinburgh, where she completed her MSc in American Literature in 2021. Her research is rooted in Black Geographies with a focus on the narration of 'movement' in Black American women's literature. With a focus on space-making, she is interested in exploring the ways literary texts speak to a developing Black geography in the U.S. landscape, and within historical contexts that have prompted physical and/or political movement. Nadine is a dedicated activist who seeks to bridge the gap between academia and community engagement. She has been continuously involved in local activist circles since her undergraduate studies and her longstanding commitment to intersectional resistance has since imbued her academic research with a purpose to reach beyond the institution.

VISIONS OF BLACK FREEDOM: BORDERS, ART, AND PRISON WALLS

Battistini, Matteo

Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna

FREEDOM DOES NOT EXIST: THE STRUGGLE FOR HAPPINESS IN THE AMERICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT OF CLR JAMES

By reading *American Civilization* (1950) and other writings of his American moment (1938- 1953), the paper reconstructs how CLR James investigated what freedom was in the postWWII United States to highlight the contradiction lying at the heart of American freedom. James argued that the "official opinions of a very substantial organized body revolved around the thesis of the freedom of the individual [...] in business enterprises but elsewhere also." This public opinion "could not be abstracted from the nation." In his opinion, the "huge power" of the "American ideal of freedom" was continuously "reinforced [...] by those who rule and instruct the United States and the people of the world about the United States." Freedom was the "axis of the United States propaganda in the Cold War" and was linked to the "growth of productive power of the United States" in the world market. At the same time, capitalism had "created so huge an apparatus of economic, social and political institutions that the freedom of the individual except in the most abstract terms does not exist."

According to James, what emerged was the opposition between freedom and security that would rise ahead of the intellectual and political debate over a decade later. More importantly, by introducing a word of Americanism foreign to Marxism into his Marxian thought, James 5 made freedom the keyword of the critique of "American civilization" to show how the "struggle for happiness" emerged in the everyday practices of workers, blacks and women against the working and social – racial and sexual – conditions imposed by their integration into the welfare state and the administrative program of security organized around the Fordist factory: "The great body of the American people have sufficiently demonstrated [...] that this program is not at all their idea of individual freedom [...] What exactly is individual freedom, freedom of association in the world of today, that they do not know. But their rejection of the present perspective is [...] sufficiently established. [...] the main social issue is that the population has travelled far to recognize that freedom has been lost" (*American Civilization*, 107).

Matteo Battistini is associate professor in the Department of Political and Social Sciences at the University of Bologna. He teaches American History and International History of the United States. He is author of *Middle Class: An Intellectual History through Social Sciences: An American Fetish from its Origins to Globalization* (Leiden: Brill, 2022) and co-author of *Global Marx: History and Critique of the Social Movement in the World Market* (Leiden: BRILL, 2022).

ALTERNATIVE FUTURES: VISIONS OF FREEDOM IN THE AMERICAN LEFT

Batzke, Ina

Universität Augsburg

REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOMS? LITERARY ENGAGEMENTS WITH ABORTION IN EARLY 20TH-CENTURY US LITERATURE

This paper explores the contested notion of reproductive freedom in early twentieth-century U.S. literature, focusing on the ways literary texts negotiated abortion as both a social reality and a cultural taboo. While the Declaration of Independence enshrined "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" as unalienable rights, women's autonomy over their own bodies remained profoundly curtailed well into the twentieth century. Abortion, criminalized in most states by the late nineteenth century, became a site where questions of individual liberty, state authority, class, gender, and morality collided. Literary representations of abortion between 1900 and the interwar years reflect these tensions, revealing how women's reproductive choices – or their absence – were embedded within broader struggles over the meaning of American freedom.

Drawing on Edith Wharton's *Summer* (1917) and Meridel LeSueur's *The Girl* (1978 [1939]), this paper examines how abortion figured as a narrative problem, a social critique, or a silent absence. While the works expose both the silencing of women's reproductive experiences and the imaginative strategies writers used to render visible what was legally and morally unspeakable, abortion also appears as a prism through which anxieties about class decline, eugenics, and racialized motherhood were refracted, while at the same time providing female characters a means – however fraught – to assert agency against social and familial constraints.

By situating these literary engagements with abortion within the discourses of freedom and unfreedom, the paper argues that reproductive autonomy represents a crucial but often neglected dimension of American liberty. Early twentieth-century texts not only register the lack of reproductive freedoms but also anticipate later feminist claims that bodily autonomy is foundational to women's citizenship. In foregrounding this literary archive, the paper contributes to ongoing debates about the limits and contradictions of U.S. freedom, showing how struggles over abortion reveal the gendered exclusions underlying national myths of liberty.

Ina Batzke joined the University of Augsburg, Germany, as a post-doctoral researcher and lecturer in American Studies in 2018, after she received her PhD from the University of Münster. She is author of the monograph "Undocumented Migrants in the United States. Life Narratives and Self-representations" (Routledge 2019), which summarizes her research interests in life writing and critical refugee studies. She is also co-editor of the volumes "Exploring the Fantastic: Genre, Ideology, and Popular Culture" (transcript, 2018), "Storied Citizenship: Imagining the Citizen in American Literature" (Amerikastudien 65.4, 2020), and "Life Writing in the Posthuman Anthropocene" (Palgrave, 2021). In her most recent project titled "Reproductive Citizenship in 20th and 21st Century US-American Fiction," she explores the "silencing" and representations of the pregnant body in US fiction and life writing.

VISIONS OF REPRODUCTIVE (UN)FREEDOM

Bavaro, Vincenzo

Università di Napoli "L'Orientale"

ANGELA DAVIS AND THE RADICAL IMAGINATION OF ABOLITION: READING ARE PRISONS OBSOLETE? WITHIN CALIFORNIA'S CARCERAL LANDSCAPE

This paper explores Angela Davis's *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (2003) as a landmark text in the critical discourse on California's carceral system and as a foundational work in the transnational articulation of prison abolitionism. Written in response to the exponential growth of California's prison infrastructure in the late twentieth century, Davis's work situates the institution of the prison within a continuum of racial, gendered, and economic subjugation that extends from slavery to mass incarceration. Her critique exposes how the Californian carceral state embodies the "prison-industrial complex." The paper argues that *Are Prisons Obsolete?* functions both as theoretical intervention and as political pedagogy: Davis's rhetorical strategy, in fact, transforms historical narration into an act of resistance, mobilizing collective memory to dismantle the ideological "common sense" of incarceration. Ultimately, the analysis shows how Davis redefines the notion of freedom as a collective and unfinished process—one that demands not only the dismantling of prisons but also the reimagining of social relations beyond carceral logic. Through Davis's text, California becomes both a site of oppression and a laboratory for envisioning emancipatory futures.

Vincenzo Bavaro is Associate Professor of U.S. Literature at the University of Naples "L'Orientale." His research focuses on U.S. ethnic minority literatures, LGBTQ+ cultures, urban studies, and performance theory, with particular attention to how identity and space intersect in American cultural production. He is the author of *Una storia etnica? Capitale culturale e performance etnica nella letteratura degli Stati Uniti* and *La città contesa. Sessualità e appropriazione dello spazio urbano a New York negli anni Settanta*. His essays have appeared in major Italian and international journals and edited volumes on American studies and queer theory. Bavaro has served on the steering committee of the Italian Association for North American Studies (AISNA) and member of the executive council of the International American Studies Association (IASA). He recently coordinated the L'Orientale research unit for the national PRIN project *Literary California 1884–2022: Spaces of Exception, Spaces of Disaster*.

Becce, Nicolangelo

Università Roma Tre

RHETORICAL STRATEGIES IN JAPANESE AMERICAN INCARCERATION STORIES: THE CASE OF MANZANAR

Ever since the publication of Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston's biographical volume *Farewell to Manzanar* (1973), various works set in the Owens Valley have depicted the Manzanar camp and the plight of Japanese American incarcerees during World War II. More recent books, such as Sophie Littlefield's Garden of Stones (2013) and Marianne Wiggins' *Properties of Thirst* (2022), offer alternative perspectives on Japanese American incarceration. Littlefield's novel describes a gang of abusive members of the War Relocation Authority (WRA) who brutally mistreat the detainees. In contrast, Wiggins' novel portrays the head of the WRA at the Manzanar camp as genuinely involved in improving the lives of the incarcerees, to the point that, in the fictional world of the story, the Manzanar riots of December 1942 never take place. As the paper will try to demonstrate, both creative works share a political alignment in denouncing the injustices endured by the Japanese Americans at Manzanar, but they employ distinct rhetorical choices. By using the Aristotelian rhetorical triangle, it can be argued that Littlefield's novel primarily appeals to pathos, highlighting the violence and abuse faced by the Japanese American characters in the story. Wiggins' novel, on the other hand, appeals to logos, emphasizing the challenges faced by the WRA in providing decent living conditions despite limited time and financial resources to build a small city for over 15,000 people. The significance of these rhetorical strategies becomes evident when comparing both Littlefield and Wiggins' novels to Houston and Houston's work, which, in turn, offers a representation of the Japanese American incarceration that is rhetorically built as an appeal to ethos.

Nicolangelo Becce is Associate Professor of American Literature at Roma Tre University (Italy). He earned his Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from the University of Naples "L'Orientale" (Italy) in 2010, and from 2014 to 2019 he worked as an Assistant Professor of English Language and American Literature at the University of Fukui (Japan). He has published essays on American literature, corpus linguistics, the CEFR, American TV series and graphic novels, and is the author of two books, *Apparizioni spiritiche e fantasmi letterari. Il Modern Spiritualism e lo sviluppo della ghost story* ("Spiritualistic Apparitions and Literary Ghosts. Modern Spiritualism and the Development of the Ghost Story", 2016) and *Positive Outcomes. A CorpusBased Analysis of a Placement Interview System for EFL Students in Higher Education* (2019). He is currently focusing on Japanese American literature and the literary and media representations of the Japanese American incarceration experience. A new monograph on this subject is set to be published in 2026.

Beneš, Jan

Ostravská univerzita

ARTICULATIONS OF BLACK AGRARIAN FREEDOM IN LALITA TADEMY'S CANE RIVER, MARGARET WILKERSON'S THE REVISIONERS, AND NATALIE BASZILE'S QUEEN SUGAR

Black agrarian spaces, argues Priscilla McCutcheon, are those where "Black farmers seek to work within the constraints of nature to sustain Black life and create Black futures of liberation." As central points in the framework of Black ecologies, these spaces highlight what Ashanté Reese describes as "geographies of self-reliance," which "call attention to how spatial, historical, and racial dynamics intersect and insist that Black folks navigate inequities with a creativity that reflects a reliance on self and community." This creativity and self-reliance are then reflected in the historical ideology and ethos of Black agrarianism, which is defined by the freedom of SELF-DETERMINATION, to follow agrarian knowledge and practices, to build communities, and becoming free of the stigma of and alienation from working the land—all in the face of decades of racial discrimination and dispossession in a hostile rural southern landscape.

However, although Black farming, as Jay Fiskio posits, represents "both a space of imagining a different world and a real place to grow freedom," few African American novels have addressed and depicted the lives, practices, and experiences of Black farmers or their visions and articulations of freedom through creating and stewarding Black agrarian spaces. Adopting the wider Black geographies framework, this contribution therefore analyses the ways in which three of these rare texts, Lalita Tademy's *Cane River* (2001), Margaret Wilkerson's *The Revisioners* (2019), and Natalie Baszile's *Queen Sugar* (2013) – set on Louisiana plantations-turned-Black-owned farms – dramatize, celebrate, and imagine the journeys of Black women farmers to owning and stewarding land to provide liberated, safe, and self-reliant agrarian spaces for their communities in the Deep South. In telling stories of Black women farmers' repeated resistance to dispossession and displacement alongside constant attempts at place-making and freedom, the novels attend to intersections between race, gender, and the environment inherent to the fraught history of Black agriculture. The novels' characters also embody what J.T. Roane and Justin Hosbey describe as "alternative worldviews," characteristic of the ethos of Black agrarianism, as the novels' communities in their pursuit of freedom foster interracial economic cooperation, environmentally just land stewardship, and equitable models of labor management. They seek to recreate Southern agrarian spaces burdened with histories of slavery, racial capitalism, and oppression into material representations of liberation, freedom, and social and environmental justice.

Jan Beneš is assistant professor at the University of Ostrava in the Czech Republic. His research interests revolve around African American literature, culture, and history and range from Black aviation and aviators of the Harlem Renaissance era to Black farming and environmental literature. He co-edited the collected monograph *Environmental Justice in Ethnic American Literature* (Lexington Books, 2024) and contributed a chapter on Zora Neale Hurston's real-life and fictional trials for the upcoming *Zora Neale Hurston in Context* (CUP, 2026).

Berberick, Stevie

Washington & Jefferson College

STRANGE PLAYMATES: CHILDREN'S CARTOONS, MTV, AND SUBCULTURAL SELF-EXPRESSION AT THE MALL

This presentation interrogates MTV's influence on the youth of the 1980's and 1990's, particularly regarding consumption as a practice of identity expression. Ultimately, this research considers the strange relations between subcultural ethos, consumption culture, and capital incorporation of cultures that purport to resist the status quo. MTV aired on cable television in 1981 and quickly became a global phenomenon amongst the youth – so much so that Generation X became known as the "MTV generation." MTV's popularity was so immense that Hasbro launched the *Jem and the Holograms* cartoon/toy line (1985). Mattel followed with *Barbie and the Rockers* (1986). MTV-inspired cartoons that advertised to boys, such as *Kidd Video* (1984) and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1987), also arose. These programs were a driving force in children's consumption and self-expression; cartoon-inspired merchandise such as clothing, lunchboxes, action figures, bedding, and posters appeared on the market. Children learned early that identity can be communicated through licensed merchandise. Then, the children who watched MTV-inspired cartoons grew into teens who took their consumption practices to the mall for subcultural, music video inspired clothing and goods. Hot Topic, a chain that first specialized in rock, goth, and punk styles, opened its first store in California in 1989. Founder Orv Madden said in a 1997 interview that he "saw an underserved market--music-related t-shirts and apparel . . . and I decided to pursue it." Madden was not misguided – by 1996 the 60 Hot Topic locations around the USA netted $44 million dollars in sales. Similarly, some large department stores saw a boon through offering "preppy" styles turned streetwear as inspired by hip-hop videos, particularly through brands such as Tommy Hilfiger and Ralph Lauren. By the mid-nineties teenagers were solidified as a reliable demographic to sell to, and their practices of consumption were informed by the deregulation of children's programming over a decade prior. Indeed, an overarching message, regardless of genre, guided MTV-inspired changes in fashion, play, and entertainment: you are free to be whoever you want to be, so long as you can pay to play (and find a ride to the mall on Friday night).

Stevie N. Berberick (they/them), Ph.D. (associate professor of communication arts, Washington & Jefferson College) is a first-generation teacher-scholar who researches subaltern media and cultures. Berberick authored *Reframing Sex: Unlearning the Gender Binary with Transmasculine YouTube Vloggers* (Lexington Books, 2020). They are also published in *Journal of Media Critiques*, *International Journal of Communication*, and *triple: communication, capitalism, and critique* (among others). In addition to writing, Stevie also dabbles with ethnographic photography and video. They also coordinate and lead their campus's LGBTQIA+ inclusivity training program. Stevie holds a PhD from the Pennsylvania State University.

Bercuci-Murariu, Loredana

Universitatea de Vest din Timișoara

"A WONDERLAND": THE REPRESENTATION OF THE USSR IN THE ALICE CHILDRESS PAPERS

As early as the 1930s, the Soviet Union was often perceived as a space of autocracy, while the US represented the empire of freedom. In the context of the Great Depression and the inter-racial tensions before and during the Civil Rights Movement, many African American intellectuals, however, expressed their admiration for the Soviet Union. The latter was seen as a space of equality and, paradoxically, freedom, where racism did not exist. Joy Gleason Carew calls this mirage "the Soviet promise" (4), a promise that strengthened the USSR's influence in Africa and later attracted black students and professionals to countries behind the Iron Curtain. African American writers and artists like Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Paul Robeson, and Alice Childress visited the U.S.S.R. to experience what they perceived as a society free of class, race and gender discrimination. Some of them later changed their perception of Russia, while others continued to be influenced by their visit.

Alice Childress traveled to the USSR in 1971 and remained a supporter of the reality she experienced there. Known primarily as a playwright documenting the experiences of African American working class women, in plays like *Florence* (1949) or *Wedding Band* (1966), Childress was a radical feminist in the Harlem left. Never overtly associated with the CPUSA, she was nonetheless under surveillance by the FBI due to her association with other organizations, such as *Freedom*, *Masses & Mainstream*, Club Baron, the Jefferson School of Social Science, the American Negro Theatre, the Committee for the Negro in the Arts. Childress attempted to distance herself from radical politics in some of her essays, but her trip to the USSR and her writing about it suggest otherwise.

This paper analyzes the representation of the Soviet Union as a haven of equality and freedom in the archival materials from the Alice Childress collection Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, including letters to George B. Murphy, essays, her travel diary, articles from *The Washington Afro-American*, an interview with Slava Tynes, the description of a film project that was to be produced in the USSR, and a travel brochure printed in the USSR and aimed at American visitors. These archival materials have never been explored in depth, to my knowledge. Their analysis will add to our incomplete portrait of Childress. I also aim to show that Soviet Russia curated a specific type of image of itself to target African American visitors.

Loredana Bercuci is assistant professor in the Department of Modern Languages at West University of Timișoara, Romania, where she teaches courses in American Cultural Studies and academic writing. She holds a PhD in American Studies, with a focus on trauma and transmedia storytelling. In 2016-2017, she conducted research at Empire State College, State University of New York as a Fulbright scholar. Her research interests include trauma studies, adaptation studies, American popular culture, and teaching academic writing. Her more recent publications include: "The Remaking of the Radical in the Harlem Renaissance: Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem*" (*Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* 84, 2022, 31-43), "(Re)drawing the line: Deficit and empowerment in articles on writing research from Central and Eastern Europe" (in *Language and the Knowledge Economy*, Routledge, 2025) and *Trauma and the Mediated Self: Contemporary Life Writing Across Media* (Bloomsbury, 2024).

THE REVOLUTION OF 1917 AND AMERICAN FREEDOM

Bettamin, Miriam

Università di Torino

ACCOUNTABLE TO WHOM? FAILED ATTEMPTS TO REFORM THE FEDERAL RESERVE IN THE EARLY 1980S

Central bank independence recently made headlines in the United States as the Supreme Court blocked President Trump's attempt to fire Federal Reserve Governor Lisa Cook. This was not the first dig at the Federal Reserve System (Fed) made by the current Administration; however, it recalled a struggle between executive government and central bank that the country has witnessed in the past. Looking back at Trump's most relevant term of comparison, Ronald Reagan, this paper focuses on the failed attempts to reform the Fed during the early 1980s and on the balance between accountability and freedom of the central bank when handling monetary policy.

At the end of the 1970s the Federal Reserve, guided by its new Chairman Paul Volcker, adopted a restrictive monetary policy in the hopes of solving the double-digit inflation rate that was plaguing the country. As the economy spiraled into a predictable recession, criticism towards the Fed started coming in from both Congress and the Administration of President Reagan. The two branches of government both exercised some authority on the central bank; however still, with the rise in the unemployment rate, the degree of accountability of the central bank started to appear insufficient. As a result, more than twenty congressional bills were proposed in the early 80s to restructure the central bank and add constraints to its perceived unchecked freedom. Surprisingly, none of them came to fruition, encountering at best a neutral stance from the government.

Offering a closer examination of the primary sources of the Reagan Administration, this paper examines the dynamic between the Department of the Treasury and the Federal Reserve in the early 80s. Touching on the theme of independence, accountability and freedom of central banks, it recounts how the attempt of the Treasury to gain more decisional power on monetary policy hindered a collaborative effort with Congress to reform the Fed, thus allowing more room to the central bank to define its agenda and objectives without interference from other institutions.

Miriam Bettamin is a second-year PhD Candidate in the Global History of Empires Program at the University of Turin. She also holds a Master's degree in Comparative International Relations from Ca' Foscari University of Venice, where she first developed her interest for contemporary US history and the global economy.

Her current research project, titled "*Relationship Status Unknown: a deep dive on the interactions between the Reagan Administration, Volcker's Federal Reserve and how they shaped the 1980s*" aims at investigating the balance of power between monetary policy actors in a pivotal decade for the world economy.

BOUND TO BE FREE? MARKET FREEDOM AND POLITICAL CONSTRAINTS AFTER THE NEOLIBERAL TURN

Bon, Cristina

Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore

THE CONTROVERSIAL IDEA OF DEMOCRATIC ADMINISTRATION IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN HISTORY

The expression *democratic administration* refers to the idea of an administrative system based more on elected officials than on a professional career bureaucracy. This was precisely the nature of administration in the United States, at least until the Pendleton Act of 1883 and the Reform Movement of the late nineteenth century introduced the principle of merit-based competition into the American administrative system. Yet, as Woodrow Wilson stated in *The Study of Administration* (1887), in the last quarter of the nineteenth century American citizens would still have been willing to trade a higher level of administrative competence for even a small degree of "self-government."

Within a political system traditionally dominated by a white male elite to the exclusion of various minorities, it is clear that this idea of administrative democracy—one of the pillars of the United States' model of governance during the Age of Revolutions—ultimately became one of the most undemocratic features of the American state. In this respect, the Southern states represent one of the clearest examples, both before and after the Civil War.

This paper analyzes the controversial aspects of American administrative democracy in the Southern states, with particular reference to politics in Georgia during the Gilded Age, when Redeemer Democrats, former Confederates, and ex-slaveholders returned to power, promoting the same exclusionary conception of democracy that had characterized antebellum politics. In particular, the paper focuses on Georgia's contested gubernatorial election of 1880, which reveals both the political strategies adopted by Georgian agrarian elites to reassert full control over the state and their attempts to compete with Republicans and Independents in appealing to African American voters. The electoral debate of 1880 therefore provides valuable insight into the competing visions of freedom and unfreedom promoted by Georgia's democratic agrarian elites during the Gilded Age.

Cristina Bon is Associate Professor of History of Political Institutions in the Faculty of Political Science at Catholic University of Milan, where she teaches History of Political Institutions and History of Contemporary Administrative Systems. She is interested in the institutional and constitutional history of the United States, with specific regard to the Nineteenth Century state and nation-building processes, as well as the presidential powers and prerogatives. Her publications include the following titles: *Alla ricerca di una più perfetta Unione. Convenzioni e Costituzioni negli Stati Uniti della prima metà dell'800* (*In Search of a More Perfect Union. Conventions and Constitutions in the United States of the First Half of the 19th Century*) (FrancoAngeli, 2012); *The controversial concept of emancipation in the nation-building process: the American Civil War and Italian Unification*, in L. Buonomo, E. Vezzosi (edited by), *Discourses of Emancipation and the Boundaries of Freedom*, EUT, 2015, pp. 205-217.

VISIONS OF (UN)FREEDOM: AFRICANS, AMERICANS, AND THE FATE OF DEMOCRACY FROM THE AGE OF REVOLUTIONS TO THE GILDED AGE

Bonnevier, Jenny

Örebro universitet

FREE TO BE RESPONSE-ABLE: TERRAFORMING A BETTER LIFE IN ANNALEE NEWITZ'S THE TERRAFORMERS

Set in a distant future on a faraway planet called Sask-E, Annalee Newitz's *The Terraformers* (2023) follows three generations of inhabitants through process of terraforming and settlement over the course of 1600 years. Sask-E is owned by a private corporation, but the planetside work of terraforming is conducted by an organization called the Environmental Rescue Team (ERT). This organization follows principles modelled on indigenous cosmologies that recognize land, rivers, non-human animals, plants, and so on as part of interconnected webs of life and its primary aim is the maintenance of balance in both ecologies and social life. However, the principles and structures of ERT have become interlaced with corporate principles of profit and hierarchy and as these conflicts intensify, the novel addresses complex questions of what freedom means, especially in relation to social and ecological response-ability.

Response-ability, a term used by feminist theorists Karen Barad and Donna Haraway among others, help us see responsibility as agential and relational, as an ability to respond well to the needs of both self and other. Often used in the context of "staying with the trouble" (Haraway 2016) as an ethical mode of being in the Anthropocene, response-ability involves the recognition of human life as necessarily entangled with the more-than-human world. In the future world of *The Terraformers*, this more-than-human world is dizzyingly diverse. The human – non-human dichotomy has been made obsolete through a proliferation of humanity in the form of *homo diversus*, a malleable and plural species, as well as by both robots and intelligent, speaking nonhuman animals. Through these figures, the novel frames freedom as a biopolitical issue, while simultaneously situating it within a discussion of structures of governance, where direct democracies clash with corporate hierarchies. Drawing on both a feminist new materialist approach and indigenous studies scholarship, this paper aims to explore the relationship between the biopolitical questions of what bodies are (deemed) free and response-able and the socio-political questions of what social structures enable response-able freedom.

Jenny Bonnevier is Associate Professor of English at Örebro University, Sweden. She is also the four term former president of the Swedish Association for American Studies and the current President of the Nordic association for American Studies. Her main research focus is on contemporary American literature and culture, in particular speculative fiction and narratives that imagine more just and sustainable futures. Together with Berit Åström, she edited the anthology *Kinship in the fiction of* N.K. *Jemisin: Relations of Power and Resistance* (2023). They are currently working on a project exploring representations of AI and kinship in popular culture. A pilot study, entitled "Selfless Servers, Weapons in Waiting: Androids Parenting Human Children in *Raised by Wolves* and *I Am Mother*," is forthcoming in *The Palgrave Handbook on Parenthood in Popular Culture* in October 2025.

FUTURE FREEDOMS IN SCIENCE FICTION

Bonsanti, Brando Francesco

Università Roma Tre

AN EXPLOITED LAND: ECOCRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON DENISE GIARDINA'S STORMING HEAVEN AND THE UNQUIET EARTH

This paper aims to analyze the novels *Storming Heaven* (1987) and *The Unquiet Earth* (1992), by Italian American and Appalachian writer Denise Giardina, considering them significant examples of ethical literature that reveal the structural nexus — crucial to the development of American capitalism — between economic growth, labor exploitation, and environmental devastation.
In particular, it focuses on two different notions of freedom, often in sharp contrast with one another and representative of alternative ideas of progress: the absolute economic freedom of expanding capital to accumulate unlimited human and natural resources, and the freedom of every human being to fulfill their own needs without being exploited.
To explore this tension, the paper reads these works through an ecocritical lens, drawing on the theoretical tools of eco-socialism to highlight the close connection between human and environmental exploitation — that is, the problematic relationship between capitalism and the planet.
This perspective is particularly appropriate for analyzing Giardina's novels: *Storming Heaven* portrays the labor struggles that took place in West Virginia between 1912 and 1921, during which coal miners fought and were defeated by a system that expropriated them of the land they owned and forced them to work under inhumane conditions and constant surveillance. *The Unquiet Earth*, its sequel, addresses the consequences of this historical defeat and the beginning of the neoliberal era.
By narrating these social and political struggles, these novels pay close attention to the ecological effects of intensive coal extraction, highlighting its devastating impact on both the natural ecosystem and the communities living in those territories. They can thus be read as powerful critical tools that shed light on how the rise of the capitalist system has often reduced «the universal metabolism of nature (…) to a mere "free gift…to capital" to be used and abused at will» (Foster and Clark: 2020).
Furthermore, thanks to their Appalachian setting, they offer a privileged perspective: through their multivoiced narration and their choice to adopt the point of view of the colonized, they belong to those "peripheral narratives" that are essential for revealing the profound interdependence between social and ecological dynamics (Iovino: 2006).

Brando F. Bonsanti is a Ph.D candidate in North American literature at Roma Tre University. The name of his research project is "A *matter of identity: the representation of labour in Italian American Literature*" (supervisor: Professor Sabrina Vellucci), and his interests are focused on Italian American literature, workingclass literature and culture, and critical theory.
He is a member of IASA (Italian American Studies Association) and AISNA (Associazione Italiana di Studi Nord Americani).
In 2025, he published an article titled *Il «Progresso Italo-Americano» e il suo pubblico: un'analisi critica e letteraria* in Forum Italicum, a work he had presented at the international symposium "The Italian Ethnic Press in North America. Expanding Scholarship on Language, Education and Identity", held at Seton Hall University. That same year, he was awarded the Pietro "Pete" Panto Fellowship, established by the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, for his Ph.D research project.

Bordin, Elisa

Università Ca' Foscari Venezia

JACK LONDON'S THE STAR ROVER (1915): A DENUNCIATION OF THE DEATH PENALTY THROUGH TIME AND SPACE

This contribution examines the origins of the prison system in 19th-century California and the ensuing societal backlash against the establishment of the state prisons of San Quentin and Folsom , two penitentiaries that quickly earned a reputation as some of the most brutal in the United States for the punitive systems used and the inadequate living conditions for inmates (McKanna 1990; Kamiya 2023). Amidst the rising public calls for criminal justice reform, this paper analyzes Jack London's 1915 prison novel, *The Star Rover*, a book London wrote with the specific aim of advocating for comprehensive prison reform and the abolition of the inhumane practice of the straitjacket, which followed other forms of punishment enacted at San Quentin such as solitary confinement, the lash, and the shower bath. *The Star Rover* testifies to London's interest in marginalized subjects and underrepresented strata of society, as he had done, for example, in his documentation of the homeless of London in *The People of the Abyss* (1903), and adds to other voices advocating for a reformation of the Californian Prison System like Donald Lowrie, who talked about his experience in solitary confinement in his memoir *My Life in Prison* (1912), and activist Ed Morrell's account of the experience of the straitjacket (1925). Probably moved also by a brief personal experience which he recounts in *The Road* (1906), London once again focuses on the incarceration experience in *The Star Rover*, in which he explores the living and psychological conditions of inmates. Using the device of a dreamlike travel through space and time, which has made critics define *The Star Rover* as an example of science fiction, the author discusses issues of personal freedom and agency, even in extreme cases of lack of freedom such as when one is held by a straitjacket.

Elisa Bordin is Associate Professor of Anglo-American Literature. At Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy. She has taught English Language and Anglo-American Literatures at several Italian universities, including the University of Verona, the University of Padua, the University of Ferrara, and the University of Trieste. In 2025, she was qualified to serve as a Full Professor for the sector 10/L1 (English and Anglo-American Language, Literatures, and Cultures). She has participated in both national and international conferences and is a regular member of the Italian Association for North American Studies (AISNA) and the European Association for American Studies (EAAS). Her research interests include the Western genre, studies on blackness and the new African diaspora, and Californian literature. Since 2023, she has been the Principal Investigator for the PRIN project *Literary California, 1884-2022: Spaces of Exception, Spaces of Disaster*, for which she is currently researching extraction literature and the work of Italian American writer John Fante. She has three children.

Borkfelt, Sune

Aarhus Universitet

"TO MAKE MANKIND INTO SAUSAGES": HUMAN FREEDOM AND MEATY TEXTS IN THE VEGAN LENS

In his 1854 essay "Slavery in Massachusetts," Henry David Thoreau compares slavery to sausagemaking in his passionate objection to the practice of Massachusetts politicians in administrating the Fugitive Slave Act (passed by the US Congress in 1850), who he argues prioritize appeasing slave owners over human liberty. Three years earlier, Herman Melville argues in chapter 65 of *Moby Dick* that Fijian cannibals should be judged less harshly than those who nail geese to the ground for force feeding. What are we to make of such meaty imagery in the context of discussions on freedom, race, and animal use? And how may vegan readings enhance our understanding?

Taking these texts as a starting point, and drawing on later literary developments in the US that further linked the objectification of human and nonhuman animals to each other, this paper draws on vegan literary theory to approach these questions. It has been suggested that veganism encompasses a "useful ambiguity," and a certain fragmentary quality which allows it to continually resist categories and to embrace "contradictions and inconsistencies" (Quinn and Westwood 2018). Moreover, I have argued elsewhere that vegan readings retrieve "animals and insists on meat being ontologically different from objects of non-animal origin" while remaining conscious of the multiple ways in which "the objectification of animal bodies is deeply entangled with … exploitation of human bodies" (Borkfelt 2022). Holding on to and further developing these ideas, this paper applies a vegan lens to ask more specifically what happens when meat, whether as metaphor or not, is made to serve as a vehicle for discussions on human freedoms, or the lack thereof, in American texts from the prelude to the Civil War until today

Sune BORKFELT has lectured at Aarhus University, Denmark, since 2007. He is author of *Reading Slaughter: Abattoir Fictions, Space, and Empathy in Late Modernity* (Palgrave, 2022), as well as co-editor (with Matthias Stephan) of *Literary Animal Studies and the Climate Crisis* (Palgrave, 2022) and *Interrogating Boundaries of the Nonhuman: Literature, Climate Change, and Environmental Crises* (Lexington Books, 2022). His research on topics such as nonhuman otherness, the naming of nonhuman animals, postcolonial animals, vegan literary studies, critical animal pedagogies, and the ethics of animal product marketing, has appeared in a variety of journals and edited collections. He is also editor of a 2016 special issue of the journal *Otherness: Essays and Studies* focused on animal alterity.

VEGAN READINGS, US FREEDOMS: CHATTEL, CATTLE, CAPITAL

Botelho, Teresa

Universidade Nova de Lisboa

FINDING FREEDOM IN NATURE: REWRITING THE SKY AND THE SOIL IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

When the environmental historian Carolyn Finney discussed, in her 2014 study *Black Faces in White Places: Reimaginig the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors*, the absence of African American perspectives and voices in the dominant environmental narratives in the United States, she identified a silence that had been justified by an unchallenged narrative of collective detachment from nature, historically grounded on violent and discriminatory relational experiences of contact with the soil. Countering that distorted frame of interpretation, works like Dianne D. Clancy *Rooted in the Earth Reclaiming the African American Environmental Heritage* (2010) and Camille T. Dungy's *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry* (2009) have retrieved and brought to light an overlooked heritage of environmental writing that had remained unseen for too long.

In parallel to those acts of re-reading, many contemporary African American authors have been addressing their connections with nature in narratives that weave the experience of individual assertions of freedom with specific geographies of collective and historical experience. This paper will discuss this twentieth-first century momentum of African American environmental writing, focusing on two texts that reflect different approaches to the act of being with nature – *The Home Place: Memoirs of a Coloured Man's Love Affair with Nature* (2017), by the ornithologist J. Drew Lanham, which contemplates the natural world as a site of unprejudiced being with the more-than-human, and the novel *Queen Sugar*, by Natalie Baszile (2014), which can be read as echoing contemporary activist farmer movements and initiatives such as the Earthseed Land Collective or the Soul Fire Farm, that assert a return to the land as a gesture of liberation and autonomy. It will analyze these texts through the lenses of ecological justice and ecofeminism, establishing relations with the African American historical and literary archive and analyzing how they rewrite the sky and the soil as restorative sites of affirmation of free selfhoods.

Teresa Botelho is Associate Professor of American Studies at The Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, NOVA University of Lisbon (emerita), and convener of the research strand *American Intersections* at CETAPS. She is also a member of the Mapping Utopianism research strand at the same center, of the *Challenging Precarity Global Network*, of the *European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture, and the Environment* and of the *Red Iberoamericana de Humanidades Ambientales* (Ibero-American Network of Environmental Humanities). She has published extensively on African American and Arab-American literature, on theater and on utopian and dystopian. Her current interests include climate change fiction, literary representations of environmental justice and refugee literature.

REFLECTIONS FROM AMERICAN LITERATURES: CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE THREAT TO VISIONS OF FREEDOM

Bouchelaghem, Aïcha

Université de Genève

[M]Y MAMA'S FLESH IS SOFT AS PIG STOMACH": VEGAN PROJECTIONS OF FREEDOM IN JESMYN WARD'S LET US DESCEND

Jesmyn Ward's writing is familiar to the developing field of enquiry that connects Black Studies with Critical Animal Studies. Her critically acclaimed *Salvage the Bones* (2011) is featured in Joshua Bennett's landmark study, *Being Property Once Myself: Blackness and the End of Man* (2020). Bennett argues that, while chattel slavery produced an "all-too-fraught" relationship between enslaved African Americans and animals, texts like Ward's 2011 novel view "human personhood [as] rooted not in the logics of private property or dominion but in wildness, flight, brotherhood and sisterhood beyond blood" (1, 4). Likewise, Matthias Klestil argues that *Salvage the Bones* "embraces… the evocation of similarities between the suffering of African Americans and the oppression of nonhuman animals" (2025, 47).

This paper expands this scholarship by addressing the human-animal ethics and aesthetics of Ward's most recent work, *Let Us Descend* (2023), a lyrical historical novel set in the Antebellum U.S. and narrated by Annis, a young enslaved woman. Specifically, I argue that the novel's visions of freedom invite a vegan reading. Indeed, resistance to the discursive objectification and systemic abuse of animals for the purpose of consumer capitalism is intrinsic to the text. Annis's narration deploys human-animal parallels that reify the sense of similarity and interrelation of white supremacy and human dominion over other animals. In turn, she depicts animals as individuals with their own interests and suffering. At the same time, *Let Us Descend* leaves unsolved the "fraught" relationship between veganism and the struggle for racial justice. As Annis finds freedom in an abandoned Louisiana farm, the vegan cues supplied by her previous narration are initially reinforced but promptly undermined. Thus, the vegan meanings of the text are best understood as projections – ideas for a changed future – that are ultimately scrapped, or perhaps forgotten. While depictions of animals devise an abstinent human-animal ethics, the ending of the novel sheds its vegan configurations, in favor of carnivorist, individualist, and heteronormative lifeways. The novel's eventual relinquishment of a vegan ethics reflects Annis's rejection of communal life and African-heritage spirituality, as opposed to her embrace of a secularized Protestantism grounded in self-reliance.

Aïcha BOUCHELAGHEM is a Teaching and Research Assistant and a third-year doctoral candidate in American Literature at the University of Geneva (Switzerland). Her research focuses on the rhetorical functions of human-animal relations and of animality more abstractly in Antebellum African American slave narratives. Her doctoral study contends that, beyond expressing the Abolitionist idiom according to which enslaved African Americans are treated "like animals," autobiographical slave narratives acquire credibility by representing other-than human animals as more-than-human, i.e., as operating beyond "human" strength, cognition, and morality. Alongside her doctoral project, from 2022 to 2024 Aïcha researched U.S. vegan and animal welfare discourses of the long nineteenth century, as part of the UNIGE-based research project *Vegan Literary Studies: An American Textual History, 1776-1900* (PI Deborah Madsen). Her academic interests extend to the intersection of Black Studies with Human-Animal Studies or Critical Animal Studies, African American literary theory, Fat Studies, and Literary Addiction Studies.

Bourhis-Mariotti, Claire

Université Paris 8

VOIX D'ESCLAVES/VOICE(S) OF THE ENSLAVED": SLAVE NARRATIVES AS TOOLS FOR HISTORICAL RESEARCH, PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND PEDAGOGICAL INNOVATION

This paper presents a "research-creation" project—understood here as practice-based research combining critical inquiry and creative production—which I developed with undergraduate students. The project engaged with North American slave narratives as historical sources, while exploring new ways of teaching and sharing this history with other students as well as wider audiences. At the center of the project was the creation of a bilingual (French/English) exhibition, "Voix d'esclaves / Voice(s) of the Enslaved," accompanied by fictional narratives inspired by the testimonies of enslaved men and women. Written and recorded by students in collaboration with a professional scriptwriter, these audio narratives explored how storytelling might intersect with the historical archive, raising questions about representation, silences, and the circulation of memory, while experimenting with ways to make these histories resonate with contemporary audiences.The project pursued a double ambition: to foster critical engagement with the legacy of slavery and to experiment with new forms of public dissemination combining research, multilingual writing, and digital tools. It invited students to reflect on the complex interplay between fact and fiction, history and memory, past and present.

Claire Bourhis-Mariotti claire.bourhis-mariotti@univ-paris8.fr is a Full Professor of African American History and Co-Director of the TransCrit research unit at Université Paris 8 (France). Her research focuses on nineteenth-century African American history, including emigration and colonization movements, early Black organizing, the rise of Black nationalism, and Black transnationalism. Her latest book, *Wanted! A Nation! Black Americans and Haiti, 1804–1893* (UGA Press, 2023), explores Black engagement with Haiti. Her forthcoming book, *We Are American Citizens. The Colored Conventions Movement and the Long Struggle for Civil Rights* (UGA Press, spring 2026) examines antebellum Colored Conventions as collective action mobilizing free Black communities nationally and transnationally for respectability and civil rights. She also authored *Isaac Mason, une vie d'esclave* (PURH, 2021), a critical edition and translation of a postbellum slave narrative. She is actively involved in scholarly societies, serving as President of the French learned society RéDEHJA and Vice-President of the Institut des Amériques.

Boyden, Michael

Université de Fribourg-Universität Freiburg

"WE ARE GOING TO SAY THAT WE DID THIS TO OURSELVES." BIOWAR, VIRAL SOVEREIGNTY, AND PLANETARY HEALTH IN RECENT PANDEMIC FICTION

The turn of the millennium has witnessed the rise of a new apparatus of global disease surveillance, ushering in an age of platform-based pandemics where global health crises play themselves out in real-time. This paper explores how this new constellation is reflected in – and in turn propelled by – literary narrative. My working hypothesis is that recent pandemic literature throws into relief growing tensions between security, humanitarian, and ecological frameworks for pandemic preparedness.

As my case study, I have selected Lawrence Wright's *The End of October* (2020), a novel about the outbreak of a fictional influenza strain that eerily prefigured the Covid crisis. Classical literary narratives about the 1918-20 Spanish flu pandemic tended to treat disease and war as separate realities. This is the case, for instance, in Willa Cather's *One of Ours* (1922), which consigns the influenza outbreak to an intercalary section separate from the actual war narrative that drives the plot. In Wright's novel, in contrast, the fictional flu pandemic figures centrally in a broader story about geopolitical warfare involving diseases as bioweapons. At the same time, the novel interrogates such a security framework by offering alternative storylines that foreground the ecology of infectious disease in the context of anthropogenic climate change. Apart from October Island, the place where the dormant pathogen is uncovered from the melting permafrost, the novel's title might reference the end to the influenza pandemic (traditionally most virulent in the fall) as well as the collapse of ideologies such as the evangelical socialism espoused by the protagonist, an otherwise typical virus hunter figure in search of a vaccine. The paper will dissect these various meaning layers in Wright's novel in an attempt to develop a deeper understanding of the specificity of pandemic storytelling in the platform society.

Michael Boyden is a professor of American literature at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. Prior to his appointment at Fribourg, he worked as an associate professor at the University of Uppsala, and as a full professor at Radboud University Nijmegen. He did his PhD at the University of Leuven with a dissertation on the sociology of literary history. He is the author of *Climate and the Picturesque in the American Tropics* (OUP, 2022) and has a new project underway on platform-based pandemic storytelling.

FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM IN THE ANTHROPOCENE? ECOLOGY AND WARFARE IN CONTEMPORARY US CULTURE

Brady, Emily

University of Oxford

"250,000 I'S ARE HERE!": PHOTOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVES ON THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON

Within public history and memory, the March on Washington of 1963 is remembered as a high point of the Civil Rights Movement. With Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 'I Have A Dream' speech, a utopian vision of America was articulated, documented, and reproduced. Photographers, looking to capture the reality of the day, heralded its preservation with the click of hundreds of camera shutters. Many of these photographs have contributed to the construction of historical narrative surrounding this iconic day. As King called to "let freedom ring," photographers were at the forefront of crystalizing what King's "freedom" would look like. However, there has been a scholarly lack of interest in the photography of the March on Washington, and the ways in which such images inform contemporary understanding of protest culture.

Organisers conceived the March on Washington as a visual event from its planning stages, utilising the iconic National Mall and building an infrastructure that enabled photographers to inhabit a top-down view of proceedings. In so doing, they set the stage for King's domination of public memory. Whilst immediate responses in the press responded more to the peaceful nature of the event rather than King's individual role, the press's fascination with the scale and spectacle of the event allowed for King's ascension. From these early planning stages and first press responses, a neoliberal protest rhetoric was encoded; one that determined a 'correct' method of protest which prioritises charismatic male leadership and an orderly, peaceful crowd. Whilst many present museum spaces recognise and reckon with this, the desire to present audiences with an 'immersive' experience further reinforces a neoliberal, top-down perception of history. This paper, therefore, calls for a pointillist understanding of the March on Washington – one that embraces snapshot photography, reckons with the role of surveillance, and problematizes a fascination with 'authenticity.' King's vision of freedom was communicated, commemorated and contested in visual culture. As such, this paper will caution against the enshrinement of privilege and prestige within renderings and recollections of American protest – a glorification that began that hot August day in 1963.

Emily Brady is a Departmental Lecturer in American History at the University of Oxford. Her research focuses on the intersections of protest cultures and identity in the United States, with particular focus on race, gender and photography. Her forthcoming monograph *Let the World See What I See: Black Women Photographers from the Harlem Renaissance to Black Power* is under contract with the University of North Carolina Press. With previous publications in the *Journal of American Studies*, *Panorama*, *African American Review*, and multiple edited volumes, Emily further used her time as the Broadbent Junior Research Fellow (University of Oxford, 2022-2025) to organise the first international exhibition of Maria Varela's civil rights photography in April 2024. She has also served on the British Association of American Studies committee since 2021.

"WHY 1963?": REIMAGINING RIGHTS AND PROTESTS IN A WATERSHED YEAR

Brígido-Corachán, Anna M.

Universitat de València

POETS, WARRIORS, MOTHERS: FLUID BECOMING, EMBODIED SOVEREIGNTY, AND INTERGENERATIONAL HEALING IN CONTEMPORARY NATIVE AMERICAN POETRY

Contemporary Native American poets often represent the experience of motherhood as a central element in the interconnected web of relations grounding identity to family, community, and the land. The poetry of Joy Harjo, Linda Hogan, Luci Tapahonso, and Layli Long Soldier, among others, also provides strategic guidelines to navigate a tense biocultural space where tribal and personal memory, intergenerational trauma, gender abuse, and anti-colonial resistance intertwine. Through historical revisionism, poignant symbolism, and artistic innovation, these authors challenge neocolonial frameworks that aim to control Indigenous bodies and maternal forms of Nativity, while opening new venues of relational possibility that are rooted in creativity, af/filiation, and embodied sovereignty.

Focusing on a selection of poems penned by Joy Harjo and Linda Hogan in their recent volumes *An American Sunrise* (Joy Harjo 2019) and *A History of Kindness* (Linda Hogan 2020), this presentation will examine matrilinear repair and healing by reexamining the concepts of daughterhood, aging motherhood, and embodied sovereignty through an Indigenous-centered, care ethics lens. What lessons on freedom and in/dependence can be gathered through Harjo and Hogan's renderings of mother/daughterhood, as they restore maternal lineages, historical memory, female/land relationships, and sovereign practice? From environmental stewardship to a grounded historical materiality that vindicates cultural continuance, these poet warriors interrogate the colonial disruption of Native kinship systems by reimagining motherhood as an intimate form of relation, conflict, and co-dependence—one that problematizes traditional conceptions of freedom in the United States while simultaneously asserting Indigenous sovereign practices.

Anna M. Brígido-Corachán is Associate Professor of American Studies at the University of Valencia, Spain. Her research interests include contemporary Native American/Indigenous literature and media, critical pedagogies, and traditional environmental knowledge. She is the director of the research group LÈNA (North American Ethnic Minority Literatures in a Global Context) at the University of Valencia and has recently edited the volumes *Indigenizing the Classroom. Engaging Native American/First Nations Literature and Culture in Non-Native Settings* (2021) and *Indigenous Journeys, Transatlantic Perspectives: Relational Worlds in Contemporary Native American Literature* (2023). She has also published numerous articles in competitive journals such as *Western American Literature*, *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, *Miscelanea*, or *Annals of Arts* and in publishing houses such as Rodopi/Brill, De Gruyter, or Peter Lang.

MOTHERING LIBERTY: MATERNAL VISIONS OF FREEDOM IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Broich, Maxine

Katholische Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt

"HUMANS LEFT THEIR PLANET NOT AS ONE, BUT IN FRAGMENTS": PLANETARY EXODUS AND THE MAKING OF HODGEPODGE HUMANITY IN BECKY CHAMBERS' THE LONG WAY TO A SMALL, ANGRY PLANET.

The myth of the exodus has long been tied to the idea of freedom in U.S. culture. In contemporary North American astroculture, this narrative is reimagined as a planetary exodus, with leaving Earth presented as the "logical next step" in human history and treated as inevitable amid the escalating polycrisis (Ganser 36-37). Within this reimagining, outer space is framed as liberation, salvation, and solution, a "weirdly religious" promise (Rubenstein x) of being "free from death, free from Earth, [and] free from gravity" (5). Becky Chambers' *The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet* negotiates this trope of planetary exodus as being far from a universal project, but rather as reproducing stark inequalities.

In the novel, humanity leaves Earth in fragments: the wealthy resettle on Mars, the poor depart in the Exodan Fleet's fragile ships, and later generations spread across stations and planets in the Galactic Commons (GC). Though the Exodans are pacifists who define themselves by cooperation and peaceful coexistence, humanity's violent legacy persists. Meanwhile, Martian settlements uphold colonial privilege and exploitation, reintroducing hierarchical violence and showing that, despite pro-space promises of renewal, leaving Earth does not resolve preexisting inequalities.

Chambers' narrative thus reworks the exodus myth as a selective claim to legitimacy. In the U.S., the exodus was adapted into civil religion and partially secularized to serve nation-building, especially through Pilgrim and Puritan framings of America as a Promised Land (Paul 153, 160). This rhetoric "served to justify and legitimate the displacement and destruction of other peoples," making salvation and liberation selective privileges (146). Chambers makes these selective, non-egalitarian dimensions visible in the GC, where mobility and belonging hinge on access to ships, routes, and permits and on adaptive competence in technology, law, and interspecies sociality.

In North American astroculture, freedom therefore appears as uneven access to movement, protection, and recognition. Rather than unity, Chambers' planetary exodus engenders a 'hodgepodge humanity' whose ongoing fragmentation conflicts with the notion of space 'for all (hu)mankind,' which in practice privileges the few while claiming to represent the many. Thus, this hodgepodge emphasizes that planetary exodus and its coupled promise of freedom are non-egalitarian – a reissue of terrestrial inequalities under galactic conditions.

Maxine Broich is a PhD-candidate in American Studies at Catholic-University Eichstätt/Ingolstadt. She received her master's at Heinrich-Heine-University in Comparative Studies with the thesis titled: "'You know this of course, but in space you see it'": Orbital Politics and the Overview Effect in Samantha Harvey's *Orbital* and Duncan Jones' *Moon*". Her PhD project focuses on the co-production of planetary vision, labor, and the technosphere in North American astroculture.

"FREE FROM DEATH, FREE FROM EARTH": POST-PLANETARY FREEDOM IN THE AGE OF TECHNOCAPITALIST AUTHORITARIANISM

Brosnan, Kathleen

University of Oklahoma

MAPPING MIGRATION AND IDENTITY AMONG INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND MORMONS

As Patrick Wolfe and others have observed, settler colonial states sought land and, in turn, the dispossession and even the elimination of Indigenous peoples became the objectives of settler states. Bureaucratic mapmaking was essential to creating the settler colonial world, demonstrating the state's supposed territorial legitimacy and coherence. State-sponsored cartography was intended to manage people, nature and space and to provide visual justifications for the seizure of native homelands. In response, Native nations engaged in survivance, or political, economic, and cultural adaptations to resist colonial pressures. This paper considers two Indigenous maps that represented forms of resistance: a sixteenth-century depiction of the Aztec journey to Atzlan and the 1837 Ioway map presented to the US Indian Commission. In both, Indigenous peoples adopted a settler colonial method – mapping – but adapted it to their culture by rejecting the planimetry and including both spatial and temporal relations to assert not only their claims to land but also their history, heritage, and identity. Intriguingly, one group of white settlers, the Mormons, who participated in settler violence and the dispossession of Utah's native peoples but found themselves excluded from the dominant settler narrative in the late nineteenth century on the basis of religion, also attempted to assert their American identity by similarly inverting traditional cartographic norms. The 1899 "Route of the Mormons from Navoo to the Great Salt Lake" adopts a similar mix of spatial and temporal images.

Kathleen Brosnan is the Travis Chair of History at the University of Oklahoma; vice president of International Consortium of Environmental History; and past president of American Society for Environmental History. In addition to numerous articles, she has authored or edited seven books in western history and US and transnational environmental history, including *Mapping Nature Across the Americas* (2021) *The Greater Plains: Rethinking a Region's Environmental Histories* (2020); *City of Lake and Prairie: Chicago's Environmental History* (2020); *City Dreams, Country Schemes: Community and Identity in the American West* (2011); *Energy Capital: Global Influence, Local Impact* (2014); and *Uniting Mountain and Plain: Cities, Law and Environmental Change across the Front Range* (2004). Brosnan has received multiple grants from the NEH and NSF, among others. She is currently working on two books: an environmental history of the Napa wine industry and a transnational history of the science of viticulture.

Bryson, Christen

Université Sorbonne-Nouvelle

IN DEFENSE OF THE HOUSEWIFE: FROM FAMILY VALUES TO PARENTAL RIGHTS

During the 1970s and 1980s, voices on the Right emerged claiming to be speaking in defense of "family values." These "guardians of the family" defined the Right's position on many culture wars issues and produced several generations of single-issue voters who rallied against feminism, abortion, and LGBTQ+ rights. During the Bush and Obama presidencies, the Right's attempt to reverse liberalizing social values culminated in a strategic capture of the legal system, reaching its apotheosis when President Trump appointed three Supreme Court justices who then helped reverse nearly fifty years of legal jurisprudence in 2022 overturning *Roe v. Wade*. Gradually over this period of time, the culture wars issues seem to have coalesced. Rather than galvanizing people around single issues, social and cultural positions on culture wars issues have come to define entire swaths of the population as either conservative or liberal. Since the 1970s, conservatives have held up the hegemonic "traditional" family as an institution in need of defense. More recently, the housewife—with all her accompanying connotations of class, race, sexual orientation, and gender identity—has been mobilized as a rebuke of progressivism. A larger defense of the complimentary nature of White, heterosexual cis-gendered "traditional" women's and men's roles has been couched in the language of freedom. This paper is interested in exploring how the Right has positioned traditional, heterosexual, gender roles—assimilated with Whiteness—as sites of freedom that have come under attack. The knee-jerk response might be to see this defense as backward-looking, or a desire to return to an idealized past, but the very use of "the housewife" as a symbol of conservative liberation also hints at an imagined future. This paper proposes to trace the defense of "the housewife" and "family values" over the last fifty years to better understand the nature of conservative visions of freedom today.

Christen Bryson is an Associate Professor of American Studies in the English Department at the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle. She has studied the processes that have shaped the White, heterosexual, middle-class nuclear family of the postwar era into the traditional family. She is likewise interested in the history of feminism and antifeminism and the ways that both have acted as intellectual and cultural currents to position "the family" in American society. She sits on the board of the European Association for American Studies, representing the French Association for American Studies. Her most recent publications include coediting and contributing to *Womahoods and Equality in the United States* (Routledge, 2024) and *Pour une société meilleure?* (Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2025).

Carassai, Mauro

California State University, Northridge

PERMEABLE WALLS, EXCLUSIVE ZONES: RETHINKING DIGITAL LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

In "The Internet as Public Space," Jean Camp and Y.T. Chien outline three key characteristics of electronic spaces: simultaneity (being in multiple places at once, like at work and in a train), permeability (the erosion of spatial/organizational barriers, like in telecommuting), and exclusivity (the restriction of access within certain digital environments, like intranets). Applying these to born-digital electronic literature on the Web—particularly the *Electronic Literature Collection* series from its 2006 debut to 2022 Volume 4—reveals how ethnic communities have negotiated their representation within an exclusive digital literary subspace. While early Web navigation tools like Internet "Explorer" allowed users permeability in "visiting" both websites and digital literature simultaneously, this accessibility has obscured relevant cultural dynamics. The dominant American hyperfiction software, "Storyspace," mirrors the broader U.S. historical experience of redefining geography through exploration. Yet, engaging with nonlinear digital literature through the metaphor of "exploration" risks reactivating a textual version of Frederick Jackson Turner's idea of the American frontier as a progressive, appropriative space—ignoring more nuanced conceptions of frontiers as multicultural contact zones (Anzaldúa, Rosaldo). Additionally, digital poet John Cayley argues that terms like "new media," "cyber," and "electronic" strip digital literature of history and locatedness. A telling example is the underrepresentation of African American voices in digital literature. This mirrors historical spatial segregation, where whites left African American communities in economically declining urban centers—now replicated intellectually in literary spaces. For example, while the *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* presents Colson Whitehead as a technologically engaged Black author, the *Norton Anthology of Postmodern Fiction* includes primarily white digital hyperfiction writers like Michael Joyce and Jane Yellowlees Douglas. This division suggests a cultural dynamic in which white authors occupy the (exclusive) digital zones of literary innovation, while Black authors remain anchored in print—tasked with asserting a technological presence from a potentially impoverished cultural center. Electronic literature as "a cultural force helping to shape subjectivity in an era when networked and programmable media are catalyzing cultural, political and economic changes," (Hayles) can be seen as a site of inquiry into American spatial mythology.

Mauro Carassai is Associate Professor in the departments of Interdisciplinary Studies and Liberal Studies and English at California State University Northridge where he teaches courses in digital humanities and interdisciplinary studies. He was a Brittain Postdoctoral Fellow at Georgia Institute of Technology and a visiting Fulbright at Brown University. His research combines literary theory, philosophy of language, and digital literatures within the larger frame of American studies. His scholarly work has been published in journals such as *Culture Machine*, *LEA Almanac*, *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, *ADA – A Journal of Gender Media and Technology*, and *The Routledge Companion to Humanism and Literature*. He co-edited a double issue for *DHQ* titled "Futures of Digital Studies," and he is currently at work on two manuscripts: one on situating digital humanities within humanistic traditions and one exploring problems and perspectives in configuring an *Ordinary Digital Philosophy*.

TRANSFORMATION AND MALFORMATION OF MOVEMENT IN AMERICAN OUTDOOR SPACES

Carlsson, Mats

Stockholms universitet

FREEDOM, MEDIA, COMMUNICATION: IMAGE AND VIDEO PROVENANCE IN THE AGE OF GENERATIVE AI

he aim of this presentation is to investigate the possibilities for maintaining trust in visual media in the light of recent developments in artificial intelligence (AI). While questions of deception and trickery have been a mainstay in discussions about digital media since its inception, the explosion of synthetic images and video in the wake of massive investments in generative AI has accentuated the problems of managing online veracity—not only for the accurate dissemination of visual information, but also for the preservation of trust in democratic institutions.

Against the current background of increasing societal polarization and "post-truth" politics in the United States the goal of the proposed presentation is to investigate the techno-institutional frameworks needed to procure a socially cohesive level of trust in American news media.

The rise of generative AI has introduced entirely new capabilities for digital content creation, automation, and workflow optimization. Its ability to generate text, images, video, and code has profoundly altered the way nation states and businesses approach the digital economy. Administering clear records of origin and ensuring transparency in AI-assisted creation, therefore, will be crucial for maintaining consumer trust and enforcing ownership rights in the digital sphere. Hence, the focus of the proposed research is not AI technologies per se but rather the burgeoning media authentication standards emerging in parallel with these developments. My aim is to present the socio-technological infrastructure behind these standards from a media theoretical perspective to excavate how they conform with culturally dominant Anglo-American notions of provenance and ownership rights while at the same time laying bare how the production of such notions of authenticity and freedom is always already technologically mediated. The free exchange of visual information, thus, relies on the paradoxical unfreedom of an institutionalized ability to trace the source and evolution of a piece of content, assisting the end-user in distinguishing nefarious or misleading AI-generated material from authentic media by ensuring the credibility of its origin as well as disclosing any potential edits on its way via the establishment of immutable online registers.

Mats Carlsson is a recently graduated PhD from the department of Media Studies at Stockholm University. His interests include media and monetary theory, philosophy of consciousness, and ontology. In his PhD dissertation he focused on the social relation of images and money and how they shape our perception of economic reality.

MEDIATED FREEDOMS

Castelao-Gómez, Isabel

Universidad de Educación a Distancia

FREEING MOTHERHOOD AND THE FREEDOM OF MOTHERING IN BOHEMIA: DIANE DI PRIMA AND MINA LOY'S MATERNAL PRACTICES AND POETICS

Diane di Prima was a Beat generation poet in postwar United States that lived and wrote in the New York new bohemia in the 50s and early 60s. Mina Loy was a British American avant-garde poet and artist that belonged to the experimental artistic groups in Europe and New York in the first decades of the 20th century. Although separate in time, they participated in revolutionary countercultures, whose women revised the freedoms and limitations of their position in their milieu and normative society, above all regarding sexuality and motherhood. The purpose of this paper will be to analyze the common characteristics of Loy and Di Pirma's maternal practices and poetics: free love and sexuality, maternal desire, children from different partners, conflict between vocation and mothering, abortion as a no-child poetics, and above all the projection of the freedom to experience motherhood on gender mobility and the embodiment of space in their lives and works. I argue that their practices as mothers and their maternal poetics represented a proto-feminist political stance by experiencing in praxis unprecedented visions of what a mother should be due to their understanding and commitment to female bohemianism. Not only did they confront the institution of motherhood in two historical periods when, curiously, the social pressure on sexist stereotypes in the normative family were politically and culturally intensified, but they also undermined the patriarchal views within their own avant-garde artistic circles (Beats and Moderns). They did that through distance and movement, since one left and the other wandered: Loy dared to leave her mothering responsibilities to become an artist in community, and Di Prima carried her five children across the country writing along, both to evolve as writers and live coherently with their vocation and selves. This paper's claims will be based on the analysis of the matrifocal narratives and aesthetics of specific poems throughout their careers and some vital moments in their biographies imbricating life and work. Thus, connecting these, otherwise, unrelated writers from distant historical periods from the point of view of how they freely chose to be motherpoets.

Dr. Castelao-Gómez is a Lecturer of literature in English at UNED. She has written articles on Anglo-American women poets and feminist literary criticism. She is co-author of *Female Beatness: mujeres, género y poesía en la Generación Beat*, granted the Best Research Book Award of SAAS in 2021. She has translated and studied the experimental modernist poet Mina Loy (*Breve Baedeker Lunar*. 2ª ed., Torremozas, 2021) and has published the study and translation of unedited Beat poet, Elise Cowen, *Dedajme salir, dejadme entrar* (*Let me out, let me in*). She is the author of two books of poetry, *Cartas desde Tebas* (Torremozas, 2010) y *Abril* (*and the cruellest months*) (Ya lo Dijo Casimiro Parker, 2022), and has been anthologized in *Hey, Jack. La huella Beat en la literatura española* (Garvm Ed. 2022).

MOTHERING LIBERTY: MATERNAL VISIONS OF FREEDOM IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Chang, Rose

Carnegie Mellon University

THE (IN)VISIBLE AND FRAGMENTED ASIAN/AMERICAN IN CHAN IS MISSING AND EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE ALL AT ONCE

Asian/American identity, much like Asian/American film, is not bound to any one particular definition. Rather, the film form emphasizes the Asian diaspora's constant state of renewal and transformation, recognizing the Asian/American identity's ability to perpetually change, grow, and ultimately reject a singular, homogenous, static identity formation (Hall 244). To state this differently, Asian/Americans have the freedom to go beyond any one construction of who they are and who they should be by claiming and presenting their inherent complexities.

This is evinced in Asian/American film as they work to produce a rich and multifaceted representation of Asian/American identity and its formations through its attention to the constant (re)constructions, possibilities, and perspectives within and of the Asian diaspora. To highlight this within Asian/American film, this paper contrasts earlier depictions of and inspired by Asian/American communities of those found in Wayne Wang's *Chan is Missing* (1982) to Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert's *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2022) to illuminate how the Asian/American film functions to portray the Asian/American identity as always already multiple, complex, and infinite. While *Chan is Missing* highlights the ways in which the collection of fragments, the coalescence of thoughts and perceptions of others, work to construct the Asian/American identity and serve as a potential mode of identity formation, *Everything Everywhere All at Once* imagines the limitless possibilities of the Asian/American individual existing in every capacity in every lifetime in every time, which is most evident in the Wang family's lives in, movement through, and exploration of the multiverse. In Chan's case, he is fragmented into his contrasting, paradoxical qualities: he is a "genius" who is also "slow-witted,""a failure" but a "patriotic" man who serves others, "too Chinese" but also "an eccentric who likes mariachi music." For Evelyn, she is the repository for her multiple selves as a martial artist, a martial artist with oddly strong pinkies, a blind opera singer, a teppanyaki cook, a queer laundromat owner with hot dogs for fingers, and so many more. This raises the following questions: what are the limits of the Asian/American body, both physical and metaphorical? How is the Asian/American free or forbidden from existing in its endless potentialities? How is the Asian/American imagined and represented as fickle, elusive, and perpetually in motion in film? This paper ultimately considers how Asian/American identities in Asian/American film have the freedom to be seen, heard, and exist through all the disparate parts of the self.

Rose Chang (she/they) is a PhD candidate at Carnegie Mellon University and they examine representations of (East) Asian/American identities and communities in 20th and 21st century film and literature. In particular, they focus on the ways in which Asian/American culture, experiences, and perspectives are coded, portrayed, contested, and complicated by film through visual and narrative elements. She engages predominantly with diaspora studies, Asian American studies, film studies, and postcolonial studies. Her work will turn specifically towards Korean/American film for her dissertation as she plans to analyze how *han*, feelings of grief, loss, and acceptance, are experienced and portrayed by the Korean diaspora in the United States.

RECLAIMING FREEDOM BEYOND BORDERS: ETHNICITY, GENDER, AND ECONOMY IN ASIAN AMERICAN CULTURAL PRODUCTION

Charbonneau, Oli

University of Glasgow

OWNERSHIP AND EVASION: RECOVERING EMPIRE AT THE MOHONK MOUNTAIN HOUSE

This paper examines how the Mohonk Mountain House—a Quaker family resort in New York's Shawangunk Mountains—functioned as a site for negotiating American imperial memory and practice across the twentieth century. Drawing on an eighty-page 1968 oral history interview with Daniel and Albert Keith Smiley, grandsons of the founder, it traces how performances of selective remembering and forgetting shaped Mohonk's self-presentation as both a philanthropic enterprise and a hub for international dialogue. The Smiley brothers' reflections on land conservation and family legacy highlight a simultaneous occlusion of the resort's entanglement with settler colonization, Black dispossession, and overseas empire. Their recollections, I argue, exemplify what Anne McClintock calls "administered forgetting": a managed amnesia that repackaged imperial histories into narratives of ecological stewardship and liberal internationalism.

The paper connects two arcs in Mohonk's history. First, the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century colonial conferences convened by Albert K. Smiley, which drew military officials, missionaries, and academics to deliberate on assimilation, race management, and colonial governance in the growing US empire. Second, the mid-twentieth-century reinvention of Mohonk as a venue for Cold War educational initiatives, notably student consultations in the 1960s that gathered international students studying in the United States. These meetings echoed earlier colonial logics of elite formation and tutelage, reframed in the developmentalist idiom of modernization, reintegration, and "international citizenship." Through these overlapping episodes, Mohonk illustrates how American elites recycled imperial grammars across shifting political landscapes. Its archives—oral histories, conference proceedings, and philanthropic reports—reveal not only continuities of empire but also the strategic silences through which uncomfortable pasts were domesticated. By reading Mohonk as a space of both preservation and evasion, I foreground how elite memory practices converted colonial histories into usable traditions of liberal reform. In doing so, this paper contributes to scholarship on U.S. imperial formations, memory studies, and the genealogy of development, showing how a family resort became a microcosm of America's twentieth-century efforts to reconcile empire with narratives of benevolence and global leadership.

Oli Charbonneau is Senior Lecturer in American History at the University of Glasgow. Their research explores cultures of US empire, attending to knowledge production, violence, and labour, among other topics. They are the author of Civilizational Imperatives: Americans, Moros, and the Colonial World (Cornell University Press, 2020; Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2021) and co-editor of The Gospel of Work and Money: Industrial Education and its Global Legacies (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2026). Their articles have appeared in Diplomatic History, Modern American History, and the Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. They are the recipient of the 2022 Stuart L. Bernath Lecture Prize from the Society for Historians of American Foreign relations. Their scholarship has been supported by the Royal Society of Edinburgh, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Haverford College, and the Center for International and Regional Studies at Georgetown University in Qatar.

Chávez, Karma

University of Texas

FROM PROTEST TO PEDAGOGY: ATTACKS ON US HIGHER EDUCATION IN AN AGE OF AUTHORITARIANISM

Since the unprecedented rebellions following the police murder of George Floyd in May 2020, conservatives have seized an opportunity to dismantle higher education as we know it. Although as historians such as Nancy MacLean have shown, a takeover of US universities has long been in the game plan of far-right foundations and think tanks, conservative pundits like Christopher Rufo used the racial reckonings that emerged across the country in the summer of 2020 to wage a very successful, full-frontal assault. This assault can be characterized as emerging through several interrelated pillars: 1) state and federal attacks on "diversity, equity, and inclusion" programs and university over-compliance; 2) attacks on academic freedom, and particularly the alleged dominance of "critical race theory" in K-12 schools and universities that have led to a nationwide chilling effect on university teaching and research in the social sciences and humanities; 3) legislative dismantling of the protections of faculty tenure; 4) a similar destruction of shared faculty governance, effectively removing faculty from meaningful decision making roles and opening the door for hostile revisions of core curriculum, dismantling of departments, and the creation of new "civics" units designed for conservative indoctrination; 5) the crack down on student protestors, following the expulsions, suspensions, and even deportations of students who challenged their universities' support for the state of Israel and its genocide in Gaza, and the subsequent weaponization of antisemitism; 6) the eradication of the federal funding system for universities, including decimating direct costs, actively rejecting or discontinuing projects related to concepts like race, gender, and equity, and ultimately attempting to do away with peer-reviewed, competitive grant competitions as reflected in the Trump Administration's "Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education" released in October 2025. I argue that each of these pillars must be understood in relation to one another for professors, students, and community members to best determine how to fight back to preserve academic freedom, free speech, and ultimately, any possibility for a future of US democracy

Karma R. Chávez is Bobby and Sherri Patton Professor in the Department of Mexican American and Latina/o Studies at the University of Texas - Austin. She is author or editor of several books including, *Queer Migration Politics: Activist Rhetoric and Coalitional Possibilities* (University of Illinois Press, 2013); *Palestine on the Air* (University of Illinois Press, 2019); and *The Borders of AIDS: Race, Quarantine, and Resistance* (University of Washington Press, 2021). Chávez is president of the American Association of University Professors Chapter at UT Austin, and she is a co-founder of the campus Faculty and Staff for Justice in Palestine.

Cheseldine, Lucy

University of York

KEEPING WATCH: POETIC VISION AND FORMAL FREEDOM IN ROBERT FROST'S LONGER POEM

'They cannot look out far | They cannot look in deep. | But when was that ever a bar | To any watch they keep.' In these lines, from Robet Frost's poem "Neither Out Far Nor in Deep", '[t]he people along the sand' stand vigilant to the sea, turning 'their back on the land'. Despite their restricted vision, they keep watch over some mysterious, bland or even absent force that the poem never makes visible. The act of watching in which they partake, is not just about seeing, but about those who are seen and those who are not. This paper will explore the microsocieties of Frost's longer poems through the lens of visibility and his peculiar formulation of watchers. In doing so, it will trouble the slippery space between the lyric "I" and narrative voice, by which these societies are articulated and articulate themselves.

Frost's own feelings towards his visibility as a public figure have become a critically well-trodden path; those of 'the people' who populate his poems present equally complex dispositions which bear examination beyond the terms of poetic reference. This paper will re-examine Frost's poetics by attending to Frank O'Connor's claim for the short story: that it makes visible 'submerged populations'. The short story, as Raymond Carver has it, only offers a 'glance' at such lives, but still illuminates an otherwise unavailable insight of immediacy. Finding the middle ground in Frost's poems not only poses questions about who the construct of writing makes visible and who it does not, but about poetry's freedom to play with the qualities of prose and the limits this play shows up. Frost's construct of a New England community, which holds on to the significance of oral culture, gossip and storytelling is nevertheless haunted by inwardness. Vision, this paper will argue, is the concept that holds narrative voice and lyric subjectivity together in his poetry – not only expressing his characteristic formulations of visibility but troubling the formal ground under which we read his poems and delineate the watching, witnessing, visionary socialities within them.

Dr Lucy Cheseldine is a postdoctoral researcher in Twenty-first Century American poetry. She completed her PhD on 'Donald Hall's Poetics of Process' at the University of Leeds. Her scholarship has been published in journals including *Essays in Criticism* and is forthcoming in *The Cambridge Quarterly* and *New American Studies Journal: A Forum*. Lucy has studied and taught in Glasgow, Alabama, Dublin, Tokyo and York, and has worked on various public poetry events including The New York City Poetry Festival. She is on the editorial board for *Stand Magazine* and is a founding board member of the European Association of American Studies Poetry Network. She is currently working on a Wellcome Trust funded research project at the University of York.

ALTERNATIVE LOOKS VISION AND COUNTER-VISION IN AMERICAN POETRY

Cheyette, Bryan

University of Reading

BEYOND THE AMERICANIZATION OF TESTIMONY

The early 1990s was a period of geo-political optimism—the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Oslo accords, the Good Friday Agreement, the end of South African apartheid—which included the 1993 opening of the United States Holocaust Memoria Museum in Washington, DC. Such optimism led to Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, in their standard work *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing* (1992), to argue that they were living in an 'age of testimony'. Felman and Laub were following Elie Wiesel who famously postulated in 1977 that testimony, after the Holocaust, was a new genre: 'If the Greeks invented Tragedy, the Romans the epistle, and the Renaissance the sonnet, our generation invented a new literature, that of testimony' ('The Holocaust as Literary Inspiration', 9). One reason for such statements is that access to vital East European archives was granted at this time which created a 'boom' in Holocaust history and museum spaces of remembrance which were popularized by the global release, and critical and commercial success, of Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1994). But there was a radical difference in approach between Felman and Laub who universalized Holocau st testimony as a benchmark to prevent further evil (including slavery and colonialism) and Wiesel who particularized testimony in relation to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. My talk will show that the Americanization of Holocaust testimony in museum film culture, and bestselling survivor memoirs, has followed Wiesel's particularist narrative, reinforcing Jewish identitarianism, rather than the hoped for universalisation of the Holocaust preventing other atrocities. It will take seriously Wole Soyinka and Toni Morrison who show that the 'age of testimony' began with slave narratives rather than Holocaust testimonies. In doing so I will treat testimony as a genre in the work of Frederick Douglass, Harriot Jacobs, Elie Wiesel, and Primo Levi so as to explore the similarities and differences between various testimonies. This will contrast with an empty universalisation that has resulted in the instrumentalization of the Holocaust in American and global culture in relation to the Gaza War (2023-2025).

Bryan Cheyette is Emeritus Professor of Modern Literature and Culture at the University of Reading, and a Research Fellow at the University of Southampton. He has published twelve books which include *Constructions of "the Jew" in English Literature in Society* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), *Muriel Spark* (Liverpool University Press, 2000), *Diasporas of the Mind* (Yale University Press, 2014), and, most recently, *The Ghetto: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2020). A Series Editor for Bloomsbury (*New Horizons in Contemporary Writing*), he has been a visiting professor at Dartmouth College, the University of Michigan, and the University of Pennsylvania. He is currently working on a comparative account of testimony from slave narratives to refugee stories.

JEWISH AMERICAN WRITING AND THE UNITED STATES' REGIMES OF MIGRATION: REIMAGINING NARRATIVES OF IMMIGRATION

Choiński, Michał

Uniwersytet Jagielloński

THE RHETORIC OF VIOLENCE – THE HYPERBOLIC LANGUAGE OF WILLIAM FAULKNER'S "DRY SEPTEMBER" AND ITS CONTEMPORARY RECEPTION

Of the rich corpus of William Faulkner's writings, the short story "Dry September" stands out as one of the shortest, but also one of the most popular. According to Edmond L. Volpe, in this 4000-word-long text, published first in *American Mercury* in 1930, Faulkner constructed a universal "metaphor of despair" – a pithy vision of a relentless regional reality devoid of compassion and morality. Critics have often attributed the longevity of this short story to the strategy of narrative omission – instead of depicting the act of racial violence, the murder of an innocent Black citizen of Jefferson at the hands of a lynch mob, Faulkner describes the social processes that led to the inception of violence. In my paper, with the help of qualitative and quantitative methods, I intend to explore "Dry September" not as an abstract existential drama – a "metaphor of despair" – but as a notoriously relevant drama of language. In particular, I wish to focus on how Faulkner presented the logic of racist and misogynist rhetoric of white supremacy and to explicate the cornerstones of the eristic arguments used by the members of the soon-to-be-formed lynch mob. Next, with the help of quantitative methods of literary analysis (lexical frequencies calculated with the AntConc software), I will demonstrate how these rhetorical and stylistic ploys can be placed against the wider background of the language employed in Faulkner's oeuvre. Finally, I will demonstrate how the racist and exclusive rhetorical mechanisms demonstrated by Faulkner almost one hundred years ago bear eerie relevance to the anti-immigration and misogynistic language used by far-right politicians of today. "Dry September" first entered the European literary landscape at the time of Nazism's raise to power (it was translated first into French (1932), Ukrainian (1936), and Spanish (1939)), and now the contemporary European "renaissance" of Faulkner, driven by new translations of e.g. *Light in August* into German (in 2008), into Italian (in 2017), and into Polish (in 2024), can help us reflect on the divisive and exclusive language of racism, and make us more aware of the potential of the language of violence to incite hate crimes.

Michał Choiński is Associate Professor of Literary Studies and Head of the Department of History of American Literature and Culture at the Jagiellonian University (Kraków, Poland). In 2022, he was a senior Fulbright Fellow at Yale University. Choiński's research focuses on the literature of the American South, the history of American journalism and stylometric authorship attribution. He has published more than fifty academic articles and essays on American literature (with, among others, *Mississippi Quarterly*, *The Southern Review*, *Amerikastudien*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, and *Polish Journal of American Studies*), as well as three books: *Rhetoric of the Revival* (V&R, 2016), *Southern Hyperboles* (LSU Press, 2020), and the first history of *The New Yorker* magazine in Polish (Znak, 2024).

CONFRONTING THE FOURTH GHOST: VISIONS AND CRITIQUES OF TOTALITARIANISM IN SOUTHERN FICTION

Clinton, Catherine

University of Texas in San Antonio / Queen's University Belfast

REVOLUTIONS IN BLACK AND WHITE: WOMEN AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

Re-examining the ways in which race and gender played an important role for the status and challenges to American women during the Civil War. Issues of sexuality and sensibilities, morality and masculinity have more and more found their way into the pages of Civil War monographs. Equally significant, questions involving "gender, color and status" have replaced the trinitarian "sex, race and class" to provide a more robust appreciation of the impact of war on American society. Particularly significant, a vibrant literature on African American women – enslaved and free – has expanded definitions and creatively explored intersectionality.

Catherine Clinton (she/her) is the Denman Chair of American History at the University of Texas in San Antonio and is Professor Emerita at Queen's University Belfast. She has written and edited over thirty books. Her books include *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (1982) was a selection of the History Book Club; *Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom* (2004); *Stepdaughters Of History: Southern Women and The Civil War*(2016); and *Mrs. Lincoln: A Life* (2009). Clinton served as a consultant for Steven Spielberg's 2012 film, *Lincoln*, is former Guggenheim Fellow and served as President of the Southern Historical Association. She is co-editor of the University of Georgia Press series *History in the Headlines*.

UNEXPECTED BATTLES FOR LIBERTY: THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOMS DURING WARTIME

Colina, Beatrice

Università Ca' Foscari Venezia

ARTICULATING FREEDOM: SPEECH AND SUBJECTIVITY IN GLORIA ANZALDÚA'S BORDERLAND THEORY

How is the concept of freedom culturally constructed and experienced by people living along the US-Mexican border? In *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) and *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro* (2015), Gloria Anzaldúa examines the condition of discrimination experienced by Chicano people, and her relationship with freedom as a Black queer woman living in the borderland between Mexico and the United States. Her theoretical discourse is embodied in her physical, psychological and emotional experience, situated within a specific historical moment when many Black, Latina and queer feminists were raising their voices to illuminate the intersections of identity and oppression.

Anzaldúa explores suffering, silencing and discrimination through a literary genre known as autohistoria-teoría – a more tangible and embodied form of writing, deeply connected to the body, identity, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, with an emphasis on healing within the context of marginalization and discrimination. Autohistoria-teoría is a genre that combines autobiography to the history of Chicano people, considerations on language, and a close connection to the geo-corporeal body as both a physical and emotional site of research. As far as language is concerned, it holds a significance parallel to that of the physical and psychological body in shaping one's identity and in relation to potential discrimination. To this end, Anzaldúa reflects on "border tongues," which are repeatedly tamed and suppressed by the privileged, English-speaking society in favor of standard English. This process not only results in the loss of one's language, but also annihilates one's culture, identity and sense of belonging.

Ultimately, the journey towards freedom is fulfilled in autohistoria-teoría both in style and purpose: Anzaldúa blends essayistic writing with poetry, and disrupts English as the academic norm by switching from standard English to Castilian Spanish, to the North Mexican dialect to Tex-Mex, to Nahuatl. Indeed, in *Borderlands* and *Light in the Dark* Anzaldúa offers a path towards liberation and healing from the compounded effects of multiple forms of discrimination. She gives voice to the pain and oppression experienced, aiming to create a network of voices and people who can create bridges across cultures, languages, ethnicities, genders, identities and re-establish a sense of belonging.

Beatrice Colina is a PhD student in the program of *Modern Languages, Cultures and Societies* at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. She graduated with a thesis titled *Adapting Autobiography to Theory: The Role of Language and the Body in Gloria Anzaldúa's Autohistoriateoría* and now she is still researching in the field of feminist and Black studies. Her PhD project is about the relation between the poetic and the theoretical production of Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks, and Audre Lorde, as feminist and queer thinkers who have written and theorized from a physical and symbolic position of marginality. The focus on their intellectual discourses concern intersectionality, the margin, and the sense of belonging within the US American context. Her research interests include American Literature, Literary Criticism, BIPOC Studies, Diasporic Studies and Feminist Studies.

Collins, Michael

King's College London

HOW TO BREAK UP WITH AMERICA: TACT, SOCIALITY, AND THE PROBLEMS OF FEELING FREE IN THE WORK OF LYDIA DAVIS

"It occurred to me that if he did not want to be with me anymore, then when I went to find him, just because I wanted to see him, smell him, and hear his voice, regardless of what he wanted, I was turning him into something less than another human being, as though he was as passive as anything else I wanted, any other object that I wanted to consume – food, drink, or a book." (Lydia Davis, *The End of the Story*)

In this paper, I consider how Lydia Davis's work in both short form and in her only novel, *The End of the Story* (1996), serve as explorations of the American author's philosophical understanding of the relationships between literary form, social behaviour, and the complex affects of individual freedom that must be negotiated at the turn of the twenty-first century; a period she associates with declining American moral authority, political toxicity, and societal breakdown. I suggest that in her fictions, the attention to literary form she is especially famed for is not neutral or idiosyncratic. Instead, it often serves to reveal an underlying politics organised around notions of the appropriate etiquette and tact required to navigate postmodern conditions of permacrisis and the relation to the individual to the state. Examples include how in *The End of the Story* the problems of how to relate to another person following a break-up – namely, how to acknowledge their right to freedom, while also acknowledging your own undiminished desire – reflect a political ambiguity in relation to nationalism and the American state where the individual's contemporary moral repugnance must be balanced with certain undiminished desires for an older world order. Or, how her microfictions ironically produce an openness and cosmopolitanism out of brevity and formal closure. To do so, I bring Davis's work into dialogue with both affect studies (specifically Sara Ahmed's engagement with "feeling free" under neoliberalism) and with the earlier writing of Theodor Adorno, principally his aphoristic, mid-century masterwork *Minima Moralia* (1949), which ruminates on how literary and social forms might help the individual navigate questions of complicity with tyranny. Crucially, unlike poststructuralist theorists such as Michel Foucault who associate social convention and tact with domination solely, Adorno and Davis consider form and social convention of certain kinds as discursive spaces that navigate intimacy and relation, and "negotiate[…] between proximity and distance, general norms and individual deviation, ratio and affect" (Katja Haustein, *Alone with Others*, 35) in ways that respond to the threat of fascism in previously liberal states.

Mike Collins is a Reader in American Studies at King's College, London, Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, and Chair of the British Association for American Studies. His work has ranged from topics in short fiction and classic American literature, through essays on intelligence testing and race, to work on sci-fi and American anthropology.

Cortés Farrujia, Elena

Universitat de Barcelona

(LAND)ESCAPING "MANIFESTALGIA": RE-INDIGENIZING IMAGINATION

Landscapes have historically had a responsibility as representational contact zones, as forms of imagining in the visual and in the literary, specific events and snapshots of nature as stages to narrate and naturalize myths connected to nation-building discourses. This paper examines the paintings of the nineteenth-century Hudson River School, featuring artists such as Thomas Cole, George Innes, and Frederic Edwin Church, as the underpinnings of the settler American imagination. These imaginative landscapes perpetuate not only a settler heteronormative Judeo-Christian hierarchical and extractive vision upon nature, but also a series of affects along with the settler futurities that accompany them, thus inscribing what this paper calls "Manifestalgia," a Manifest of Nostalgia, that requires questioning, denormalization, and de-naturalization. Read along with John Gast's "American Progress," the first part of this paper analyzes the rhetoric and affects that accompany the Manifest Destiny visions, made especially relevant in the contemporary context when the U.S. Homeland Security Department shared Gast's painting via Instagram with the caption "A Heritage to be proud of, a Homeland worth Defending" (24/07/25). So, this paper asks, what is the purpose of retrieving such images "in the land of the free," especially now? The second part of this analysis presents a transdisciplinary chorus of voices that question the architecture of the American imagination and trouble these visions of "manifestalgia" in diverse ways. From closely observing Charles Hillard's "Reversing Manifest Destiny" (2021), to the artistic expressions of both Demian Dinéyazhi' and Kay WalkingStick, and reading the poetry of Chrystos, the purpose of this second part is to show how (queer, trans* and Two-Spirit) Indigenous authors and artists are (re)mapping (refusing and remapping) their representation in the imaginative panorama. Mishuana Goeman defines (re)mapping as a method to unsettle "imperial and colonial geographies" both materially and metaphorically, "to generate new possibilities" to sustain vibrant futures (3). All in all, this interdisciplinary conversation between the literary and the artistic questions and (re)maps landscapes as imaginative forms, evidencing the material and real-life consequences that these representations have entailed, and the need for them to be denaturalized and escaped for new and more habitable (Land) possibilities to be (re)generated.

Elena Cortés Farrujia is a predoctoral researcher at ADHUC Theory, Gender and Sexuality Research Center. Graduated with the Extraordinary Degree Award in English Studies at the University of La Laguna (2019), she completed the Master's degree in Construction and Representation of Cultural Identities at the University of Barcelona (2021) and the Master's in English Literary and Cultural Studies and Their Social Application (2024). She has presented at several international conferences and seminars, the most recent ones being the SAAS 2025 and the 19th International Conference on Contemporary Narratives in English. She is currently doing a visiting research stay at the University of Calgary. Her research focuses on contemporary queer Indigenous (Two-Spirit) literatures from North America. Her doctoral thesis revolves around the representation and subversion of domestic spaces by Two-Spirit/queer indigenous authors from an intersectional perspective, interweaving decolonial and affective positions with the queer, waste, and Indigenous lines of study to question the ideal of the American home.

RELATIONAL SOVEREIGNTIES: INDIGENOUS (RE)VISIONS OF FREEDOM ACROSS LAND, BODY AND IMAGINATION

Cortés Vieco, Francisco José

Universidad Complutense de Madrid

LIMITS OF LIBERTY AND VISUALIZING REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM IN LEAH HAYES'S NOT FUNNY HA-HA

In the wake of the 2023 Supreme Court decision that overturned *Roe v. Wade*, reproductive freedom in the United States has been drastically curtailed, reshaping the landscape of personal autonomy and constitutional rights for millions of women. This paper proposes an analysis of *Not Funny Ha-Ha* (2015), Leah Hayes's graphic novel that narrates the abortion experiences of two women from differing social and economic backgrounds. Through its unflinching yet non-didactic visual storytelling, Hayes's text provides a compelling lens through which to interrogate the evolving meanings and limits of American freedom, notably the notion of bodily autonomy as a civil right.

The novel's empathetic, unjudgmental tone and its intimate depiction of abortion as a common yet deeply personal experience challenge dominant narratives that often frame reproductive decisions in moralistic, legal, or political terms. In doing so, *Not Funny Ha-Ha* not only demystifies the clinical process of abortion but also unearths the emotional complexity of women exercising reproductive agency. The medium of the graphic novel itself, being highly accessible, affective, and expressive, becomes a radical instrument for reclaiming discursive space in a public sphere, where the topic of abortion is silenced or stigmatized. Situating the work within the broader socio-political aftermath of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization in the United States*, this paper explores how Hayes's work intersects with contemporary feminist resistance and protest movements that reframe abortion not only as a medical or ethical issue but as a question of women's personal freedom. The analysis draws on theoretical frameworks from medical humanities, affect studies, and feminist theory to examine how freedom, as historically constructed and mythologized in the United States fails to account for the lived realities of those whose rights are structurally undermined. Ultimately, this paper argues that *Not Funny Ha-Ha* functions as a vital literary artifact that documents and critiques the erosion of reproductive freedom in the United States, while also affirming the power of graphic novels to contest hegemonic ideologies. In visualizing both the ordinary and extraordinary aspects of abortion, Hayes's work invites a reimagining of American liberty, one that encompasses empathy and gender equity.

Francisco José Cortés Vieco is tenured Associate Professor of English Literature at Complutense University of Madrid (UCM), where since 2013, he teaches British and North American literature and Gender Studies. He holds two PhDs – one in Literary Studies (UCM, 2013) and another in Interdisciplinary Gender Studies (Alcalá University, 2019) – both awarded for excellence. In 2018, he was a Visiting Postdoctoral Fellow at Harvard University's Department of the History of Science. His research focuses on gender studies, feminist theory, life writing, and medical humanities, with particular interest in illness narratives, trauma, sexuality, maternity, and gender-based violence. He has published extensively, including two monographs and numerous articles, chapters, and translations. He is one of the two lead members of the research project "*Illness Narratives: Towards a Gendered Health(care) Awareness*" (2025–28), funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation, which explores how gendered storytelling can inform more inclusive approaches to health and care.

PATHOGRAPHIES AND THE POLITICS OF FREEDOM: WOMEN'S BODIES, ILLNESS, AND INEQUALITY

Costaguta, Lorenzo

University of Bristol

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE AND THE AMERICAN LEFT, 1776-2026

This paper explores the role of the Declaration of Independence in the history of American radicalism. More specifically, it takes the collection *We the Other People: Alternative Declarations of Independence by Labor Groups, Farmers, Woman's Rights Advocates, Socialists, and Blacks*, 1829-1975, edited by Philip S. Foner in 1976, and updates its intervention to 2026, assessing the significance of a long tradition of radicalism linked to the American Declaration of Independence for the contemporary left. In the nineteenth century, the words of the Declaration were a template used by a wealth of groups to frame their radical demands. The trend continued early in the twentieth century, with declarations issued in the 1930s and up to the early 1970s. Radicals outside the United States picked up this legacy and used the Declaration to frame their anticolonial messages. As time went by, however, the trend lost momentum and was all but abandoned. At the end of the twentieth century, the reality of U.S. imperialism made the founding document too charged, contradictory and controversial to be used in its original anti-imperialist and antiauthoritarian framing.

The 2026 anniversary of the Declaration of Independence will be used by the current administration to advance its nativist, exclusionary and suprematist political message. In this context, rescuing the original interpretation of the Declaration and linking it to the most recent history of the American left is an intellectual intervention aimed at restoring analysis based on historical evidence and historiographical interpretation. Alongside the work on the alternative declarations, then, the paper will trace the development of the historiographical debate on the Declaration in the past fifty years, critically assessing it against previous and contemporary radical interpretations.

Lorenzo Costaguta is Senior Lecturer in United States History at the University of Bristol, UK. He is the author of *Workers of All Colors Unite: Race and the Origins of American Socialism* (Illinois University Press, 2023) and co-editor of *Working-Class Nationalism and Internationalism until 1945: Essays in Global Labour History* (Cambridge Scholars, 2018). He is Co-Editor in Chief of *USAbroad: Journal of American History and Politics* and a coordinator of the Labour and Empire Working Group of the European Labour History Network

Cross, David John

Universität Stuttgart

THE UNCERTAINTY OF PLANETARY DOMESTICITY. LOUISE ERDRICH'S FUTURE HOME OF THE LIVING GOD & TC BOYLE'S BLUE SKIES

Anthropocentric thinking, once the cornerstone of American exceptionalism, now appears as a literary and ethical disruptor. In turn, I argue, contemporary science fiction(s) are revitalizing the domestic form and leveraging the narrative mode of uncertainty, which act as a mode of cultural repair at a time when the local seems to be overwhelmed by the disruption of polycrisis. This paper explores the difficulties that conventional domestic narrative form has with rendering the non-human temporalities of planetary history. By drawing from several critical threads including Donna Haraway's call for a new way of thinking through the "unthinkable" about the current planetary crises to interrupt static historical narratives I argue that contemporary authors are exploring the idea that another world is not only urgently needed but is also possible. In Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of The Living God* and TC Boyle's *Blue Skies*, we witness planetary catastrophe from the perspective of everyday spatialities and displaced futurity in a society where individual freedoms and questions around birthright and/or belonging are under scrutiny in an increasingly dystopian world. Erdrich's narrative provokes an attempt to wrangle with the institutional conditions of modern America by (re)claiming domestic spaces and inserting human/non-human entanglements in the literary mode. Erdrich's text also deals with the idea of what it is to belong to a culture as the novel's main protagonist, Cedar Songmaker, finds herself caught between her indigenous heritage and the white middle America into which she was adopted. In Boyle's eco-satirical future, domestic comfort becomes complicit in environmental degradation, as privilege and denial unravel under climate instability. Both novels reveal how freedom dissolves in the face of planetary interdependence. By situating personal and planetary uncertainty within everyday spatialities, Erdrich and Boyle invite a rethinking of freedom beyond the settler-colonial and anthropocentric paradigms that have long defined the American imaginary. The gathering of collective introspection against an apocalyptic backdrop revives a consciousness of uncertainty with the potential to rethink a future of belonging. This opens a key question of what it means to be free in a world where the concept of freedom itself is being increasingly stripped from minority groups.

David J. Cross is a Doctoral Candidate and Lecturer at the University of Stuttgart in American Literature & Culture. Having received his BA (Hons) and MA from Goldsmiths, University of London, for which he was awarded an excellency scholarship, he completed a fully funded two year MFA research programme at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie's prestigious Sandberg Instituut (NL) exploring the role of utopia and the commons with a focus on social interaction and equal opportunities over financial growth and profit via an analysis and working practice with sound and video. His current research revolves around the apocalyptic tradition, alienation, and catastrophe in Contemporary American Fictions.

Curci, Daniele

Università di Siena

VISIONS OF AMERICA, VISIONS OF FREEDOM, REDEFINING THE POLITICAL SPACE: THE CONTESTED LEGACY OF WOODY GUTHRIE BETWEEN NATIVE AMERICANS AND MEXICAN-AMERICAN CONGRESSIONAL CLAIMS

Democracies constantly redefine the space of representation, who belongs to "the people," and the way the past is conceived - and therefore their own mythopoetic narrative. The United States is no exception, confronting its own «birth defect», as former George W. Bush Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice put it. The color line does not concern only slavery and African-Americans, but is more broadly intertwined with the acceptance of Mexican immigrants, the expropriation of Native lands, and the relationship with Native Americans.

Within this context we also find Woody Guthrie (1912–1967), arguably the most important folk artist and author of the famous "This Land Is Your Land." Guthrie underwent a process of canonization starting in the 1950s that erased his radical traits and flattened him into a patriotic, national bard. Partly as a result of this process, from the 1980s onward Guthrie was cited by Mexican-American congressmen to claim greater rights for their community. At the same time, Guthrie appears in debates among Native communities who contest that «this land is your land», also because of his role as singer for the Bonneville Power Administration - a system of dams built under the New Deal that expropriated Native lands.

My presentation will therefore reconstruct these debates, showing how an artist like Guthrie, considered a national bard, can become the subject of contested and shared memories within cultural battles over the redefinition of identity and freedom in the United States.

Daniele Curci is a research fellow and subject-matter expert in the history of the international system at the Department of Political Science of the University of Siena, and for about ten years he has also worked as a freelance journalist and political analyst. He earned his PhD, *cum laude* and with the title of *Doctor Europaeus*, from the Universities of Florence and Siena in U.S. history and international relations. He has completed three visiting PhD programs in Paris (UPEC, Collège de France, Panthéon-Assas), a city where he lived for about two and a half years and where he also undertook an Erasmus Traineeship for his thesis at Sorbonne IV. His research interests include political history and mentalities, propaganda and influence practices, military employment, and police militarization. In 2018, he co-founded the news site *L'Eclettico*.

FREEDOM, MOVEMENT, AND THEIR LIMITS FOR MARGINALIZED PEOPLE IN THE AMERICAN WEST

Davis-McElligatt, Joanna

University of North Texas

THE FLYING AFRICANS: FUGITIVITY AND RESISTANCE IN BLACK COMICS

The legend of The Flying African in the folklore of the Black Diaspora is inherently speculative: in the story, a certain number of Africans, upon arriving on the shores of the Americas, step off the boat and immediately fly away across the ocean back home. The particulars vary, depending on where you are coming from—Cuba, Jamaica, South Carolina. Flight is sometimes considered to be an ancestral trait, an individual or collective ability, made possible with the aid of salt, by growing wings, or by transforming into a buzzard. At its root, scholars have understood the legend as an allegorical or metaphorical longing for escape, for a desire to enter into the conditions of fugitivity, to bring about the conditions of freedom, and to reverse the violence of the Middle Passage. As a literary trope, the figure of the fugitive, as Saidiya Hartman has argued, "dream[s] of an elsewhere," characterized by their "ongoing struggle to escape." As a Black speculative technology, the myth of the Flying African anticipates fugitivity of all sorts—flights of fancy, movements of the mind, transfigurations of the body and spirit, escapes and altered states.

In this talk I offer a reading of a cluster of Black superheroes—Storm, Nubia, Icon, and Black Panther—alongside readings of John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell's *March trilogy*, Rebecca Hall and Hugo Martínez's *Wake: The Hidden History of Women-Led Slave Revolts*, and Jamila Rowser and Robyn Smith's *Wash Day Diaries* in order to demonstrate how Black comics continue to respond to, reshape, and reimagine the Flying African as a visual-narrative mode of resistance to white supremacy, racial capitalism and penal colonialism, and the death-logics of the antiblack state. I suggest that the figure, trope, allegory, and legend of the Flying African in Black comics anticipates (and at times fulfills) desires for the freedom of unfettered movement, frames the politics of fugitivity and resistance as a radical spectacular praxis, and offers new ways of thinking through—and making possible—Black futures.

Joanna Davis-McElligatt is an Assistant Professor of Black Literary and Cultural Studies at the University of North Texas. Her first monograph, entitled *Black Aliens: Narrative Spacetime in the Cosmic Diaspora*, is forthcoming from The Ohio State University Press. She is the co-editor of four volumes: *Narratives of Marginalized Identities in Higher Education: Inside and Outside the Academy* (Routledge 2019), *Narrating History, Home, and Dyaspora: Critical Essays on Edwidge Danticat* (UP of Mississippi 2022), BOOM! SPLAT! *Comics and Violence* (UP of Mississippi 2024), *bell hooks' Radical Pedagogy: New Visions of Feminism, Justice, Love, and Resistance in the Classroom* (Bloomsbury, 2025). Her areas of teaching and research include Africana Studies, Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, Literary Theory, Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, Comics Studies, Southern Studies, and 20th and 21st century U.S. Literary Studies.

UNMADE AND REWRITTEN: BLACK COUNTERNARRATIVES TO DOMINANT HISTORIES

Day, Emma

University College London

CONTESTING REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM IN EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY GYNECOLOGY

In the first decades of the twentieth century, gynecologists debated the cause, treatment, and significance of various gynecological complaints in women. Building on the medical tradition advanced by physicians who developed the specialty of surgical gynecology in the late nineteenth century, medical commentators often addressed pain, tumours, menstrual absence or irregularity, and other gynecological experiences in relation to their perceived impact on fertility and heterosexual marriage. Among women deemed fit for procreation on account of their race and ethnicity, ability, class, and other identity categories, physicians advocated procedures that sought to enhance their fertility. At the same time, physicians undermined and pathologised the procreative capacity of women whose fertility they deemed undesirable. In advancing medical practices which promoted white, heteronormative families, gynaecologists institutionalised pronatalism within a medical speciality that had professionalised half a century earlier to ostensibly address diseases specific to women – blurring the distinction between women's health and obstetrical health in ways that undermined women's ability to petition for care on their own terms. Pronatalism not only informed how medical professionals approached 'diseases peculiar to women' but the treatment of people who, due to perceived bodily anomalies, doctors classified as intersex. Physicians who encountered a-typical bodies performed procedures which sought to enable individuals to procreate and pursue marriage in ways that constrained their bodily autonomy. The paper analyses medical publications, correspondence, and other forms of media to examine how gynecologists' preoccupation with fertility and heterosexual marriage constrained gynecological research, treatment, and care, including people's freedom to act on their own definition of reproductive health. While analysing medical sources that centre the perspective of physicians, this paper also employs Deidre Cooper Owens's methodology of focusing on 'moments when cracks in the narrative appear.' Acknowledging instances during which people's embodied experiences challenged the prescription of pregnancy as healthy, the paper also suggests a new way of envisioning reproductive freedom that goes beyond a preoccupation with pregnancy, childbirth, and maternal health.

Emma Day is a Leverhulme Trust Early Career Fellow at the Institute of the Americas, UCL. Her research focuses on the intersections between histories of sexuality and gender and medicine and disease in the United States. She is the author of *In Her Hands: Women's Fight Against AIDS in the United States* (University of California Press, 2023). Her current book project examines the formation and maintenance of the concept of reproductive health and its role in shaping the politics of the gendered body in the US. Her research has also appeared in *Modern American History* (2022), *Public Health and the American State* (2024), and *The Theatre Annual* (2018). She is a 2025-2026 Research Fellow at the Consortium for the History of Science, Technology and Medicine. She has also received funding from Smith College, Harvard University, the British Arts and Humanities Research Council, and the Library of Congress, among others.

CONTESTED FREEDOM: REPRODUCTION, FAMILY, AND BODILY AUTONOMY IN U.S. HISTORY

Deleyto, Celestino

Universidad de Zaragoza

PERFORMING THE MEDITERRANEAN: THE ACTOR, THE LOOK, SPACE AND PLACE IN BEFORE MIDNIGHT

Robin Wood led the way in appraisals of Richard Linklater's "before" trilogy (*Before Sunrise*, 1995, *Before Sunset*, 2004, *Before Midnight*, 2013) with his description of Julie Delpy's and Ethan Hawke's acting style in *Before Sunrise*. For him, their performance collapsed the usual distinction between "being" and "acting" (1998, 321). Placing the film resolutely on the side of the "verisimilar" as opposed to the "histrionic performance style" in Roberta Pearson's dichotomy (1992), Wood zeroed in on performance to frame the film within a powerful brand of realism.

In film history, notions of freedom have often been linked to certain types of acting, particularly in independent cinema. Linklater is a central figure of "the discourse of independence" (Tzioumakis 2017) that started in the 1980s. In this paper I relate the two central performances of *Before Midnight* to the film's use of location shooting in various places of the southern Peloponnese and argue that, through performance and, specifically, the look, the actors become part of the film's space. The paper uses classical and contemporary theories of film realism (Bazin 1971, Kracauer 1997, Aitken 2020, Nowell-Smith 2001, Gaudin 2015) to suggest the continuity between film space and the material world. This continuity brings about, on the one hand, the transformation of the real place into part of the mise-en-scène of the film and, on the other, it allows the real place –the Peloponnese, and the Mediterranean – to speak to us through the film.

What these places speak to us about, beyond the narrative of the ups and downs of a couple's relationship, is larger questions of European construction and successive crises as seen from Greece in the year 2013, in the aftermath of the financial crisis. Since then, backlash notions of national freedom have continued and gained momentum in their final goal on bringing the idea of Europe to an end. In the film, the American perspective of the filmmakers and, within the story, the American male protagonist adds a layer of complexity to the deployment of this European space.

Celestino Deleyto is professor of Film Studies and English at the University of Zaragoza. He has published widely on film genre, comedy and transnational cinema. His books include, among others, *The Secret Life of Romantic Comedy* (2009), *From Tinseltown to Bordertown: Los Angeles on Film* (2016) and *Before Sunrise: Young Love on the Move* (2023), co-written with M. Mar Azcona. Among his articles and book chapters are "Humor, Erotic Utopia and the Intimate Scenarios of Romantic Comedy," in *The Blackwell Companion to Film Comedy* (2013), "Looking from the Border: A Cosmopolitan Approach to Contemporary Cinema," *Transnational Cinemas* (2017), "Brief Encounter: Matt Damon in Marseille,"*Transnational Screens* (2024), with M. Mar Azcona, and "The Hippie, the Cowboy, and the City: Aesthetic and Political Layers in Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood*", *Journal of Film and Video* (2025), with David Roche. His current research deals with cinematic space and Mediterranean cities.

PERFORMING FREEDOM IN SPACE FROM CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD TO CONTEMPORARY CINEMA

Delioglanis, Vasileios

Aristotéleio Panepistímio Thessaloníkīs

"DATA RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS": DIGITAL DEMOCRACY, FREEDOM, AND DATA POLITICS IN AMERICAN SPECULATIVE FICTION AND CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

This paper examines the intersections of data rights, privacy, freedom, and mediated power in contemporary media, analyzed through American speculative fictional texts that engage politically with pressing socio-technical issues. It asks: To what extent is freedom shaped or constrained by technology and media? The documentary *The Great Hack* (2019) demonstrates how mobile and digital media have influenced the outcomes of immense political and cultural significance and global impact — such as the 20216 US election and Brexit — through data mining and psychographic targeting, thus calling into question mobile users' autonomy, privacy, and, by extension, freedom. Drawing examples from various American speculative and cultural narratives—including William Gibson's novel *Spook Country* (2007), *Snowden* (2016), *Westworld* (S3:E3, 2020), and *Black Mirror* (S6:E1 & S7:E1, 2023 & 2025), the paper explores how these works dramatize the consequences of ubiquitous data collection, algorithmic governance, and corporate surveillance. Drawing on theories of media studies and Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr.'s notion of "science-fictionality" from *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction* (2008), the paper argues that American speculative science fiction has become an essential mode of imagining and critically engaging with the technological transformations of everyday life. Csicsery-Ronay notes that, "as the world undergoes daily transformations via the development of technoscience," SF fosters a "mode of response that frames and tests experiences as if they were aspects of a work of science fiction" (1, 2). This framework illuminates how the selected texts cultivate a science-fictional awareness that renders visible the invisible operations of data capitalism and digital control. These works respond to specific historical and political moments in the United States—from postSnowden anxieties and election interference to ongoing debates about digital democracy and data ownership—and reveal how notions of freedom and agency are redefined in a media-saturated world. By focusing on speculative fiction, the paper shows how these media forms together expose the mechanics and consequences of mediated power, reshaping audiences' understanding of political agency, vulnerability, and resistance in the digital age. Ultimately, science fiction emerges as a political and epistemological tool that critiques the fragile state of freedom, privacy, and democracy in the 21st century.

Vasileios (Vassilis) N. Delioglanis, Ph.D., is a Post-Doctoral Researcher at School of English, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. He has taught as an adjunct lecturer in Greek universities, and holds a Ph.D. from the School of English, AUTh, funded by the Board of Greek State Scholarships Foundation (I.K.Y.). He also holds an M.A. in American Literature and Culture, and a B.A. in English from the School of English, AUTh, Greece. He is the website moderator of the European Association for American Studies (EAAS), a board member of the Hellenic Association for American Studies (HELAAS), and a member of the *Multimodal Research and Reading Group* of School of English, AUTh. His research focuses on contemporary American literature and culture, Digital Humanities, and mobile locative media and games. His scholarly work appears in international conferences and journals, and his monograph, entitled *Narrating Locative Media* (Palgrave Macmillan 2023), focuses on new forms of textuality emerging from mobile locative media and storytelling practice.

De Sutters Summerville, Erica

Los Angeles Valley College

GENDERED VIOLENCE IN CALIFORNIA'S ICE DETENTION FACILITIES

This paper examines how gender-based violence within California's ICE detention facilities operates as a carceral form of racialized and gendered erasure. Focusing on first-person literary narratives, poetry, zines, and oral histories from immigrants detained at centers throughout California, I explore how detainees document and resist the sexual assault, harassment, medical neglect, and other abuses endemic to these sites. These testimonies, often created under conditions of surveillance and repression, offer vital counter-narratives to the official accounts of ICE, exposing the structural violence that defines immigration detention. Drawing on the framework developed in *Captive Genders* (Stanley & Smith), this paper situates ICE detention within a continuum of state violence that places women, queer, and trans migrants of color at heightened risk for gender-based violence, medical neglect, and other forms of harm. By centering the creative and testimonial voices of those directly impacted, I argue that these narratives transform private suffering into acts of political resistance that challenge the framing of immigration detention as a neutral administrative process, revealing it instead as a core feature of California's broader carceral regime, one rooted in the policing and exploitation of marginalized communities.

Erica De Sutters Summerville (DESUTTEA@lavc.edu) is an educator at Los Angeles Valley College and Cerritos College in Southern California. She earned She earned a master's degree in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies with a minor in Queer Studies. Her research areas include feminist pedagogy, social justice education, abolition feminisms, and feminist media studies. She has presented original research at national and international conferences, including the National Women's Studies Association Conference, the World Conference on Women's Studies, and the International Conference on Social Media & Society. In addition to her teaching and research, Erica remains deeply engaged in feminist and arts-based pedagogy. She recently produced the 50th Anniversary Arts and Activism Exhibit for Oregon State University's Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Department and has co-moderated panels on feminist film and cultural history.

Deutsch, James

Smithsonian Institution

CONTRASTING FREEDOMS AND CONSEQUENCES IN THE 1969 AND 2010 VERSIONS OF TRUE GRIT

One of the striking differences between classical Western films and revisionist Western films is how they represent freedom. In the case of the former—as in *Stagecoach* (1939), *Shane* (1953), and *Ride the High Country* (1962)—freedom seems unrestricted in wide-open landscapes; the protagonists may encounter evil outlaws, but they ultimately prevail and achieve their goals. In the case of the latter category—as in *The Wild Bunch* (1969), *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* (1971), and *The Shootist* (1976)—the protagonists battle evil, but do not ultimately prevail. Their options and their freedoms are denied. Another way to observe the different forms of freedom represented in classical and revisionist Westerns is to compare and contrast the same story presented by dramatically different filmmakers in dramatically different eras, specifically the two versions of *True Grit*: 1969, directed by Henry Hathaway with John Wayne as US marshal Rooster Cogburn; and 2010, directed by Joel and Ethan Coen with Jeff Bridges as Cogburn. In both cases, the films follow the basic plotline of Charles Portis's 1968 novel, but their tones, styles, and philosophical outlooks illustrate some of the fundamental changes that had occurred in the western genre from the late 1960s to the early 21st century. This paper will examine the key differences between the two film versions of *True Grit*, particularly to compare and contrast: 1) the representations of the landscape—from open spaces in 1969 that provide scenic backdrops for heroic, liberating action to the harsh, stark, and somber lands in 2010; 2) the representations of Rooster Cogburn—from John Wayne's curmudgeonly but amiable marshal who follows the Western code to Jeff Bridges's highly flawed and internally conflicted character; 3) the representation of Mattie Ross—from Kim Darby's perky performance to Hailee Steinfeld's much more determined and even vengeful character who suffers permanent physical injury and emotional disillusionment In sum, the 1969 version of *True Grit* follows the classical Western themes of rugged individualism in the freedom of the West, while the 2010 version reveals the inherent conflicts and contradictions of the American frontier, suggesting that freedom often comes with personal costs and serious consequences.

James Deutsch is senior content coordinator for the Smithsonian Institution's *America at 250 project*, which will mark the 250th anniversary of the United States in 2026. He was formerly curator and editor at the Smithsonian's Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, where he helped plan and develop public programs on California, China, Hungary, Baltic nations, Ukraine, Peace Corps, Circus Arts, Native Americans, NASA, Mekong River, U.S. Forest Service, Silk Road, and White House workers. In addition, he is an adjunct professor—teaching courses on American film history and folklore—in the American Studies Department at George Washington University. Deutsch has also taught American Studies classes at universities in Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Germany, Kyrgyzstan, Norway, Poland, and Turkey. He has academic degrees from Williams College (B.A.), University of Minnesota (M.A.), Emory University (M.Ln.), and George Washington University (Ph.D.), and has published widely on topics relating to film and folklore.

De Vivo, Anna

University of Cambridge

SPACE AND CONTAINMENT IN TED JOANS' ART COLLECTIONS.

This paper will explore the ways in which Ted Joans writes back against the colonial constraints of museums and art-collections. Starting with Joans' interview in *Transition* magazine where he described how 'Europe is one big cemetery' where 'people come to collect old dates', I hope to demonstrate how depictions of art history and collections in his work decentres Europe and its representations of history within its narratives. Joanna Pawlik observes how Joans' 'surrealist historiography' deploys 'temporal anachronism and spatial discontinuity to protest the uneven spread of political and cultural agency within modernity'. Building on this exploration, I will firstly explore how Joans redeploys dates in 'Some of Our Old Ancestors' to write against Eurocentric constructions of Dutch historiography of the Old Masters. Instead, I will show how Joans proposes an alternative teleology to modern art rooted in African traditions, not too dissimilar to his claim in 'First Papers on Ancestral Creations' published in *Black World* where he describes how the containment of African art stunts its ritualistic functions. The second part of my paper will turn towards the poem 'Mammifreres', dedicated to the French anthropologist Michel Leiris with whom he corresponded with throughout his career and 'Flying Piranha'. By reconsidering these poems, it will closely analyse how Joans engages with the ethnographic dimensions within art history by way of Leiris' works such as *La Langue secrète des Dogons de Saga* (1948) and *L'Afrique fantôme* (1938), as well as the ideas which were circulating around him.

Anna De Vivo is a second-year OOC-AHRC funded PhD candidate at the University of Cambridge researching the intersection of art history and poetics within the Black Arts Movement.

Díaz Sánchez, Isabel

Universidad de Alicante

REBORDERING FREEDOM: CONTESTING THE MYTH OF LIBERTY IN US-MEXICO BORDER NARRATIVES

In *The Story of American Freedom* (1999), Eric Foner argues that freedom has been the central, though highly contested, ideal in U.S. history—both a rallying cry and a justification for exclusion. Nowhere is this contradiction more visible than at the U.S.–Mexico border, a geopolitical and symbolic space where national myths of liberty collide with the realities of displacement, surveillance, and racialized violence. This paper examines how contemporary border narratives reinterpret and challenge the American ideal of freedom from the margins of the nation-state. Drawing on works by Gloria Anzaldúa (*Borderlands/La Frontera*), Valeria Luiselli (*Lost Children Archive*), and the border photography of Graciela Iturbide, I explore how these authors and artists expose the limits of freedom as a national category and reimagine it through the lived experience of those whose mobility and belonging are constantly denied. These cultural productions foreground the border not as a line of separation but as a site of encounter, translation, and hybridization, thus transforming "freedom" from a static legal principle into a relational, embodied, and decolonial practice. The study adopts a transdisciplinary methodology, combining border theory (Anzaldúa, Saldívar, Newman), critical freedom studies (Foner, Davis, Butler), and decolonial approaches (Mignolo, Lugones). The border becomes, in this sense, a "theoretical space" (Anzaldúa) that deconstructs the binary of freedom/unfreedom, citizen/alien, and center/periphery. In line with Angela Davis's *The Meaning of Freedom* (2012), this paper asks how we might imagine a democracy that does not rely on exclusion or violence for its sustenance. The border narratives examined here answer that question not through abstraction, but through everyday acts of linguistic, cultural, and political re-signification: crossing languages, reclaiming indigenous epistemologies, and forging new forms of solidarity. Ultimately, this project argues that the U.S.–Mexico border offers one of the most powerful "visions of freedom" in the contemporary Americas—one that dismantles the imperial fantasy of universal liberty and replaces it with plural, intersectional, and transnational forms of belonging.

CONTESTED FREEDOM: RACE, SECURITY, AND THE CARCERAL BORDER

Di Loreto, Sonia

Università di Torino

Black Atlantic, Black Mediterranean

Both the Atlantic and the Mediterranean have been paths towards or away from freedom. They have been crossed by trajectories of hope and despair, enslavement and freedom, and have generated storytelling traditions that sedimented into oral and written archives – or are beginning to do so. Our paper presents a parallel study of the Atlantic and the Mediterranean as comparable systems of Black textualities. "Black Atlantic / Black Mediterranean" considers these two bodies of water as geographic spaces connected through colonialism, slavery, migrancy, and forced mobility, but also marked by comparable textualities and punctuated with literary convergences. Our hypothesis is that the Black Atlantic and the Black Mediterranean are literary kin, and we intend to put them and their literary universes in conversation to show how both are archives of "an epic that repeats itself in space and time" (Di Maio 39). To find out how the Black Atlantic and the Black Mediterranean entangle and illuminate each other, we turn to a series of texts from both cultural geographies, including online archives of migrant biographies and historical Anglophone Black Atlantic narratives, but also contemporary fiction, poetry, and films, even artifacts, sculptures, and objects. We will organize and study these sources around tropes and archetypes we identify as central to both the Black Atlantic and the Black Mediterranean.

Sonia Di Loreto is Associate Professor of American Literature at the University of Torino, Italy, where she teaches courses in the fields of early American literature, 19th -century American literature and transatlantic print culture. She has published widely in journals on topics from archives and the Digital Humanities, to epistolarity and transatlantic relations. Her current research focuses on Margaret Fuller's transnational network, and her book, tentatively titled *Nations of the Future: Correspondences, Networks, Media in the U.S. and Europe, 1830-60*, aims at reconstructing the network of communication – especially periodical publications – that Margaret Fuller established and maintained in Italy and Europe. She is also working on a book project on shipwrecks and maritime forms of abandonment and recovery.

ATLANTICS: FREEDOM NARRATIVES IN ENTANGLED WATERS

Ding, Mohan

Georg-August Universität Göttingen

THE VISION OF TRANSNATIONAL MEMORY IN THE WORKS OF DON MEE CHOI

Transnational memory studies encourage poets to move beyond national borders and excavate memories that have been forgotten, silenced, or distorted. Even when poets are neither victims nor eyewitnesses of national tragedies, they can still contribute to cultural memory in ways that transcend the boundary of a single nation. In this paper, I examine Don Mee Choi's KOR-US trilogy as an example of how transnational memory informs poetry, and how poetry, in turn, reshapes and preserves that memory. I focus particularly on how Choi's work illuminates the intimate relationship between visual images and transnational memory, as well as how it exposes the conflict between suppression and freedom. Choi develops a reflection on history across three countries and cultivates a cosmopolitical empathy for all those who suffer from war or state oppression and crave freedom. She juxtaposes Korea's division with Germany's, the Gwangju Uprising with the Miami Riot and the young Korean girls who survived the 1951 Sancheong-Hamyang Massacre, with the absence of students portrayed in Soviet-era classrooms by artist Ilya Kabakov. Through Choi's transnational lens, we can observe how the onset of the Cold War affected both Western and Asian countries, how state apparatuses ruthlessly suppressed citizens, and how children's testimonies are often lost in cultural memory. Choi's "paranormal" vision of remembering offers a model of American poetry that seeks to uncover and reconstruct both individual and national memory within a framework of transnational connectedness. Through photographs, testimonies, interviews, films, and archival research from South Korea and beyond, Choi demonstrates how poetry can create a resonant and multidirectional remembrance across languages and nations. Crucially, she makes t he struggle for liberation legible even across linguistic, historical, and geographic divides. Beyond this poetics of unifying fractured memory, this paper also highlights Choi's fusion of past and future in the present, influenced by Walter Benjamin's concept of "temporal magic." This temporal entanglement allows Choi to trace atrocities and repression across different times and places within a globalized context, using the past to strongly condemn and caution against ongoing war crimes that cruelly deprive people of freedom.

Mohan Ding is a PhD student and research assistant at the University of Göttingen in Germany. Her dissertation focuses on three Chinese American poets: Li-Young Lee, Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, and Chen Chen. It examines how ethnic identity is complicated, enriched, and at times transcended by other forms of poetic sociability. In addition to her dissertation research, she works on projects related to queer Asian American poetry, U.S.–China literary diplomacy, and mixed-genre works that explore war, memory, and the Asian Pacific diaspora.

Di Tommaso, Gaetano

Roosevelt Institute for American Studies

EXPANDING ENVIRONMENTAL DEMOCRACY THROUGH VIRTUAL EXCHANGES: FREEDOMS, FRAMEWORKS, AND FUTURES IN TRANSNATIONAL DIGITAL EDUCATION

Virtual Exchanges (VEs) represent a transformative approach to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), creating opportunities for transnational collaboration while navigating the evolving landscape of digital mediation. Drawing on four years of implementing VEs in the Netherlands, this paper examines how structured digital encounters generate new forms of environmental agency and democratic participation across borders through collaborative GIS and student-made XR/360° microdocumentaries. Our VEs, connecting universities across Europe with US partners including William & Mary, LSU, Navajo Tech, UT Rio Grande Valley, and Emory, demonstrate how immersive technologies amplify rather than replace traditional educational freedoms and practices. Through collaborative mapping exercises, VR content creation, and cross-cultural environmental storytelling, students develop "transnational environmental citizenship"—the capacity to think and act on environmental challenges beyond national frameworks. Specific case studies from our partnerships reveal how 3-5 week intensive programs catalyze lasting engagement with environmental democracy. The presentation analyzes three key dimensions of freedom in VEs: Creative freedom/Access to information: how students use XR tools to visualize and communicate environmental challenges in novel ways and make open environmental data legible, verifiable; Collaborative freedom/Public participation: how digital platforms enable forms of cross-cultural partnership previously impossible due to geographic and economic constraints; and reproduce public-facing consultations and deliberations; and Pedagogical freedom/Pathways to remedy: how VEs allow instructors to integrate experiential learning into existing curricula without displacing core content. While celebrating these expansions of educational possibilities, the paper acknowledges practical realities, including time-zone coordination, varying technological access, and the need for sustained institutional support. Rather than limitations, we position these as productive constraints that have driven innovation in program design, leading to the development of asynchronous collaboration methods and low-bandwidth alternatives that actually increase accessibility. These VE programs, emerging amid recent volatile shifts in US climate policy, demonstrate how transnational educational networks sustain environmental democracy when governmental commitment wavers. US and European students develop crucial environmental citizenship, transcending domestic political battlegrounds to cultivate civic capacity necessary for continued climate action. They function as counter-arguments to isolationist stances by ensuring global exposure to environmental challenges—from Louisiana's Cancer Alley to European adaptation—that no nation can address alone.

Gaetano Di Tommaso is a researcher at the Roosevelt Institute for American Studies in Middelburg, the Netherlands. Previously he taught at Sciences Po-Paris and was a Kluge Fellow at the Library of Congress. His research examines the role of natural resources in U.S. history, particularly how American extraction and use of fossil fuels have shaped life and politics from local communities to global ecosystems. He's currently developing a project on the environmental health implications of petroleum production in coastal regions and has collaborated with Dutch and international colleagues to create COIL/Virtual Exchange courses on environmental democracy. He recently co-authored a chapter in the Springer volume *Intercultural Competence Through Virtual Exchange* and is contributing to the forthcoming *Handbook of Using Virtual Exchange Across Disciplines: Building Global Citizens from Home*.

Dobre, Elena Miriam

Universitat de les Illes Balears

"ONLY THROUGH THE BLOOD OF OUR MEN": FAULKNER, FASCISM, AND SOUTHERN DECLINE

This paper revisits the long-debated question of William Faulkner's relation to fascism, his "troublesome [...] resonance in totalitarian contexts" (Spoth 2011, 253). Although Faulkner's postwar reputation as a liberal humanist encouraged a normatively antifascist reading (Atkinson 2006, Spoth 2011), his 1930s novels reveal a deeper proximity to the racial, eugenic, and agrarian myths found in totalitarian ideologies. Specifically, I read *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), a novel translated and circulated under the Nazi regime.

The first part of the paper examines how Absalom, Absalom! responds to and emerges amid "nascent reactionary politics of white extinction and civilizational decline" (Murphy 2018, 26). Drawing on Christy Cannariato's claim that the novel "readily lends itself to a reading in relation to eugenics" (2010, 116), I examine its engagement with eugenic determinism as a correlate of the historical determinism and civilizational (southern) decline at the heart of the text. That is, Faulkner's novel expresses the South's decline through the same logic that eugenics used to explain social and racial decay: as something rooted in blood, lineage, and inherited failure. I also consider the novel's theme of mastery over land in relation to the cult of "blood and soil," a doctrine central to the Nazi regime that linked racial eugenics with agrarian nationalism. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, the land and its mastery resonates with contemporary pseudoscientific discourses that used biology and demographics to naturalize Black population control.

Finally, I turn to the novel's formal dimension to examine how its structure performs the logic it represents. The protagonists' search for an explanatory cause for the "rise and fall" of the South/Sutpen's house is linked with the degenerationist drive to explain and redeem civilizational decline through eugenic intervention (Cannariato 2010). Formally, the protagonists' grafting of the present onto narratives of past mythical glory to explain the degeneration of the South finds a parallel in fascist discourses.

Ever open to reinterpretation, *Absalom, Absalom!* is both a product of and a response to the totalitarian imagination. Faulkner's work, though not reducible to ideology, offers a legible iteration of fascism on American soil. It invites—or teases—the reader into confronting the violent yet seductive coherence of an order built on purity.

Elena Dobre holds a PhD (cum laude) from Universitat Jaume I (UJI) in Castellón, Spain, where she completed her dissertation on the dimensions of trauma in the work of William Faulkner. She teaches at the same institution at both undergraduate and graduate levels, including modules on North American literature and narrative fiction, Young Adult literature and mental health, and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Her research interests include the intersections between trauma and fiction, as well as interdisciplinary approaches involving trauma studies and the medical humanities. She is also interested in the pedagogical potential of Young Adult literature. A former visiting scholar at Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU), she has published in peer-reviewed journals and presented her work at national and international conferences (AEDEAN, AFEA, APEAA, CSAAS, etc.). She is a member of the Faulkner in the UK Network and currently co-coordinates the SAAS Young Scholars communication team and edits its monthly newsletter.

Dokou, Christina

Ethnikó kai Kapodistriakó Panepistímio Athinón

MORE THAN ONE WAYS TO SKIN A... VAEMPIRE: EMILY CARROLL'S WHEN I ARRIVED AT THE CASTLE

Webcomics auteur Emily Carroll has become a celebrated canon name thanks to her innovative queer horror twists on stories both folkloric and contemporary. In her graphic novella *When I Arrived at the Castle* (2019), Carroll spins a tale with all the traits of the gothic—monsters, maidens, dark labyrinthine castles, miasmatic atmosphere, unreliable narrator and much blood—enhanced with her trademark use of human skins as disposable, abject garments/disguises for sinister creatures. Carroll's skin metaphor thus resonates with the subgenre known as "postcolonial gothic," predicated upon a. the monstrous image of "black skin, white masks" that, according to Franz Fanon, depicts the relationship between colonizer and colonized, and b. the modes of resistance stemming from the appropriation of said monstrosity as a path to freedom. The tale of the vampiric Countess's horrific and near-fatal seduction of a young Cat-woman feeds on a rich tradition of (lesbian) female vampires, while it also serves as a metaphor for the relationship between exploitative, parasitic colonizer and resisting, yet affected, colonized. Accordingly, the final twist offers a bold divergence from both the patriarchal narratives of heteronormative rescue by a male lover, and even Carroll's tradition-based gothic trope of open-ended, lingering horror. Instead, it reads as a healing fable of encountering and overcoming vaempiric colonialist dominance, where the cunning native, dispossessed in a land "skinned" of its resources and monstrously othered by the vaempire's seductive but toxic cultural bite, uses the master's (or, rather, mistress's) weapons to dismantle the mistress's house. In fact, every gothic trope, whether it pertains to external terror or internal horror, is "queered" visually and verbally to become an element of post-colonial personal/political enlightenment and growth. The ultimate twist is similarly predicated on the very conception of the queered/colonial body as divergent from a presumed bio-metaphysical and racist norm that would essentially link a certain physiology to a certain soul, character, or behavior. Thus, Carroll questions the concept of "skin-deep" as a value in a culture habitually privileging the eye as agent of phallogocentrism and racism, and simultaneously extends a healing gesture of freedom to gothic tropes infected by such ideologies.

Dr. Christina Dokou (cdokou@enl.uoa.gr) is Assistant Professor of American Literature and Folk/Pop Culture in the Department of English Language and Literature, at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece. She has published numerous articles and book chapters on Greek myth revisited in American literature, psychoanalytic criticism, Comics Studies, theoretical approaches to American Folklore, Queer and Gender Studies, her latest being "The Graves of Wrath: A Hypothesis on the Creation of the American Zombie" in *Ex-Centric Narratives: Journal of Anglophone Literature, Culture and Media* no. 9 (forthcoming, December 2025). She has co-edited two scholarly volumes, *The Periphery Viewing the World* (2004) and *The Letter of the Law: Literature, Justice and the Other* (2014), and is Secretary of the Board of the Hellenic Association for American Studies. In her spare time, she serves as the Crazy Cat Lady of her neighbourhood, being a member of Nine Lives Greece.

Duclos-Orsello, Elizabeth

Salem State University

DIGITAL NATIVES, DIGITAL ARCHIVES AND JUSTICE AFTER 250 YEARS: FROM HASHTAGS TO AGENTS OF CHANGE

Most university students today are "digital natives". They have not known a world without digital content or navigating digital spaces. However, in the US and in Europe, it also seems true that they do not always understand that this digital space is shaped by the forces of late-stage capitalism, neoliberalism, and unequal power dynamics. This is particularly true of their understanding of digitally born publications or digital research archives. A hashtag campaign may register as a tool for democratic activism or a fight for justice, but what about "that old history stuff"? I will focus on three projects that have to do with digital archives and fights for justice: two with students, and one grant funded research. Each showcases a way in which the act of digitizing, using or creating digitized materials can empower those doing the work to see themselves as a link between justice fighters of the past, see the struggles of today, and imagine a future where they have agency. Project 1 works with the archives at Salem State University to engage students in locating, adding to, and interpreting collections, digitizing them and using them in physical and digital exhibits, or digital finding aids. Students learn how archives, can hide or promote narratives of freedom and justice and gain practical skills to tell stories that have the potential to center previously marginalized stories and inspire others to do the same. The digital is powerful. Project 2 is a digital zine initiative I launched during COVID. The digital-origin zines created by more than 40 students – focused on the histories of fights for justice in the US – had the benefit of being easy to circulate in the university/public library system thereby launching the public "author" status of the students who are now public knowledge producers. Finally, I will discuss my recent free, downloadable research on African American history/cultures of Essex County, Massachusetts. This project unearthed, digitized and drove attention to the illiberal and unfree histories of our region. The ease of access and circulation of this type of publication has pushed students, organizations and regular citizens alike to grapple with and act on the complex histories of some of the most heralded places of the United States in this 250th year. In each of these three cases, digital paces/digital material has served as tools to link past struggles for justice and freedom with student or resident's own current engagement with the same. And the ways in which these activities have enhanced students' a sense of their own agency!

Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello, Ph.D., is an interdisciplinary, equity-focused publicly engaged practitioner, scholar, author, activist and educator with more than two decades of experience in the higher education, museum, social service, k-12 and cultural sectors in the US, Europe and West Africa. Locally and globally networked, she is currently Professor of American and Ethnic Studies and Director of The Humanities Brigade, as well as an affiliated Faculty with the Center for Economic Development and Sustainability at Salem State University where she was the founding University Fellow for Civic Engagement and has led university initiatives related to strategic planning, general education, non-traditional pathways, first year students, and global studies. Her research and teaching—much of it public-facing--explores questions of social justice, issues of identity-formation and struggles for voice and power including the construction and experience of "community", ethnic and immigrant studies/literature, gender studies, cultural geography, civic/service-learning, social and cultural history, and social justice. In addition to numerous articles, book chapters, and digital humanities projects, she is the author of *Modern Bonds: Renegotiating Community in Early Twentieth Century St. Paul* (UMass Press, 2018); editor of *Teaching American Studies: State of the Classroom as State of the Field* (University of Kansas Press, 2021), and co-author of the US National Park Service's *African Americans in Essex County, Massachusetts* (2022). A twotime Fulbright Scholar, a Whiting Fellow, and the recipient of a fellowship from the German Department of Education, she is currently Director of "The Humanities Brigade," funded by the Mellon Foundation. She holds a B.A in History and Sociology-based Human Relations from Connecticut College and a Ph.D. in American Studies from Boston University. She is former Chair of the ASA Committee on Departments, Programs and Centers, and a current member of the ASA International Committee.

Dunkel, Solveig

Université de Lille

PERCIVAL EVERETT'S THE TREES (2021): THE SILENCE OF THE ARCHIVES AND THE NOVEL AS A COUNTER-MONUMENT

Percival Everett's penultimate novel, *The Trees* (2021), is at once a dark comedy and a thriller, a work that confronts the legacy of lynching, the erasure of its victims, and the possibility of memorial reparation through fiction. The novel begins with a grotesque depiction of the Mississippi town of Money. In the opening chapter, we encounter a caricatured white-trash family led by a surly grandmother, Granny C. What first appears as satire gradually reveals a deeper, more unsettling purpose: Granny C is Carolyn Bryant, the woman whose false accusation in 1955 led to the brutal lynching of Emmett Till in Money. In *The Trees*, Everett imagines a sequel to this defining tragedy of American racial violence, set sixty-five years later. Moreover, one of the characters endeavors to create a monumental archive recording all the lynchings which took place in the South, but were forgotten or silenced in official archives. Through this, the novel stages a memorial project that entangles history and counter-history, reality and fiction, allowing memory to resurface in a cathartic eruption. *The Trees* interrogates the role of the archive in storytelling and in shaping collective memory, the role of fiction as experimental freedom, as well as the function of monuments within the American landscape.
This paper contends that Everett's novel operates as both a fictional archive and a monument to the dead, its pages preserving the names of the lost as if etched in marble. Yet beyond commemoration, the novel also embodies the freedom of fiction itself—a form of uchronic freedom that releases history from its fixed narratives and allows for its imaginative redress.

Solveig Dunkel is Associate Professor at the University of Lille (France), where she teaches American literature. Her work has been published in *the Faulkner Journal*, *The Mississippi Quarterly*, *Transatlantica* and *The European Journal of American Culture*. She is the book review editor for the *Faulkner Journal*, and a representative-at-large at the *William Faulkner Society*.

Dunstan, Sarah

University of Glasgow

"THE STATE OF AFRICA": ANNA ARNOLD HEDGEMAN, PAULI MURRAY, AND THE POSSIBILITIES OF PANAFRICANISM.

Commenting in 1959 upon the implications of decolonisation in Africa, the African American activist Anna Arnold Hedgeman, declared "We are America's major link with that ancient civilization, and we also have the opportunity to serve Africa as she develops continuing relationships with the West."[1] A year later, in 1960, Hedgeman would attend the Conference of the Women of Africa and African Descent in Accra, Ghana, in an effort to consolidate this connection. This paper will attend to the contours of her interventions at this Conference, positioning them in conversation with both those of another African American delegate at the Conference, the radical lawyer Pauli Murray, as well as the visions of Pan-Africanism that emerged amongst African delegates.

A longtime member of the National Council of Negro Women, Hedgeman urged her audience to think about the potential of an international movement grounded in a shared gender identity. Pauli Murray, took this one step further, arguing that women of all races and nations shared common ground with Africans because they had all known a history of enslavement. "From these beginnings," she declared, they could move together "towards equality."[2] The notion that a shared gender identity might transcend race as a unifying force in the creation of a decolonised Africa was at odds with the role the Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah envisioned for the women gathered at this Conference. In his opening keynote, he encouraged the women present to "carry back this message to the men of your respective countries, but… you can also bring your feminine influence to bear in persuading your brothers, husbands and friends of the importance of African unity as the only salvation for Africa." Hedgeman certainly agreed with Nkrumah's assessment of the women's influence upon public life – she commented that this would not be a new phenomenon, given that "women have always been in public life, but the men have not always known it."[3] Nevertheless, she was wary of an internationalist discourse that did not attend to the ways that race and gender intersected to shape access to rights at the level of the state and the international. Both Murray and Hedgeman had experienced the gendered limitations of racial solidarity in their struggles for civil rights within the US domestic context. As such their interventions into the political discourses of Pan-Africanism hinged on the necessity of foregrounding their experiences as Black women.

Sarah C. Dunstan is a Lecturer in the International History of Modern Human Rights at the University of Glasgow. Her first book, *Race, Rights and Reform: Black Activism in the French Empire and the United States from World War One to Cold War*, came out with Cambridge University Press in early 2021 and was awarded the American Historical Association's 2022 J. Russell Major Prize. She is also a co-editor of the multi-award winning *Women's International Thought: Towards a New Canon*, (Cambridge University Press, 2022).She has published on questions of United States and French empire, decolonization, and citizenship, and is currently working on a Leverhulme funded monograph exploring how philosophical and cultural understandings of what it meant to be human were deployed in the mid-twentieth century to craft human rights and citizenship legislation at the level of the international and the national.

Duplay, Mathieu

Université Paris-Cité

WE, TOO, ARE ITALIAN': FREEDOM AND THE ALLURING OTHER IN ALLEN BARNETT'S THE BODY AND ITS DANGERS

The protagonist of "Succor," a story collected in Allen Barnett's *The Body and Its Dangers* (1990), is a gay, HIV-positive New Yorker who revisits Rome, the scene of his first love affair. To Kerch, Italy is associated with personal freedom: it once gave him licence to explore his sexuality, and it now promises to help him break away from his obsessive concern with his own mortality. However, everything reminds him of what he wishes to leave behind: his Italian lover has gone back into the closet, the cityscape mocks him with its reminders of historical disasters, and his favourite masterpieces offer gruesome depictions of suffering, tortured flesh. This pattern of self-obsession is disrupted by references to Rome's history of antisemitic violence, from the time of the emperors all the way down to the twentieth century. As a member of an oppressed minority, Kerch identifies with persecuted Jews, but his Catholic upbringing aligns him with some of their worst oppressors. Niccolo, his lost love, is Jewish; he gives voice to the suffering of Roman Jews in a language – Italian – which Kerch admires but does not master. Niccolo's voice offers intimations of alluring yet unattainable difference; it carries echoes of Italy's literary depictions of Jewishness, which Kerch senses but cannot access: Niccolo's father is in Ferrara, Giorgio Bassani's hometown, and as a Roman of Jewish descent, he experiences history as one endless catastrophe, like Ida Ramundo in Elsa Morante's La Storia. Perspective is key in a narrative filled with references to Baroque architecture, and cultural intimations of otherness, together with snippets of the "other" tongue, thus suggest a completely different view of Kerch's predicament, which is less about death than about his inability to escape the tyranny of self. The key to freedom is not proud self-absorption, but the unassuming beauty of Monte Testaccio, a mound of broken amphorae; it is in what abides, if only for a while, after everything has been destroyed. Despite himself, Kerch finds grandeur in catastrophe, in apocalyptic visions "of the Archangel Michael on the summit of . . . Hadrian's tomb." Niccolo directs his attention to what is there "too" ("anche"), to what "remains to be seen" after the grand display is over. "*Siamo anche italiani*," he states on behalf of his fellow Jews: we, too, are Italian. Therein lies hope, for as long as there is more, the end is yet to come.

Mathieu Duplay is Professor of American Literature at Université Paris Cité in Paris, France. His recent research focuses on the intersection between history and memory in LGBT literature of the AIDS era. In collaboration with several other scholars, he recently translated and edited Sarah Schulman's *Let the Record Show: A Political History of ACT UP New York, 1987-1993* (Montreuil: Editions Libertalia, to be published in 2026). Previously, Mathieu Duplay published a book-length study of John Adams's operas and oratorios, *Les oeuvres scéniques de John Adams: l'opéra et les frontières du littéraire* (Paris: Editions Honoré Champion, 2023). He currently serves as President of the French Association for American Studies (AFEA).

Durán Giménez-Rico, Isabel

Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Lucy Grealy and the Limits of Freedom: Illness, Beauty, and Belonging

This paper analyzes Lucy Grealy's *Autobiography of a Face* (1994) through the framework of Critical Medical Humanities and feminist theory, reading the memoir as both testimony of illness and political critique. At the age of nine, Grealy was diagnosed with Ewing's sarcoma; the aggressive treatments that saved her life left her permanently disfigured. Over the following decades, she endured more than thirty reconstructive surgeries, each promising restoration but often deepening her sense of alienation. Her memoir demonstrates that surviving cancer was only the beginning of her struggle, for the greater affliction lay in the stigma of ugliness in a culture that equates beauty with worth.

Critical Medical Humanities (CMH) is crucial here. Rather than treating her narrative simply as an occasion for empathy, CMH compels us to see how medical practices and cultural aesthetics intersect to produce inequality. Grealy's face became a site of both clinical experimentation and social punishment: surgeons treated her as a technical challenge while peers treated her as monstrous. The memoir's scenes of bullying, concealment, and despair reveal how categories of beauty function as instruments of exclusion, denying her the freedoms of love, belonging, and recognition.

Her account aligns with feminist critiques of beauty culture, showing how the female face is disciplined into what might be called a "docile face," endlessly reshaped or concealed in pursuit of unattainable ideals. At the same time, the Frankensteinian logic of her surgeries highlights how medical interventions can reinforce stigma rather than alleviate it. In narrating these experiences, Grealy exposes the entanglement of illness, gender, and aesthetics, and demonstrates that freedom is not evenly distributed but contingent on conformity to normative ideals of beauty. Ultimately, *Autobiography of a Face* stands as a civic intervention: a pathography that interrogates the limits of freedom and makes visible the exclusions hidden within cultural myths of autonomy, equality, and happiness.

Isabel Durán is Professor of North American Literature at the Complutense University of Madrid (UCM), where she serves as Dean. She was Vice-Provost for International Affairs (2015–2019), President of the Spanish Association for American Studies (SAAS) until 2019, and Chair of the Department of English Philology II (2013–2015). She also served on the General Council of the American Studies Association (2008–2011). Her research centers on gender studies, autobiography, literature, and ethnicity. Author of more than eighty articles and book chapters, she has also edited an eight-volume collection on Gender Studies. She directs the UCM research group "Gender Studies in the Anglophone World" and has supervised fourteen doctoral theses. Prof. Durán has been a Fulbright scholar (Louisville, 2000) and held research appointments at Harvard (2012) and UC Santa Barbara (2019). She co-leads the project *Illness Narratives: Towards a Gendered Health(care) Awareness* (2025–2028) and lectures internationally.

PATHOGRAPHIES AND THE POLITICS OF FREEDOM: WOMEN'S BODIES, ILLNESS, AND INEQUALITY

Enzerink, Suzanne

Universität St.Gallen

TRANSATLANTIC ARCHITECTURES OF UNFREEDOM

Just as visions of US freedom and democracy have traveled the globe, so have visions of unfreedom. I read a number of materials across language–English, German, and French–to make a case for the necessity of tracing the transatlantic and historic lineage of fiction in understanding the global parameters of unfreedom, in particular in what today might be termed the the far right. Fiction, as well as the strategies of fiction as applied to political writing, form a powerful affective force in narratives of racial decline and immigration, yet they have been almost entirely overlooked in the study of the far right so far in part due to an elitist conception of the far right as divorced from any form of arts and culture. Crucially, fiction and its circulation also helps to show that the far right has never been far from the mainstream in liberal democracies and its popular writings. In particular, these visions of unfreedom have persisently been constructed in transnational dialogue. I focus in particular on the conversations between W.E.B Du Bois and historian Lothrop Stoddard (author of The Rising Tide of Color Against White World Supremacy) and how these debates were discussed within a European context.

Suzanne Enzerink is assistant professor of American Studies at the University of St Gallen, Switzerland. She is the Swiss delegate to the EAAS board.

DISCOURSES OF FREEDOM: HISTORY-MAKING SPEECHES, ESSAYS, AND MANIFESTOS IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Ernest, John

University of Delaware

IMPOSSIBLE ORATORY:WILLIAM G. ALLEN AND THE CONDITIONS OF ELOQUENCE

DISCOURSES OF FREEDOM: HISTORY-MAKING SPEECHES, ESSAYS, AND MANIFESTOS IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Espinoza Garrido, Lea

Freie Universität Berlin

FROM HARRIET JACOBS TO CATHY PARK HONG: U.S. LIFE WRITING AND THE AFFECTIVE INFRASTRUCTURES OF (UN) FREEDOM AND (DIS)TRUST

The Declaration of Independence famously enshrined the "unalienable rights" of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Yet, as U.S. literature has long attested, this promise of freedom has been profoundly uneven in practice, distributed along lines of race, gender, class, and religion. While freedom is promised to all American citizens, the perceived freedom of some, in fact, often comes at the cost of the unfreedom of many. This interplay between freedom and unfreedom can be understood as part of what Sara Ahmed has called an "affective economy" (2004: 119): a circulation of emotions that binds subjects to the promise of national belonging while unevenly allocating freedom through structures of discursive, social, political, and financial power. In this paper, I argue that, within this economy, trust emerges as a crucial affective hinge. It is extended to some as evidence of full citizenship and withheld from others as proof of their contingent belonging, marking them as suspect, untrustworthy, or undeserving. As Lauren Berlant argues, the "whole infrastructure of trust" (2011: 42) surrounding the American Dream keeps citizens affectively attached to the fantasy of freedom and happiness, even when systemic inequities render those promises practically unattainable.

This paper will survey a range of Black and Asian American life writing across U.S. history – from nineteenth-century slave narratives to contemporary Korean American memoir – to explore how life narratives register and contest these affective contradictions of (un)freedom and (dis)trust. I argue that, despite their historical and cultural differences, such autobiographical forms are particularly equipped to foreground the stakes of racialized vulnerability, credibility, and authenticity, all of which are bound to questions of trust. At the same time, such texts provide the discursive space to articulate strategic distrust as a counter-affect and a form of resistance: a way of loosening attachment to national fantasies of freedom and envisioning alternative modes of belonging outside the nation's prescribed scripts of liberty and happiness. Reading these life narratives as interventions in the affective politics of (un) freedom, I will highlight how (dis)trust itself can function as an emancipatory practice that unsettles the exclusions embedded in one of U.S. democracy's most cherished ideals.

Lea Espinoza Garrido is Assistant Professor at the John-F.-Kennedy Institute for North American Studies at the Free University Berlin. She previously taught at the University of Münster, Augsburg University, and the University of Wuppertal, where she completed her dissertation on "Postpost-9/11 Imaginaries" in 2025. Lea held fellowships at Vassar College, the University of California, Santa Barbara, and Stanford University. She served as co-chair of the "Narrative Research Group" at Wuppertal's Center for Narrative Research, is a member of the international "More-than-Human Studies" research group, and a Postgraduate Representative and Advisory Board member of the German Association for American Studies (GAAS). Her publications include the co-edited volumes *Mobility, Agency, Kinship: Representations of Migration Beyond Victimhood* (2024), *Life Writing in the Posthuman Anthropocene* (2021), *Rammsteins Deutschland* (2022), a special issue of *Parallax on Migrant States of Exception* (2022), as well as several articles and book chapters on Arab American literature, zombie fiction, Black and Asian American writing, and popular culture.

FEELING FREE(DOM): AFFECTS AND/OF LIBERTY IN US LITERATURE

Fagan, Abigail

Leibniz Universität Hannover

One of the often unspoken—or only quietly discussed—realities of the academic field is the difficulty that some people experience becoming parents, particularly because many academics wait to try to become parents until we have stable jobs. For the past year, I have been a regular patient at a fertility clinic; as a feminist and an academic, I was not prepared for the ideological culture shock with which I have been confronted at this particular fertility clinic. While I have been quietly supported by a number of other academic women as I maneuver through the rigid schedule of fertility treatments alongside the rigid schedule of academic professionalism, this roundtable struck me as an appropriate venue to stop being quite so quiet about a reality that many academics experience: the difficulties of becoming a parent in the first place.

Abigail Fagan is a postdoctoral researcher in American Studies at the Leibniz University in Hannover, Germany. Her current book project is a decolonial feminist consideration of the social role of the university in US-American history and society. She received her PhD from the University of Connecticut in 2019, where her dissertation, "Bloated: Power and the Body in American Temperance Literature," won the university's CGS/ProQuest Prize for the best dissertation defended that academic year. Abby's further research interests include Critical Indigenous Studies, Black Studies, feminist and queer critique, and American women's writing. Abby acted as co-speaker for the German Association for American Studies' Diversity Roundtable from 2020 to 2023 and is currently a member of the EAAS's Women's Network Steering Committee.

Fakkeldij, Femke

Roosevelt Institute for American Studies

FREE BLACK LITERARY SOCIETIES AND THE GENDERED POLITICS OF RESPECTABILITY IN THE ANTEBELLUM NORTH

The proposed paper examines free Black literary societies in the urban antebellum North and seeks to establish how these societies influenced the engagement of Black communities with questions of freedom, citizenship, and democracy. Black literary societies, which flourished in the North in the 1830s and 40s, served a variety of functions: they encouraged intellectual debate and the production of poetry, essays, and other texts; they maintained libraries and offered members the opportunity to improve their literacy; and they served as a public platform through which members were able to voice their concerns and demands regarding issues such as free Black citizenship, abolitionism, and women's rights. Closely related to these efforts were antebellum understandings of what constituted respectability. Antebellum-era respectability politics has been varyingly understood as a performative, prescriptivist, and mimetic strategy – imposed upon the working class by the Black elite and aimed at appeasing the white gaze – or as an identity-affirming activist strategy, embodying an anti-slavery cultural ideal, and closely entwined with other forms of political activism. The ways in which literary societies and their members engaged with respectability politics greatly influenced their position within the broader abolitionist and civil rights movement. As such, the proposed paper explores the relation between Black literary societies and the abolitionist movement, assessing the significance of institutional organizing in free Black communities and considering the activist potential in literature as a form of personal and political expression. Because literary societies were most numerous, and arguably most influential, in Boston, Philadelphia and New York City, this paper is particularly concerned with the literary societies in these three cities. It examines the unique circumstances in which Black literary societies operated in each of these locations, highlighting the disparate and highly localized experiences of freedom across the antebellum urban North. In doing so, this paper underlines how Black communities – through institutional organizing – worked to shape their own interpretations of freedom and citizenship, independent of the legal and political categories imposed upon them by white authorities.

Femke Fakkeldij is a first-year PhD candidate on the "In the Shadows of Slavery" project at the Roosevelt Institute for American Studies in Middelburg, the Netherlands, under the supervision of professor Damian Pargas. This project examines the spectrum of democracy and free Black citizenship across the United States in the antebellum era. Femke's dissertation, provisionally titled "Free Black Literary Societies and the Gendered Politics of Respectability in the Antebellum North," is specifically interested in how Black literary societies in antebellum Boston, Philadelphia and New York City shaped understandings and experiences of citizenship for its members. Femke graduated from Leiden University with a BA in English Language and Culture (2023) and a MA in North American Studies (2024). She is a PhD board member of the Netherlands American Studies Association and part of the editorial board for the Netherlands American Studies Review.

Fernández-Caparrós, Ana

Universitat de València

VISIONS OF (LIMITED) FREEDOM: GROUNDED MOTHERS ON THE TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY AMERICAN STAGE

As Deboek and Stratford claim in *(M)Other Perspectives: Staging Motherhood in 21st Century North American Theatre & Performance* (Routledge, 2023), "mothers have occupied a very narrow band of representation on the American stage" (22). It is not that there have not been memorable mothers in U.S. drama, but rather, as playwright Sarah Ruhl wrote in one of her short essays, that "Seldom have we seen a mother's point of view on stage" (2014, 154). The reluctance or the very impossibility to develop matricentric theatrical narratives might be closely related to the fact that the American theatrical industry is still dominated by a "stubbornly entrenched, atheist white male aesthetics" (Sanchez and Hudes, 2019: n.d.) This is, nonetheless, slowly being challenged in the 21st century and, in fact, many plays premiered in the last decade have brought complex, disruptive, and nuanced explorations of the maternal center stage. By focusing primarily on Amy Herzog's *Mary Jane* (2017) and George Brandt's *Grounded* (2014), this paper seeks to critically assess how each of these plays enacts a complicated visibility of mothers on stage with unerring seriousness and, in doing so, responds to their overlooked presence in the social and political fabric of the world. Herzog's *Mary Jane* depicts the daily realities of a single mother caring for a severely disabled child. The play avoids sentimentality or pathologization, instead presenting *mothering* with dignity and gravity. In contrast, Brant's *Grounded*—a solo performance—follows a female fighter pilot reassigned to drone duty after pregnancy. The monologue explores how the patriarchal institution of *motherhood* constrains maternal agency, particularly within military and professional spheres. While their dramatic focus and strategies might be different, I will contend that both plays enact a shared, urgent cultural work: they present matricentric performances and expose the many limitations posed to women in their search for maternal freedom, at once making visible the sociopolitical forces that shape and hinder their maternal experience but also, and crucially, how the mothers at the center of these dramatic narratives warp, subvert and resist imposed obstacles.

Ana Fernández-Caparrós is Associate Professor of English and American Literature at the University of Valencia, Spain. Her current research investigates the representation of twenty-first-century global crises in contemporary drama, focusing on the performative negotiation of precariousness and the emergence of resilience; and on twenty-first century maternal narratives and performances. Her work has appeared in leading journals such as *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, *Cultura, Lenguaje y Representación*, *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, and *Atlantis*, as well as in edited volumes like *Staging 21st Century Tragedies: Theatre, Politics and Global Crisis* (Routledge, 2022) and *The Theatre of Paula Vogel: Practice, Pedagogy and Influences by Lee Brewer Jones* (Bloomsbury, Methuen Drama, 2023). She is also the author of the monograph *El teatro de Sam Shepard en el Nueva York de los sesenta* (PUV, 2015).

MOTHERING LIBERTY: MATERNAL VISIONS OF FREEDOM IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Ferrari, Anna

Università di Roma "La Sapienza"

BANNING TONI MORRISON: READING THE TRILOGY IN THE TRUMP ERA

For the past two and a half centuries, Americans have celebrated the first amendment as the cornerstone of their national identity. Being American was synonymous with having freedom of speech and freedom of expression. This idealistic notion is in sharp contrast to the widespread repression of speech that has become particularly blatant in the last few years. This phenomenon affects not only the press or comedians, but also literature. The endeavor of removing books from public libraries and school curricula, commonly referred to as 'book banning,' seems to be in service of maintaining an idealized vision of the United States that has little to do with the country's history or culture. According to PEN, one of the most notable, and most frequently, banned authors is Toni Morrison.

Morrison's case is particularly significant in the context of book banning for different reasons. Firstly, there is an evident dissonance in banning one of the most decorated contemporary authors, particularly a Nobel Prize winner. Secondly, Morrison was not just a novelist, but a prolific intellectual who not only participated in the cultural public debate, but actively contributed to shaping it. Thirdly, but perhaps most importantly, her work explores American culture and history in a way that subverts the idealization resulting from America's national mythmaking, thus carrying out what according to Morrison is the responsibility of the writer, that is, "sharpening the [country's] moral imagination." As the author herself remarked in an essay on censorship, "truth is trouble."

The paper would deal with the central themes in Morrison's work, such as the intersection of memory and history through the African-American gaze, while considering them in the context of the book-banning phenomenon. By focusing on Morrison's trilogy (*Beloved*, *Jazz*, and *Paradise*), which is structured around three crucial times in African-American history, the analysis aims at investigating the significance of Morrison's work in the social and cultural context of the Trump era, a time dominated by debates on issues such as critical race theory and DEI. Through a rereading of the trilogy, we will see how Morrison disturbs and informs Trump's America at a time in which freedom of speech and literature, specifically, are under attack.

Anna Ferrari holds a PhD in American literature from Sapienza, University of Rome and teaches American Literature and English at Sapienza, University of Rome and at the University of Florence as an adjunct professor. Her writing has appeared in *Ácoma. Rivista internazionale di Studi Nordamericani*, *Book 2.0*, *The New Americanist*, and *RSAJournal*. Among her research interests are AIDS literature, LGBTQ culture, camp, dark humor, the American myth and the literary representation of urban space.

THE HAUNTING LEGACY OF TONI MORRISON: CELEBRATING BLACK FREEDOM AND THE ETHICS OF CARE AND RESISTANCE

Filanti, Rita

Independent Researcher

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE IN THE US AT THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY: THE ANARCHIST PERSPECTIVE

The so-called 'Woman Question' was a hot topic in the US at the turn of the 20th century and it aBracted a constellation of reformers, agitators, and freethinkers. Within this variegated panorama, some post-Civil War feminists employed white suprematist arguments to advocate the extension of suffrage to white women only, opposing the same demand by the formerly enslaved, Indigenous, and immigrant men and women. In this regard, the position of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, one of the chief philosophers of the women's rights and suffrage movement, is notorious (Tetrault 2014).

To anarchist women activists, on the other hand, suffrage was not worth having: they neither cared for women's right to vote nor would they support their sisters in the fight for it. Emma Goldman, Voltairine de Cleyre and Lucy Parsons were the most outspoken. To Goldman the suffrageBes were making "a truly gigantic effort" only to benefit "a handful of propertied ladies, with absolutely no provision for the vast mass of working women" (Goldman 1911). Similarly, Lucy Parsons, America's first Black woman anarchist, opposed the ballot system as inherently corrupt while insisting on the necessity of freeing all workers from the wage system (Jones 2017). De Cleyre, possibly the most radical feminist of the three, never expected men to give women liberty: "A fillip for your paper rag! The ballot hasn't made men free, and it won't make us free" (de Cleyre 1891).

This paper explores different visions of freedom as expressed by American anarchist women through the journals they edited, the essays they wrote, and the lectures they delivered. Finding inspiration in the Quaker women reformers and abolitionists of the antebellum era, namely Lucretia MoB and the Grimké sisters (Faulkner 2011; Greenidge 2023), de Cleyre, alongside her anarchist comrades, had more ambitious goals and refused enfranchisement as the gateway to freedom.

Rita Filanti holds a PhD in Translation Studies and Anglo-American literatures from the University of Bari, Italy. She has been a lecturer of Italian in the US and Australia for more than ten years. Currently based in Bari, Rita is an independent scholar, language teacher, and literary translator. She has published over a dozen essays in the field of Gender and Translation, Translation and Censorship, American Studies, Transnational and Anarchist Studies. Rita is the Italian translator of Maxim D. Shrayer's memoirs and short fiction, *Aspettando America* (Pisa University Press, 2017), *Fuga dalla Russia* (Pisa University Press, 2019) and *Immigrato russo. Tre novelle* (WriteUp Books, 2024). Her monograph *Voltairine de Cleyre's Transnational Anarchism* (Manchester University Press, 2026) is forthcoming

A TENUOUS GRASP ON FREEDOM: COMPETING IDEAS FOR WOMEN'S SELF-DETERMINATION

Filip, Loredana

Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg

DIRT UNDER THE FINGERNAILS: FREEDOM AS RESPONSE-ABILITY AND THE SENSORY ETHICS OF THE EVERYDAY IN RICHARD POWERS

This paper reconsiders the American ideal of freedom—long defined through autonomy, will, and self-determination—by reading Richard Powers's fiction as a sustained meditation on ecological freedom: the capacity to respond within interdependence. The liberal promise of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" imagines freedom as separation and mastery. Powers instead redefines it as what Donna Haraway calls *response-ability*—a shared, embodied attentiveness to the world—but he renders it sensory and ordinary, translating an ethical concept into an everyday practice of perception.

In *Plowing the Dark* (2000), the virtual "Cavern" promises limitless vision and disembodied agency, while the prisoner Taimur, confined to a bare cell, finds freedom in his intimate engagement with the world: "the world goes simple, finally. Air, water, light, heat." The novel reveals a different kind of agency: one distributed across human and nonhuman actors. Powers contrasts the sterile perfection of the Cavern with the dirt under the fingernails of embodied life, suggesting that freedom, paradoxically, depends on acknowledging the freedom of others—the agency of the more-than-human world.

A similar inversion structures *The Overstory* (2018). After falling from a tree, Neelay Mehta loses physical mobility but turns to creating immersive digital worlds where players can roam freely. Yet his truest encounter with freedom occurs not in virtual omniscience but in an ordinary meeting with living trees on campus. Sound, scent, and texture replace spectacle; visionary freedom yields to the humility of relation.

Across both novels, Powers transforms posthumanist response-ability into a sensory ethics of the everyday. Freedom becomes an art of attention, grounded in ordinary gestures of relation where connection replaces control. In the Anthropocene, Powers invites readers to reimagine freedom not as the proliferation of choices but as the willingness to be touched, to listen, and to care. His fictions suggests that we are only as free as the worlds we allow to act through us.

Dr. Loredana Filip is a literary and cultural scholar whose work examines the intersections of affect, environmental thought, science, and narrative. She received her PhD in American Studies from Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität (LMU) Munich in 2023, where she was also a fellow at the Collaborative Research Centre "Cultures of Vigilance." Her postdoctoral research explores how literature shapes and reflects evolving notions of human–nonhuman relations, sensory experience, and ecological feeling, with a particular focus on everyday aesthetics and ordinary material interactions. Her publications include the book *Self-Help in the Digital Age* (De Gruyter, 2024), articles in *American Literatures*, *COPAS*, and *Medical Humanities*, chapters in edited volumes, and contributions to the research blog *Vigilanzkulturen*. Her work has been supported by fellowships and awards from the DAAD and FAU Erlangen–Nürnberg, among others. Under the pen name Laurel Dunn, she also writes essays and fiction exploring the poetics of everyday life.

REFLECTIONS FROM AMERICAN LITERATURES: CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE THREAT TO VISIONS OF FREEDOM

Fitzhugh Brundage, William

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

PRISONERS FOR FREEDOM: CAPTIVITY AND RETALIATION IN THE CIVIL WAR

My presentation draws attention to the dialectic between freedom, slavery, and imprisonment during the American Civil War. President Abraham Lincoln's July 30, 1863 order on retaliation marked a turning point in the Union's wartime policy and in the federal government's recognition of Black soldiers. The order declared that for every Union soldier unlawfully killed, a Confederate would be executed, and for every Union soldier enslaved, a Confederate prisoner would be put to hard labor. While the principle of retaliation was not new, Lincoln's justification was revolutionary. He made explicit that the order responded to Confederate mistreatment of Black Union troops, affirming that all soldiers—"of whatever class, color, or condition"—were entitled to protection under the laws of war. Enslaving or killing captured Black soldiers, he declared, was "a relapse into barbarism and a crime against the civilization of the age."

Lincoln's directive subtly but powerfully advanced the claim of Black citizenship. Earlier in the war, Lincoln had hesitated to recognize freed people as citizens, granting only specific rights. Now he insisted that the government's duty to protect applied equally to Black and white soldiers. Other officials, notably Solicitor General William Whiting, made this link explicit. In public statements and letters, Whiting affirmed that Black men serving in the Union army were citizens and should enjoy the same standing and protection as their white comrades.

The Confederacy refused to recognize Black soldiers as legitimate combatants, and Lincoln's order forced the issue. By conditioning all prisoner exchanges on equal treatment, the administration made racial equality in warfare a matter of Union policy. The resulting suspension of exchanges caused a rapid expansion of prison populations, leading to the creation of vast wartime prison camps. Lincoln's July 30 order, though often overlooked, thus marked a milestone in both the evolution of American citizenship and the grim transformation of wartime captivity.

W. Fitzhugh Brundage (he/him) is the William B. Umstead Professor of History at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He has written on lynching in the American South, socialist utopianism, and the contested historical memory in the American South. His most recent books include *Civilizing Torture: An American Tradition* (2019) and *A Fate Worse Than Hell: The Prisoner of War Experience in the American Civil War* (2026). Already a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, Brundage is currently at work on a global history of barbed wire.

UNEXPECTED BATTLES FOR LIBERTY: THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOMS DURING WARTIME

Foley, Barbara

Rutgers University-Newark

FREDERICK DOUGLASS AND THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION: THEN AND NOW

DISCOURSES OF FREEDOM: HISTORY-MAKING SPEECHES, ESSAYS, AND MANIFESTOS IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Forbes, Erin

University of Bristol

LIBERTY BY LAND OR SEA: WILLIAM AND ELLEN CRAFT'S RUNNING A THOUSAND MILES FOR FREEDOM

This paper examines William and Ellen Craft's memoir *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, which relates how the couple harnessed and transgressed gender and racial norms to escape from their Georgia enslaver. These formerly enslaved African American navigated the infamous Atlantic triangle in reverse: they sailed from North America, to Europe, to Africa, and back to North America. They raised their children in England and went on to establish agricultural schools in Liberia and Georgia. I ask what, through these Atlantic crossings, they came to understand the natural world within and beyond the lens of British Romanticism. In so doing, I explore not only the fragility but also the fluidity of human freedom between the 17th century and 19th centuries. I am particularly interested in how legal conceptions of freedom were entwined with concepts of water and air in the period's law and literature. In other words, I am interested in drawing on the case of the Crafts to explore what is "natural" (or unnatural) about "natural law," from the older legal doctrine of *partus sequitur ventrum*, which held that the legal status of a child as enslaved or free followed the mother's status at the time of birth to the later 1772 Somerset case, which held that England's free soil and pure air could not sustain slavery.

Erin Forbes is a Senior Lecturer (US equivalent Associate Professor) in 19th -century African American and U.S. Literature at the University of Bristol, UK. She is the author of *Criminal Genius in African American and U.S. Literature*, 1793-1845 (Johns Hopkins University Press 2024), which shortlisted for the University English Book Prize and the Arthur Miller Prize. Her essays have also appeared in *J19*, *Critical Analysis of Law*, *The Eighteenth Century*, *Poe Studies*, and elsewhere. She serves on the steering committee of the British Association of Nineteenth Century Americanists and is the Director of Teaching/Deputy Head of Subject for the English Department at the University of Bristol.

ATLANTICS: FREEDOM NARRATIVES IN ENTANGLED WATERS

Fortuna, James

Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen

¡SALUDOS AMIGOS! HEMISPHERIC SECURITY AND PAN-AMERICAN IDENTITY AT THE WORLD'S FAIRS OF 1939

In the spring of 1939, the world was invited to both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts of the United States to celebrate the opening of the final international expositions held before the outbreak of World War Two. Touted by organizers as the world's 'last best chance to promote peace and freedom,' the 1939–40 New York World's Fair and San Francisco Golden Gate International Exposition offered the host government an opportunity to strengthen hemispheric bonds on the eve of war. While Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany flooded airwaves and cultural institutions throughout South America, the Roosevelt administration waged its own campaign for hearts and minds by promoting a new sense of Pan American identity that the New Dealers in Washington would arrest the spread of anti-democratic ideals and ensure hemispheric security.

This paper explores the ways in which the expositions of 1939 were used to amplify the unifying message of the Good Neighbor Policy and promote a sense of Pan-American identity in the face of mounting Axis influence. It does so by paying special attention to the federal buildings built on each world's fair site. Both structures dominated the international zones of each exposition and contained a variety of artwork, exhibits, and iconography that reinforced America's commitment to staving off the threat of fascist-inspired ethnic nationalism both at home and south of the border. While historians maintain that the exposition in San Francsico was more outwardly concerned with the trans-equatorial alliances that underpinned Pan-American unity than its east coast counterpart, this paper will demonstrate the myriad ways the State Department ensured the New York exposition performed in an equally important function by exploring sites such as the Altar of the Good Neighbor, an exhibition on Simon de Bolivar, and plans for the construction of a PanAmerican building. Thanks to recent visits to the New York Municipal Archives and special collections of the California Historical Society, this paper will rely on architectural sketches, blueprints, development plans and budgets, as well as correspondence between designers and state officials throughout its exploration of the politically-inflected organization of space that shaped the average fairgoer's interaction with the representation of foreign and domestic power.

James is postdoctoral fellow at the University of Tübingen. His work focuses primarily on the twentieth century and is situated at the intersection of cultural and diplomatic history. He is especially interested in the architectural production of the interwar period and its relationship to the construction of national, ethnic, or civic identity.
He is co-editor, with Lisa D. Schrenk, of the forthcoming volume entitled International Expositions, 1851 to Today (Routledge, 2026), and author of several recent articles, including "Building Bridges on the Brink of War: Urban Planning, Pan-American Identity, and the International Expositions of 1939" Planning Perspectives (2025).
James received his PhD from the University of St Andrews in 2024 and taught history and international relations in the US and England before returning to Scotland on a lectureship the following year. He has been a visiting scholar at the European University Institute in Florence and Columbia University in the City of New York.

CONSTRUCTING NARRATIVES OF FREEDOM: AMERICAN EXHIBITS AT HOME AND ABROAD IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Francescato, Simone

Università Ca' Foscari Venezia

INTERGENERATIONAL CONFLICT AND FREEDOM IN THE SHORT STORIES OF PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR

My paper examines three stories by Paul Laurence Dunbar focusing on their representation of intergenerational conflict and freedom in late-nineteenth-century African American culture. Set in the post-Bellum period, these stories testify to the unrecognized variety of Dunbar's work beyond its affiliation with the Old South's plantation tradition. Belonging to different phases of the writer's career, "The Ordeal at Mt. Hope" (1898), "The Minority Committee" (1901), and "Old Abe's Conversion" (1904) center on the changing practices of religion to scrutinize the generational shift in values in the aftermath of the Civil War. At the same time, they offer a meditation on the problematic legacy of slavery in the Jim Crow Era, on the effects of the Great Migration, and on the increasing cultural divide between Southern and Northern blacks. Dunbar's stories examine with dramatic concision the tensions and possible alliances between the old and the new generation in this complex juncture of African American history.

Simone Francescato is Associate Professor of US literature and culture at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. His main area of research is late 19th- and early 20th-century American literature. He is the author of *Collecting and Appreciating: Henry James and the Transformation of Aesthetics in the Age of Consumption* (Peter Lang, 2010) and co-editor (with Rosella Mamoli Zorzi) of the volume *The Complete Fiction of Henry James, Vol XXVII. The Aspern Papers and Other Tales* (Cambridge UP, 2022). He has also published articles on African American writers (P. Hopkins, L. Hughes, W. Thurman, J. Fauset) and translated/edited a selection of short stories by Charles W. Chesnutt entitled *Il Procuste di Baxter e altri racconti* (Linea Edizioni, 2019).

THE AESTHETICS AND POLITICS OF FREEDOM IN THE ERA OF JIM CROW

Franzus, Aline

Universität Münster

PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE: A PUBLISHER PUSHING FOR CHANGE?

While the number of book challenges and bans are reaching a new record high every year, the banned book has, as a side effect, become profitable in recent years and now presents an opportunity for publishers to profit from the current crisis by aligning themselves with the fight against censorship and actively engaging in banned book marketing strategies. As a publisher, Penguin Random House (PRH) has been particularly vocal about their support of the "freedom to read" movement. Spanning from marketing campaigns to financially supporting non-profit organizations to contributing to legal action, PRH has committed to portraying themselves as a publisher that is pushing for change amidst the current wave of book censorship ("Read Banned Books"). In aligning themselves with social causes like the fight against book banning, PRH "bolster[s] their reputations as good citizens" (Banet-Weiser and Mukherjee: 11) and successfully taps into the current moment by commodifying the movement to counter book banning through their corporate social responsibility efforts. Due to their anti-censorship efforts, PRH was named one of TIME100 Most Influential Companies in 2025 (TIME100). While not all publishers can afford to position themselves in the current debate on censorship, as the biggest trade publisher worldwide, PRH has the financial resources to both employ new marketing campaigns, and to risk a minor backlash. Because of its unique positioning in the industry, PRH constitutes a fascinating case study examining the perceived value and commodification of the banned book today.

Aline Franzus is a Research Assistant at the Chair of American Studies at the University of Münster, Germany. She holds an M.A. in "British, American and Postcolonial Studies" (2023) from the University of Münster, Germany. Her research interests lie at the intersections of literary, cultural, and book studies, particularly in US-American contexts. Her master's thesis explored the implications and ramifications of contemporary US book banning and the ways in which it shapes our cultural industries today.

UN | BANNING BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

Furlanetto, Elena

Universität Duisburg-Essen

BLACK ATLANTIC, BLACK MEDITERRANEAN

Both the Atlantic and the Mediterranean have been paths towards or away from freedom. They have been crossed by trajectories of hope and despair, enslavement and freedom, and have generated storytelling traditions that sedimented into oral and written archives – or are beginning to do so. Our paper presents a parallel study of the Atlantic and the Mediterranean as comparable systems of Black textualities. "Black Atlantic / Black Mediterranean" considers these two bodies of water as geographic spaces connected through colonialism, slavery, migrancy, and forced mobility, but also marked by comparable textualities and punctuated with literary convergences. Our hypothesis is that the Black Atlantic and the Black Mediterranean are literary kin, and we intend to put them and their literary universes in conversation to show how both are archives of "an epic that repeats itself in space and time" (Di Maio 39). To find out how the Black Atlantic and the Black Mediterranean entangle and illuminate each other, we turn to a series of texts from both cultural geographies, including online archives of migrant biographies and historical Anglophone Black Atlantic narratives, but also contemporary fiction, poetry, and films, even artifacts, sculptures, and objects. We will organize and study these sources around tropes and archetypes we identify as central to both the Black Atlantic and the Black Mediterranean.

Elena Furlanetto is a lecturer and researcher at the University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany. Her current book project, tentatively titled "Racial Transcendence: Passing and its Adjacent Mobilities," redefines passing in the 19th -century US as a chain of intersectional crossings. Her postdoctoral project, "Ambiguity: Dis/Ambiguated Texts and Selves in North America, 1682-1889" centers on literary ambiguity in the early and 19th -century Americas and was awarded the 2023 Rob Kroes Publication Prize from the European Association of American Studies. Since 2021 she co-organizes the Research Network on early American studies "Voices & Agencies: America and the Atlantic, 1600-1865," together with Ilka Brasch (HU Berlin). Elena Furlanetto is the author of *Towards Turkish American Literature: Narratives of Multiculturalism in Post-Imperial Turkey* (2017) and co-edited two essay collections: *A Poetics of Neurosis: Narratives of Normalcy and Disorder in Cultural and Literary Texts* (with Dietmar Meinel, 2018) and *Media Agoras: Islamophobia and Inter/Multimedial Dissensus* (with Frank Mehring, 2020). Elena Furlanetto has published on migrant literatures, on the influences of Islamic mystic poetry on American romanticism, on Islamophobia in film and media, and more recently on Creoleness and transatlantic early American literature.

ATLANTICS: FREEDOM NARRATIVES IN ENTANGLED WATERS

Gallego, Mar

Universidad de Huelva

REWRITING (HIS)STORY IN TONI MORRISON'S HOME: MOBILITY, SPACE AND THE PROBLEMATIC NOTION OF HOME

One of the main concerns in Toni Morrison's *oeuvre* is the rewriting of American official historiography in order to include the voices of those "unaccounted for" in Morrison's famous coinage. Since historical accounts are usually narrated from a biased perspective, which only take into account the dominant views of those in power, Morrison is intent on offering an alternative narrative to set the records straight, as it were, by revisiting key periods in American history and articulating a viewpoint which deliberately exposes the racial, gender and class politics of each historical moment. I argue that one of her greatest contributions to this effort of reshaping official historiography can be found in her thought-provoking novel Home, published in 2011.

Home centers on one controversial period in American history, the 50s, also known as the "containment era," which paves the way for the subversive elements that will arise in the 60s. Concretely, in Home Morrison gives voice to African American veterans from the Korean war when they are discharged from service and supposedly return "home." In so doing, Morrison complicates notions of mobility, space and the very notion of both home and homeland by imagining a very different picture of the 50s. In her retelling she makes visible the disastrous impact of the African American engagement with the Korean war, the horrors of medical experimentation on the black population and racial terror. I contend that Morrison purposely uses the motif of the journey, highlighting a cross-country journey undertaken by its protagonist Frank Money in order to literally save his sister Cee's life. On the way, he will be subjected to a systemic racist mistreatment that forces him to rethink his patriotism and his allegiances. Through this character, Morrison brings to the forefront the deeply traumatic experiences that plague him, and by extension, black masculinities that are constantly under surveillance by the powers that be. This epic journey proves to be Frank's own means of liberation and salvation, emphasizing the importance of an ethics of care and love which resists dominant demeaning stereotypical designation and articulates the possibility of a freer, healthier sense of identity.

Dr. Mar Gallego is Full Professor of American and African American Literatures at the University of Huelva, Spain. She was a Visiting Scholar at the Universities of Northwestern (1995, 2003, 2007, 2011 and academic year 2017-18) and Harvard (1999, 2015 and 2016), and a lecturer in Ireland, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Poland, or Colombia. Her major research interests are the literatures of the African diaspora, with a special focus on contemporary women writers. She is the author of two monographs *Passing Novels in the Harlem Renaissance* (2003), and *On Both Sides of the Atlantic: Geographies of Home and Diaspora in Women Authors of African Descent* (2016). She has also co-edited eleven essay collections, among them *Myth and Ritual in African American and Native American Literatures* (2001), or *The Dialectics of Diasporas: Memory, Location and Gender* (2009). Her work has also been published in *Contemporary Women's Writing*, *African and Black Diaspora* or *ATLANTIS*. Currently, she is completing a monograph on Toni Morrison's fiction that will be soon published.

THE HAUNTING LEGACY OF TONI MORRISON: CELEBRATING BLACK FREEDOM AND THE ETHICS OF CARE AND RESISTANCE

Ganser, Alexandra

Universität Wien

CONQUEST V. (POST-)PLANETARY CARE IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN ASTROFUTURISMS

Outer space, in this so-called "Second Space Age," is increasingly becoming a lucrative market for private enterprises (with some sectors showing 10% annual growth rates), built on largely fictional futurities that are fundamentally propelled by US national mythologies. This paper contrasts two discursive strands of contemporary US-American astroculture (DeWitt Douglas Kilgore, 2000) regarding the relationship between the future of planet Earth and outer space: the continuation of a myth-based frontierism (see also Brad Tabas's paper in our panel), including a legacy of conquest and a (settler or extractivist) colonial mindset, as opposed to a minoritarian (re-)mapping of outer space in, for example, Afrofuturist expression and Indigenous futurisms that challenge frontierist logics. With the help of literary and filmic examples from both discourses, I suggest to re-theorize this relationship based on Gayatri Spivak's conceptualization of planetarity by trying to think beyond its limitations, proposing a POST-PLANETARY model of cosmic entanglements and inter-relationalities that hinge on concepts of care and connection rather than separation and exploitation. As the privatization of the cosmos is being prepared legally (see, e.g., the Artemis accords), politically, economically, and culturally (while more people on Earth are starving today than at any other point in human history), I will explore how thinking beyond the planetary with the help of Afro- and Indigenous futurisms can help us—as earthlings, but also as European Americanists—to develop a sustainable, less violent narrative that counters interplanetary colonization as, fundamentally, a U.S.-American masculine "mobility dispositive" (K. Manderscheid).

Alexandra Ganser holds the chair in North American Studies (literatures and cultures) at the University of Vienna and co-directs the Centre for Canadian Studies (ZKS) there. She is co-editor of the book series "Maritime Literature and Culture" with Meg Samuelson and Charne Lavery (Palgrave Macmillan). A Fulbright alumna and former Daniel Christoph Ebeling fellow at the American Antiquarian Society (see her monograph *Crisis and Legitimacy in Atlantic American Narratives of Piracy, 1678-1865*, Palgrave 2020), her research interests currently focus on North American American astrocultures.

"FREE FROM DEATH, FREE FROM EARTH": POST-PLANETARY FREEDOM IN THE AGE OF TECHNOCAPITALIST AUTHORITARIANISM

Garrigós, Cristina

Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia

THE LIBERATION OF WIRES: CREATIVE RESISTANCE, POWER, AND FREEDOM IN GIANNINA BRASCHI'S PUTINOIKA

Giannina Braschi's literary oeuvre is defined by a radical and sustained pursuit of freedom—formal, linguistic, and political. From her early works, *El imperio de los sueños* (1988) and *Yo-Yo Boing!* (1998), to *United States of Banana* (2011), and her most recent publication, *Putinoika* (2024), Braschi consistently dismantles conventional boundaries of genre, identity, and nationhood. Her transgressive poetics speak directly to Latinx communities and confront the colonial entanglements between Puerto Rico and the United States. As John "Rio" Riofrio aptly notes, Braschi's work rompe esquemas, challenging dominant narratives through hybrid forms and multilingual expression.

This paper examines *Putinoika* as a culmination of Braschi's liberatory vision. Written during the Trump era—with Trump himself appearing as a character—*Putinoika* is a multi-genre epic that blends humor, tragedy, and political critique. Inspired by ancient Greek drama, the work explores themes of frenzy, plague, and authoritarianism in the age of Putin and Trump. Braschi interrogates the sociopolitical landscape of the contemporary United States, proposing a literary and existential unbinding: "the liberation of wires, the unraveling of a knot—or of many knots that should not be knotted together" (*Putinoika*, 243). Central to Braschi's critique is the control of language as a mechanism of power: "Block words, block books, block testimony, block immigrants, block freedom of expression. They say it's liberty. It's not monarchy. It's dictatorship" (*Putinoika*, 116). Through her radical literary strategies, Braschi envisions creative resistance as a path to individual and collective emancipation. Her work challenges readers to reconsider the meaning of freedom in times of crisis, offering an artistic vision that is also deeply political and socially engaged. This presentation explores how Braschi's experimental poetics open new imaginative, literary, and political pathways for understanding freedom, resistance, and identity in the contemporary moment.

Cristina Garrigós-González (cgarrigos@flog.uned.es) is Professor of American Literature at the National University of Distance Education (UNED) in Spain. Her research spans contemporary U.S. literature, film, music, memory studies, life-writing, and gender. She has published extensively on authors such as Kathy Acker, Gloria Anzaldúa, Giannina Braschi, Helena María Viramontes, Don DeLillo, and Ruth Ozeki, among others. Her scholarly contributions include the monograph *John Barth: un autor en busca de cuatro personajes* (Universidad de León, 2000), the Spanish edition of Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (*La mujer quijote*, Cátedra, 2004), and *Alzheimer's Disease in Contemporary US Fiction: Memory Lost* (Routledge, 2021). She is co-author of *God Save the Queens: Pioneras del Punk* (66rpm, 2019), a book of interviews with Paula Guerra and Nuria Triana, and co-editor of *Punk Connections: A Transcultural Perspective* (University of Barcelona, 2017) with Nuria Triana-Toribio. Her most recent publication is *Women in Rock Memoirs: Music, History, and Life-Writing* (Oxford University Press, 2023), which explores the intersections of gender, music, and autobiographical narrative. She currently serves as President of the Spanish Association for American Studies (SAAS, 2023–).

CREATIVE INSURGENCIES: REIMAGINING FREEDOM FROM BELOW IN LATINX LITERATURE AND ART

Gautier, Amina

University of Miami

THE SEARCH FOR 'FREEDOM' IN CHARLES CHESNUTT'S THE WIFE OF HIS YOUTH

Only two of the short stories in Charles Chesnutt's *The Wife of His Youth* (1899) focus on characters seeking to achieve "freedom." This paper will look at the contrasting depictions of freedom in "The Passing of Grandison" and "Uncle Wellington's Wives" an argue that though "The Passing of Grandison" and "Uncle Wellington's Wives" adopt different tactics, both offer narratives that complicate the idea of freedom, asking if the individual ability to be free from slavery should be enough for an enslaved person, or if such a person has the right to expect not just life and liberty, but also the pursuit of happiness, and if so, has the right to decide what that pursuit should be.

Set immediately after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, in "The Passing of Grandison" Dick Owens, the son of a slaver, attends a trial in which a white Ohioan abolitionist is sentenced for aiding a fugitive slave's escape, which inspires Dick to attempt a similar feat. Deciding to run off his father's slave, Grandison, to freedom, he encounters difficulties when Grandison ostensibly resists and fights for his freedom to remain enslaved and return to Kentucky. Grandison's refusal to secure to freedom while in the northeast appears to attest to faithfulness and incorruptibility but instead shows that a man cannot be comfortably free while his family remains in chains.

All the dire consequences Dick Owens father predicts in "The Passing of Grandison" i.e. a black man traveling north and finding freedom distasteful and lonely and longing to return south come true in "Uncle Wellington's Wives," where former slave Wellington Braboy is dissatisfied because he defines freedom as "the state of ideal equality" where black people "sent their children to school with the white children… sat by white people in the churches and theatres, ate with them in the public restaurants, and buried their dead in the same cemeteries" and enjoyed the freedom of "intermarriage." After an unsuccessful stint up north, Wellington undergoes a reverse journey, undertaking the trip back south at risk of life and limb, returning to North Carolina resembling a fugitive "clad in dusty rags and limping along with bare feet" (262), and regretting his northern sojourn, deciding "He had purchased his liberty as too great a price" (261).

Dr. Amina Gautier is the author of the short story collections *At-Risk*, *Now We Will Be Happy*, *The Loss of All Lost Things*, and *The Best That You Can Do*. For her body of work, she has received the PEN/Malamud Award for Excellence in the Short Story. A recipient of fellowships from the American Antiquarian Society, the Camargo Foundation, Chateau de Lavigny, Flamboyan Foundation, Fondazione Bogliasco, Le Maison Dora Maar, MacDowell Colony, the Mellon Foundation, and the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, Gautier is Professor of English at the University of Miami and the Spring 2026 Mary Routt Chair in Writing at Scripps College. Her critical essays appear in *Approaches to Teaching Jacobs's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, *Approaches to Teaching South Asian Anglophone Diasporic Literature*, *The Cambridge Companion to The American Short Story*, *Critical Insights: Frederick Douglass*, *Daedalus*, and *Libraries and Culture*, and are forthcoming in *Oxford Handbook of African American Humor Studies*, and *Approaches to Teaching Post-1945 Short Fiction from the United States*.

THE AESTHETICS AND POLITICS OF FREEDOM IN THE ERA OF JIM CROW

Georgi-Findlay, Brigitte

Technische Universität Dresden

THE LAND BEFORE HER: VISIONS OF FREEDOM ON THE OVERLAND JOURNEY IN 1883

As a prequel to *Yellowstone*, 1883 serves as an origin story explaining the Duttons' relationship to the land. Like *Yellowstone*, 1883 dramatizes contrasting visions of freedom tied to the land. If *Yellowstone* can be read as a pessimistic story about the death of the West and the end of a way of life, 1883 tells of the beginnings of disillusioning insights regarding the mythic promises of the West, this time in the form of a coming-of-age story set on the 19th-century overland trail. With a 17-year-old woman as diarist, and with a multicultural cast of travelers and Indigenous residents, the series offers insights into the overland journey that authorize the showrunner as historiographic instance.

This paper examines how 1883, via the story of the ancestral Duttons' journey, engages with concepts of freedom tied to the land and with the myth of the West. It raises the question how 1883, with its focus on a white woman's perspective, her 'going native' and ensuing death, can serve as an origin story legitimizing the contemporary Duttons' hold onto 'their' land as private property and as mythic land. The paper finally considers the historiographic work of the show with regard to the representation of women, European immigrants, and Indigenous people in the context of the overland journey.

Brigitte Georgi-Findlay is Professor emerita of North American Studies at the TU Dresden in Germany. She earned her doctorate at the University of Heidelberg with a dissertation on N. Scott Momaday. Her second book dealt with The Frontiers of Women's Writing: Women's Narratives and the Rhetoric of Westward Expansion (University of Arizona Press, 1996). She has published on Native American literature, gender and colonial discourse, Americanization and transatlantic relations, nature and technology, and urban space in the American West. In recent years, her work focused on Western films and Western television series (old and new).

RE/GENERATION, VIOLENCE, AND AMERICAN CULTURE WARS: SETTLER FREEDOMS IN YELLOWSTONE

Gerhard, Atalie

Universität des Saarlandes

CHOOSING LIFE: SELF-DETERMINATION AS MATERNAL RESISTANCE IN SALVAGE THE BONES (2011) AND FUTURE HOME OF THE LIVING GOD (2017)

Shortly after *Roe v. Wade* took effect in the U.S., lesbian feminist Adrienne Rich observed that most women remain denied real agency in deciding whether to become mothers, despite the deeply personal nature of the experience. This talk takes its cue from her remark and asks how self-determination as a mother might emerge under conditions of structural disenfranchisement. Focusing on the disaster fictions *Salvage the Bones* (2011) by Jesmyn Ward and *Future Home of the Living God* (2017) by Louise Erdrich (Ojibwe), it explores how reproductive (un)freedom is negotiated. While reproductive technologies increasingly allow women to independently build families, these options remain inaccessible to many—especially disenfranchised Black and Indigenous women like the pregnant narrators, Esch and Cedar, who are subject to sexual and structural violence that limits their choices.

The American cultural imaginary of motherhood remains caught between two poles: the rejection of motherhood—including through (self-)abortion—and its celebration as a feminist practice of empowerment, as envisioned by writers like Audre Lorde and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. Esch and Cedar, however, embody the space between these binaries: their choices are neither framed as political gestures nor purely reactive. Instead, both assert their subjectivity through the quiet yet radical decision to love and carry their unborn children, resisting objectification without conforming to state-sanctioned ideals. As an African American teenager in Mississippi awaiting Hurricane Katrina and an Ojibwe fugitive adopted by white Minnesotans under institutional surveillance, they place reproductive (un)freedom at the center of any anti-racist and decolonial reading of motherhood.

Atalie Gerhard is a Lecturer at the University of Jena and Doctoral Candidate at Saarland University as an alumna of the IRTG "Diversity: Mediating Difference in Transcultural Spaces." She taught in Eichstätt, Erfurt, Tübingen, and Paderborn and lectured in Bucharest, El Paso, and Potsdam. She guest-edited an issue of *AmLit—American Literatures*. Her publications appeared in *Life Writing, Creativity, and the Social in the Americas* (2024), *Narrating, Representing, Reflecting 'Disability': 21st Century 'American' Perspectives* (2024), *Black Matrilineage, Photography, and Representation: Another Way of Knowing* (2022), *Exploring the Fantastic: Genre, Ideology, and Popular Culture* (2018), and *American Multiculturalism in Context: Views from at Home and Abroad* (2017) and the *Polish Journal for American Studies*, the *Journal of American Studies of Turkey*, the *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, *[Inter]sections – The American Studies Journal at the University of Bucharest*, *American Studies in Scandinavia*, and *The International Review of African American Art*.

A TENUOUS GRASP ON FREEDOM: COMPETING IDEAS FOR WOMEN'S SELF-DETERMINATION

Gerund, Katharina

Universität Zürich

FROM ARAMCO KID TO NAVY SPOUSE: PETROCULTURE AND MILITARY LIFE IN RACHEL STARNES' MEMOIR THE WAR AT HOME (2016)

The US military as well as American warfare are deeply entangled with petroculture and extractivism. This talk sets out to explore this nexus through the lens of military spouses' life writing. While expanding the corpus of war stories within the context of the so-called Global War on Terror to include the home front and the perspective of military families, these texts largely sideline the connections between fossil fuels, imperialism, and war as a topic even though their representations of military life are shaped by extractivist logics and are embedded in petroculture.

Rachel Starnes' 2016 *The War at Home: A Wife's Search for Peace (and Other Missions Impossible)* offers an interesting case study in this regard. In this memoir, Starnes connects her growing up as the daughter of an oil rig worker with her life as a Navy wife in times of war, comparing the demands on families imposed by extractivist capitalism with those of the military-industrial complex. The parallels that she draws between the two "greedy institutions" (Lewis Coser) – the oil industry and the military – revolve around the frequently absent father/husband, the required mobility, as well as the logics of sacrifice within the family. They are also linked to ideas of American freedom defended by the US military and secured by access to resources, especially fossil fuels.

I argue that the parallelization of these two 'worlds' in *The War at Home* ultimately works towards obscuring their strong connections and the interdependencies between extractivist capitalism and US military culture. They are portrayed as structurally similar, but largely disconnected. Combining a critical military studies approach with recent research on extractivism, the paper uses this case study to exemplarily show how 21st-century life writing by military spouses negotiates the connections between military life, warfare, and petroculture in explicit and implicit ways.

Katharina Gerund is a professor of American Literature and Culture at the University of Zurich, Switzerland. She received her PhD from the University of Bremen and her Habilitation from FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany. She is the author of *Transatlantic Cultural Exchange: African American Women's Art and Activism in West Germany* (transcript 2013) and the co-editor of several special issues and volumes, e.g. on solidarity, re-education, and global melodrama. She has published widely on popular culture, military culture, and questions of race and gender in the transatlantic world. Katharina is currently in the process of preparing her second book manuscript entitled "Happy Home Front Heroines? Military Spouses in the Cultural Imaginary of the US" for publication.

FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM IN THE ANTHROPOCENE? ECOLOGY AND WARFARE IN CONTEMPORARY US CULTURE

Giannouli, Maria

Aristotéleio Panepistímio Thessaloníkīs

DATAFIED LIVES AND SOCIAL SCORING: INTERMEDIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF SURVEILLANCE IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN CULTURE

This paper explores how Dave Egger's *The Circle* (2013) and Rashida Jones, Michael Schur, and Charlie Brooker's *Black Mirror* episode "Nosedive" (2016) dramatize the logics of surveillance capitalism and their repercussions for social relations and notions of freedom in contemporary American culture. Both texts explore the mechanisms through which digital platforms transform personal data into behavioral surplus, in order to enhance prediction efficacy, thereby reconfiguring subjectivity, conformity and dispossession. While Egger's novel depicts the rise of a Silicon Valley tech giant that imposes transparency as a moral imperative, set to transform—and potentially dismantle—democracy in its current form, "Nosedive" sharply satirizes the obsession with reputation economies the social media hegemony exacerbates, and the consequences social scoring systems have – regulating everyday interaction and alienating individuality and identity – alluding to China's Social Credit System already put into practice to monitor citizens' behavior. These works vividly express post 9-11 anxieties, such as the expansion of Big Tech and the consolidation of algorithmic governance in the United States. The present paper aims to depict how literature and television respond to sociopolitical crises like the securitization of life, the erosion of privacy, and the normalization of digital surveillance in the name of efficiency and social order. By engaging both literary and televisual texts, this paper adopts an intermedial perspective that highlights how different narrative forms and media modalities articulate complementary critiques of surveillance capitalism. Drawing on Shoshana Zuboff, Frank Pasquale, and Harcourt, I argue that together these cultural texts not only reflect but also critically interrogate – across media – the instrumentarian power, the expository or black box society which reshape democratic life, freedom, and the eclipse of humanism, exposing the costs of compliance in modern data-driven societies.

Maria Giannouli is a Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of American Literature and Culture at the School of English, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTh). She holds an M.A. in Literary Studies with a focus on Modern Literature from Goldsmiths, University of London, and a B.A. in English Language and Literature from AUTh. Her Ph.D. research examines the role of surveillance in contemporary American culture, with a particular emphasis on literature, TV series, and video games. Her broader academic interests include contemporary American literature, postmodernism, techno-dystopias, gender studies, and climate change fiction. During her M.A. studies at Goldsmiths, she focused on Postmodern Fiction, Sexuality and Gender, and American Literature of Climate Change which laid the foundation for her current exploration of contemporary American Culture. Maria is also a member of the Multimodal Research and Reading Group at the School of English, AUTh, supervised by Professor Dr. Tatiani Rapatzikou, and a member of the Hellenic Association for American Studies.

Gillespie, Laura

Liverpool John Moores University

LABORING FOR FREEDOM: BLACK AGENCY AND LABOR IN "CONTRABAND" CAMPS DURING THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

This paper explores how Black people in refugee or "contraband" camps used labor as a means to fight for citizenship during the American Civil War. The Black population of the South acted on anti-slavery convictions learned during their time in bondage by carrying out self-emancipatory actions and running away in massive numbers when the war began. Grounded in their experiences of slavery, formerly enslaved people forged new lives in freedom behind Union army lines, first as confiscated "contraband" of war in May 1861, and later as wholly freed people. Running to Union lines and laboring for the Union cause was one of the most explicitly political acts that formerly enslaved people could perform; removing their labor from the Confederate war effort and dedicating it to the Union was the ultimate form of revolt against their former enslavers, and a decisive demonstration of agency that they hoped would be a part of their lives moving forward. The development of a distinct, African American politics emerged at a regional level in many parts of the South at this time and ultimately at a national level in the final few years of the war. This paper argues that through their laboring efforts on behalf of the Union cause, Black Southerners practiced politics and fought for their freedom in a way that was progressive, radical, and revolutionary.

Laura Gillespie is a scholar of Black and Indigenous U. S. history. She currently works as a Lecturer in Modern American History at Liverpool John Moores University. Her monograph, "*This School of Freedom*": *The Development of Black Politics in Refugee Camps during the Civil War and Reconstruction*, is under review with the University of Illinois Press. This project uses grassroots organizing as a lens to study the development of Black politics within refugee or "contraband" camps during the Civil War and Reconstruction. It argues that the activism of formerly enslaved people within these camps was essential in transforming the national political landscape of the United States in the post-Emancipation era and resulted in the creation of a distinct African American politics that carries through to this day.

IN THE SHADOWS OF SLAVERY: FREE BLACK CITIZENSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES, 1783-1865

Giordano Drake, Janine

Indiana University

THE IMPLICIT MORAL PHILOSOPHY OF TAX REVOLTS IN THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN LEFT

The history of the United States is littered with moments where working people have come together to demand more public goods for the poor, including better schools and poor people's expanded access to food and medicine. However, in almost every instance, those workers have also exempted themselves from the moral responsibility to pay for the expanded welfare state. Urban artisans and farmers in the 1840s and 1850s demanded expansions to public schools and expected them to be paid for by the sale of more public lands. When some of these ideas came to fruition in Congressional legislation passed during the Civil War, many became emboldened to the idea that working people's access to public goods did not require garnishing their scant profits or starvation wages in the form of taxes. In 1871, South Carolina farmers united in "taxpayers conventions" to protest state taxation while simultaneously demanding more state and federal subsidies to fund public education. By the early 1880s, Knights of Labor, representing the demands of the nascent farmer-labor movement, demanded expanded public education for working people, paid for by a combination of the national public domain and corporate income taxes. They argued that they helped create the wealth held by industry and for that reason it ought to return to the people. This farmer-labor coalition had some success in convincing lawmakers of this argument. New, corporate income taxes, inheritance taxes and taxes on bank capital funded public education expansions in many Northern states, and land sales funded public education expansions in many Western states. However, as the paper argues, the labor movement's efforts to dodge taxes had, by the early twentieth century, become a victim of its own success. By the early twentieth century, the American Left had developed a concept of "democracy" and "industrial justice" that made little room for workers themselves to contribute to the cost of public goods through their wages. (The reasons, of course, are complicated. Workers only begrudgingly accepted payment in wages.) But, the paper explores this extended conceit within the American Left that public goods can come about through the plunder of another new source of national wealth.

Janine Giordano Drake is Clinical Associate Professor of History at Indiana University. She is author of *The Gospel of Church: How Mainline Protestants Vilified Christian Socialism and Fractured the Labor Movement* (Oxford University Press, 2023), a bottom-up revision of the Social Gospel movement, and coeditor of *The Pew and the Picket Line: Christianity and the American Working Class* (university of Illinois Press, 2015), an edited volume of essays about Christianity and capitalism. She is currently working on a history of funding for public schools and poorhouses in the United States from 1760 to 1960.

Gish, Melanie

Hochschule Heilbronn

DOMINION VS. SERVANTHOOD: COMPETING EVANGELICAL VISIONS OF ECONOMIC FREEDOM AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

The biblical creation story in the Book of Genesis and the human-nature dualism it established has long been associated with an attitude of domination and exploitation toward the natural world rather than with a posture of ecological sensibility and equity. In the United States, scripturally derived ideas of dominion are also associated with the latest surge in Christian nationalism, and, more specifically, tied to Christian reconstructionism. The latter is a fundamentalist movement within the Religious Right that pursues the reconstruction of society under the dominion of God in all spheres of human life and activity, including government, art, science, and economics.

Despite the political and theological cards seemingly stacked against conservative Christian forms of environmental activism, the first evangelical environmental organization in the US was established at the outset of the Reagan Revolution in 1979/80, under a leader who claims that conservation is not only originally conservative, but that it must also, quite naturally, entail a posture of servanthood as opposed to domination. Since then, fewer than a dozen national organizations have been founded at the intersection of Evangelicalism and environmentalism. The evangelical environmental –or creation care– movement is miniscule compared to the two increasingly polarizing parent movements that spawned its precarious existence in-between. Notwithstanding its small size, however, it has experienced intra-evangelical criticism and countermobilization almost since its very inception.

Among creation care's most severe and persistent critics have been proponents of free-market capitalism and Christian reconstructionism, most notably affiliated with the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation. The latter was specifically founded to counter the claims and activism of creation care evangelicals on grounds of theology, science, and economics.

This paper looks at key instances of disagreement between the creation care movement and its intraevangelical discontents. It explores their competing visions of environmental protection by paying particular attention to differing interpretations of the biblical dominion mandate and diverging positions on economic freedom and capitalism.

Melanie Gish is an Independent Scholar of American Studies and an English Lecturer at Heilbronn University of Applied Sciences in Germany. She received her PhD from the Heidelberg Center for American Studies at Heidelberg University and is the author of *God's Wounded World: American Evangelicals and the Challenge of Environmentalism* (Baylor University Press, 2020). Her research interests include American Evangelicalism; creation care; religion and politics; environmental history and activism; and the intersection of faith, culture, and social action.

Gleeson, David

Northumbria University

‘I SEE TODAY THE FIRST COTTON BLOOM IN CORNUCOPIA’: PRESERVING SLAVERY IN THE ERA OF EMANCIPATION

On January 1st, 1863, Tennessee planter, John Houston Bills, seemed glad his “servantsdid not perceive that they are free by Lincoln’s proclamation.” Within a few days of theNew Year, however, they had. They became “not inclined to work,” as he put, it and anumber had already made their way to the Union army headquarters at Memphis. Insome ways Bills was, as James Roark put it in his seminal work on slavery’s end, theclassic “master without slaves.” Defeated and dejected as the Confederacy fell steadilyunder Federal control, Confederate whites became despondent about slavery, even tothe extent of noted diarist Mary Chesnut reinventing herself as a “fiery abolitionist.” Still,the expanded vision of American freedom that the Emancipation Proclamation declaredremained unclear as Bills, and thousands of other white Confederates like him,continued to preserve slavery by any means necessary. Bills himself, despite the gloomhe felt at US victories in the Civil War, still managed to have enslaved people plant andnurture cotton on his properties at “Hickory Valley” and “Cornucopia” through the War.Reflecting the latter’s classical name, he believed that control of labor would continueto provide for him from the “horn of plenty.”

Based on personal papers, government documents, and contemporary newspapers,this paper examines white Confederate attempts to preserve slavery through the CivilWar, especially in the aftermath of the Emancipation Proclamation. Even as ideologicalplank after plank in the defense of slavery disintegrated, Confederates sought topreserve slavery physically. They would not give up easily “their” laborers, nor theircapital investment in that labor. In the struggle to create a slaveholders’ republic,slavery thus remained the “cornerstone,” and not, as Armistead Robinson hasdescribed it, the destructive “millstone” that dragged the Confederate States of Americadown to its demise. Even at War’s end, when their state designed to protect slavery hadcollapsed, they sought new forms of domination. Ultimately, it was this quest to directAfrican American labor to their continued advantage which drove their wholeConfederate experience as well as their post-War attitude toward redefinitions ofAmerican freedom.

David T. Gleeson is Professor of American History at Northumbria University inNewcastle upon Tyne, England. He is author of *The Green and the Gray: The Irish in theConfederate States of America* and is principal investigator of the Arts and HumanitiesResearch Council (AHRC) UK supported project Civil War Bluejackets: Race, Class, andEthnicity in the US Navy, 1861-1865, www.civilwarbluejackets.com

CONTESTED VISIONS OF AMERICAN FREEDOM IN THE CIVIL WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION ERA

Gómez Muñoz, Pablo

Universidad de Zaragoza

TRAJECTORIES OF FREEDOM? THE INTERSECTION OF BODIES AND SPACES IN VILLENEUVE’S DUNE (2021) AND DUNE: ART TWO (2024)

This paper argues that Denis Villeneuve’s films *Dune* (2021) and *Dune: Part Two* (2024) develop a discourse that treads a fine line between freedom and oppression, as the narrative moves between the cosmopolitan disposition of the protagonist, Paul Atreides (Timothée Chalamet), and his messianic impulses. Paul is a perceptive learner who is shaped by multiple planetary cultures. Yet, his remarkable ability to lead complicates an interpretation of the quest for freedom of those he seems to collaborate with: the oppressed population of the desert Planet Arrakis. The paper explores the contrast between the liberatory and messianic dimensions of the films by paying special attention to the relationship between spaces and actors. Evdokia Stefanopoulou notes that science fiction films tend to revolve around either bodies or worlds (spaces), although she also acknowledges that they are related (2023: 14-15, 174). Taking Stefanopoulou’s work as a point of departure, this paper looks at the relationship between spaces and bodies in Villeneuve’s *Dune* adaptations and the ways in which they develop the films’ discourses on cultural understanding and freedom. Villeneuve’s Dune universe stands out because of its distinct rendering of the different locations in which the action takes place: the imposing cityscapes of Giedi Prime, the vast deserts of Arrakis, or the coastal cliffs of Caladan. These landscapes are closely connected to the characters that populate and rule over them. For example, the infrared black-and-white shots of Giedi Prime convey the crudity and ruthlessness of its inhabitants and the Harkonnens, the cruel ruling family of that planet. This paper focuses on how the different planetary backgrounds of the main characters intersect with the figure of Paul Atreides and structure the films’ discourses on freedom and cosmopolitanism. My analysis will also draw on Aitken and Dixon’s work on geographies of film. I will specifically focus on the notions of spaces as actors and spaces as doing work (2006: 329-335). Given the awe-inspiring character of the landscapes in the film, I also consider Daniela Berghan’s discussion of exoticism in transnational cinema (2023) to explore how the captivating landscapes in *Dune* and *Dune: Part Two* both advance and constrain the films’ discourse on freedom.

Pablo Gómez-Muñoz is Associate Professor of English and Film at the University of Zaragoza (Spain). He has published the monograph *Science Fiction Cinema in the Twenty-First Century: Transnational Futures, Cosmopolitan Concerns* (Routledge, 2023), which received one of the 2024 ESSE Book Awards and one of the 2024 AEDEAN Research Awards. He has also co-edited the volume *Cosmopolitan Aspirations in Contemporary Cinema* with María del Mar Azcona and Julia Echeverría (Routledge, 2025). He is a member of the research project “Performing Space / Spatializing Performance: The Interface between Actors and Space in 21st-Century Transnational Cinema.” He is Book Reviews Editor at *Film Journal* and coordinates the Speculative Fiction workgroup at NECS.

PERFORMING FREEDOM IN SPACE FROM CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD TO CONTEMPORARY CINEMA

González, Jesús Ángel

Universidad de Cantabria

WHOSE FREEDOM IN BRAZILIAN WESTERNS?: FROM CANGACEIRO FILMS TO CONTEMPORARY POSTWESTERNS

When the Western genre arrived in Brazil, it already found an autochthonous form of "settler colonial cinemas," a group of films that, according to Peter Limbrick, developed independently from American Westerns in former colonies like Australia or Argentina. These were "bushranger films" in Australia, or cangaceiro films in Brazil: films like *Filho Sem Mãe* (Seabra 1925), or *Lampião, o Rei do Cangao* (Abrahão, 1936) which tell the story of Lampião and other famous bandits from the sertão in the Northwest of Brazil. These bandits were called cangaceiros and they were active in this area during the second half of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century, representing the search for freedom of the poorer population in the Northeast of Brazil, a region with a higher degree of African influence than others in Brazil, which had been historically "otherized" and ill-treated by the more affluent (and whiter) Southern states.

As in the Australian and Argentinian case, this autochthonous Brazilian genre was hybridized with the American Western after the 1940s and 1950s, creating a new hybrid which is known as the Nordestern, a genre which combines the Brazilian spaces and history with the syntax and/or semantics of the American Western, with examples as popular as *O Cangaçeiro* (Lima Barreto, 1953) or *A Morte Comanda o Cangaço* (Coimbra, 1960).

These films have evolved in recent years into Brazilian post-Westerns, films like *Bacurau* (Mendonça and Dornelles, 2019) or *Casa de Areia* (Waddingron, 2005), which play with the conventions of the Western and the *cangaceiro* film to develop a contemporary discourse about Brazil, emphasizing the contrast between the South and the Northeast as well as the difficulties of social and racial integration.

This paper will then consider the question of freedom and the "Other" as they appear in the Brazilian form of "settler colonial cinemas" as well as in their evolution as hybrid Westerns and contemporary post-Westerns.

Jesús Ángel González is a professor of English at the University of Cantabria, Spain, where he teaches English and American literature, film and culture. He has co-edited *The Invention of Illusions: International Perspectives on Paul Auster* (Cambridge Scholars, 2011) and *No Single Trajectory: Transnational and Transmedia Explorations of the American West* (Brill, 2024), and written *La narrativa popular de Dashiell Hammett: Pulps, Cine y Cómics* (Valencia University Press, 2002) and *Transnational Post-Westerns* (Brill, 2025). His most recent research deals with the Western film genre and its effects on American and international culture, literature and film, with a particular focus on post-Western films produced in different parts of the world.

González Groba, Constante

Universidade de Santiago de Compostela

CARSON MCCULLERS'S THE HEART IS A LONELY HUNTER: "AN IRONIC PARABLE OF FASCISM

For Carson McCullers, the American South resembled a fascist system—not only for its shameful racial practices but also because it was, as Robert Brinkmeyer notes, "a powerful cultural system that brutally informs its demands for conformity and allegiance." In *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* (1940), written during Hitler's rise to power, a Black character remarks that "so far as I and my people are concerned the South is Fascist now and always has been," since southern Blacks, like Jews in Germany, are deprived "of their legal, economic, and cultural life."

McCullers's own claim that *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* is "an ironic parable of fascism... presenting the spiritual rather than the political side of the phenomenon" has long puzzled critics. This paper reconsiders that statement, moving beyond the novel's overt references to European fascism to explore its deeper implications. I propose reading the novel as a metaphorical study of the social and psychological conditions that enable totalitarianism. McCullers anticipates emerging theories on the psychology of fascism developed by Erich Fromm, Wilhelm Reich, Theodor Adorno, and Hannah Arendt. Her characters embody what these thinkers call the authoritarian personality—the rootless modern subject seeking order and security who submits to a charismatic figure. Whereas liberal democracy depends on mature self-governance and individual responsibility, McCullers portrays individuals escaping this burden by irrationally surrendering to a false idol of their own making.

In *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, the main characters' worship of the deaf-mute John Singer dramatizes this dynamic. Their devotion to him reflects a yearning for unity, purity, and control—psychological mechanisms that mirror fascist collectivism. In their preference for the false protection of totalism over self-determination, McCullers's characters resemble the alienated figures Arendt described as "those who had lost their home in the world and were prepared to be reintegrated into eternal, all-dominating forces which by themselves would bear man, the swimmer on the waves of adversity, to the shores of safety."

By depicting spiritual and emotional fascism within an ordinary southern small town, McCullers transforms her regional setting into an allegory of modern authoritarianism, revealing how totalitarian desires can take root in the most intimate and seemingly apolitical realms of human life.

Constante González Groba (constante.gonzalez@usc.es) is Emeritus Professor of American literature at the University of Santiago (Spain). He was a Fulbright scholar at the University of Texas at Austin and President of the Spanish Association for American Studies. He has published articles on Carson McCullers, Lee Smith, Lillian Smith, Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Bobbie Ann Mason, Ellen Glasgow, Colson Whitehead, Ron Rash, Ellen Feldman, Harper Lee, and others. He authored the book *On Their Own Premises: Southern Women Writers and the Homeplace* (Universitat de Valéncia, 2008). He edited *Hijas del Viejo Sur: La mujer en la literatura del Sur de los Estados Unidos* (Universitat de Valéncia, 2012) and *Unsteadily Marching On: The US South in Motion* (Universitat de Valéncia, 2013). He has led competitive research projects about women in southern fiction, southern fiction and civil rights, southern autobiography, and intersections of race and the body in US fiction. His latest book is *Pathologizing Black Bodies: The Legacy of Plantation Slavery* (Routledge, 2023), co-authored with Ewa Luczak and Urszula Niewiadomska-Flis.

Goodman, Audrey

Georgia State University

YOUNG WOMEN WARRIORS: ENVISIONING AND EMBODYING THE WEST'S INDIGENOUS FUTURES

This paper will survey the work of contemporary Native poets and photographers who envision free and sovereign futures in the American West through their representations of girls and young women. Focusing on Muscogee poet Joy Harjo's forthcoming memoir, *Girl Warriors*, Diné photographer Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie's *Portraits Against Amnesia*, Chemehuevi photographer Cara Romero's *First American Girl and Native Women* series, and Wendy Red Star's *Apsáaloke Feminist* portraits, it will explore how figures of girls and young women in these works are shown to inherit powerful cultural legacies, claim their presence in the lands of the U.S. West, and carry their embodied knowledge into the future. As Romero stated in her account of her journey as an Indigenous photographer, "When we look forward, and into Indigenous Futurisms, it's always going to be wrapped up in taking the past with us" (*In Our Hands: Native Photography, 1890 to Now*). By juxtaposing the projects of older and younger artists, the paper will also consider how the writers and photographers themselves speak across generations to fight against dominant visual narratives of the American West that erased or marginalized their presence and embody varying degrees of freedom in creating, displaying, and circulating their work.

Audrey Goodman is Professor of English at Georgia State University. Her research explores the relations between cultures and landscapes through investigations of literary and visual forms of expression. Her interdisciplinary work emphasizes the interconnected histories of literature and photography in the greater U.S. Southwest, the multiple geographies of modernity, and collaborations across cultures and media. Her most recent book, *A Planetary Lens: The Photo-poetics of Western Women's Writing* (University of Nebraska Press), won the Thomas J. Lyon Award in 2022 for the best critical on Western American Literature from the Western Literature Association and the SAMLA Book Prize. Other published books and essays address topics ranging from the formation of the Anglo Southwest in the early twentieth century to diverse forms of jazz poetry. She served as co-president of the Western Literature Association from 2021-2022, and she is currently the WLA's Executive Secretary.

Googe, Katie

Purdue University

VAMPIRISM ALONG THE COLOR LINE: P. DJÈLÍ CLARK'S RING SHOUT AND THE JIM CROW VAMPIRE

P. Djèlí Clark's award-winning 2020 novella *Ring Shout* reimagines Georgia in the 1920s as a site that is stalked by a monstrous representation of racism. Clark's supernatural alternate history follows a group of African American resistance fighters who battle the demonic "Ku Kluxes," evil beings who disguise themselves among the human members of the Ku Klux Klan in order to prey on African Americans. By considering the Ku Klux Klan as a domestic expression of the United States' imperial ambitions, I will examine how Clark portrays African diasporic practices as a form of resistance to the hegemonic, vampiric empire.

In contrast with the beautiful and seductive gothic vampire, the grotesqueness of the Ku Kluxes, along with the racial patterns of their predation, represent a refusal to romanticize the horror of the barely-disguised violence of the Jim Crow South. These monsters perform not only the extractive function of vampires by killing members of the community, but they also convert others to be like them and spread their monstrosity. However, because the United States understood itself as a white empire despite its multi-racial home front, African Americans could not simply be transformed into good soldiers to perpetuate the imperial project. Instead, both laws and extralegal groups like the Ku Klux Klan attempted to enforce a complete separation between the white population and those considered Black. In *Ring Shout*, Clark literalizes this metaphor by having the Ku Klux vampires exclusively feed on African Americans and exclusively transform white racists. Where some colonial vampires transform the same bodies on which they feed, the Ku Kluxes rigidly enforce the divide that the human Klan seeks to uphold. The African Americans in the novel are considered unassimilable into whiteness, even through supernatural means. However, this rejection of assimilation then becomes a source of ower. Unlike other vampires, the Ku Kluxes are not vulnerable to Christian symbols, but can only be defeated by the collective power of resistance embodied in the titular ring shout and other African diasporic spiritual practices that preserve traditional cultures and actively fight against both imperial violence and the looming threat of assimilation.

Dr. Katie Googe (kgooge@gmail.com) is a Postdoctoral Research Assistant at the OWL at Purdue University. She received her Ph.D. in English from the University of Southern California in 2024 and spent a year teaching and conducting research at Masaryk University in the Czech Republic. Her research interests include African American literature, genre fiction, and colonialism in the United States from the nineteenth century to present. She has also done research and published in the field of Gender Studies, including a chapter on the Black Mirror episode "San Junipero" in the collection Hell Bent for Leather: Sex and Sexuality in the Weird Western from the University of Nebraska Press.

Gouck, Jennifer

Universität Münster

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS AND THE ROAD: THE ABORTION ROAD TRIP AND/AS RESISTANCE IN AMERICAN YOUNG ADULT FICTION

Reproductive freedom has long been under threat in the United States, intensifying most recently with the overturning of Roe v. Wade in 2022 and the second Trump presidency. Current restrictions disproportionately affect young people; according to a new study, of the approximately 10.7 million adolescent girls living in the United States, "more than 7 million … live in states with abortion bans, restrictive gestational limits, or parental involvement requirements" (Lindberg et al. 675). One notable consequence of the sustained attacks on reproductive rights is the creation of so-called 'abortion deserts' where people must travel over 100 miles to reach an abortion clinic.

This paper explores the abortion road trip novel in contemporary American Young Adult (YA) fiction. As Jason Vanfosson observes, "the road trip narrative is often viewed as a requisite coming-of-age experience for North American, white, heterosexual males who have the resources available to go on the road for leisure and self-actualisation" (81). In these books, however, a pregnant teenage girl is forced to cross multiple state lines to access an abortion, transforming the road from a symbol of male freedom to an infrastructural manifestation of the systemic barriers to reproductive healthcare. I argue that the abortion road trip novel functions as an act of political resistance in two important ways. First, unlike their predecessors from the 1960s-1990s, contemporary YA texts are not concerned with the moral dilemma of whether to get an abortion, but rather the logistical challenge of how to get one – a radical shift in how these stories are told. Second, the authors of these texts blend their own experiences, the emerging political climate, and fiction to create narratives which can be understood as a new kind of 'abortion storytelling', a reproductive justice tactic through which women share their lived experiences of abortion as a form of protest. I consider the extent to which these novels participate in reproductive justice activism and 'rewrite the road' by consciously moving away from previous representations of abortion within YA, educating their readers and 'writing back' to the current political moment in the United States in the process.

Jennifer Gouck is a Women in Research (WiRe) Fellow at the University of Münster. She holds a PhD from University College Dublin where she was a Government of Ireland Postgraduate Scholar. Her research focuses on representations of girlhood in contemporary American Young Adult (YA) literature, media, and culture. Her current project investigates literary and cultural representations of teen pregnancy and abortion in contemporary YA texts, situating these within the rapidly changing, unstable, and increasingly conservative sociopolitical environment in the United States. She is also interested in censorship and the rise of book banning and is a co-founder of the Banned Books Network Münster along with her colleagues Prof. Dr. Silvia Schultermandl, Prof. Dr. Corinna Norrick-Rühl, and Dr. Sarah Pyke. Jennifer's work has appeared in *The Irish Journal of American Studies*, *The International Journal of Young Adult Literature*, *Women's Studies*, and in *Children's Literature and Culture: An Introduction*, edited by Rebecca Rowe (Routledge, 2025).

Grigoleit-Richter, Grit

Universität Passau

RACIALIZED BORDERS: MIGRANT CARCERALITY IN TEXAS

The U.S.-Mexico border in Texas has long been a contested space where questions of freedom, mobility, and belonging converge. In September 2021, images of U.S. Border Patrol agents on horseback chasing Haitian migrants along the Rio Grande in Del Rio circulated widely, evoking a public outrage and explicit compar sons to the violent legacy of Southern slave patrols. More recently, in January 2024, a woman and two children drowned in the Rio Grande at Eagle Pass while Texas National Guard troops blocked federal Border Patrol agents from reaching the scene to conduct rescue operations. Such events, along with an "invasion" rhetoric persistently mediatize the border as chaotic, out of control, and threatening, thus legitimizing more punitive measures targeted particularly against migrants from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean.

Applying a race-conscious lens, this paper examines how the Texan border exemplifies the underlying racial logics in migration governance and their extension into migrant carcerality. While earlier campaigns of racialized violence and explicitly racist practices have been replaced by ostensibly race-neutral policies, Operation Lone Star—Texas' $11 billion initiative launched in March 2021 that has funneled over 45,000 migrants through county jails on state criminal trespass charges—reveals how the "progression of racism" operates through legal mechanisms that appear neutral yet systematically target racialized migrants. Texas' racialized border enforcement, thus, exemplifies how migrant criminalization, subsequent detention, and deportation function as modes of racist exclusion. The Texas-Mexico border operates as a material and symbolic space, in which the boundaries of a white, Christian American identity, citizenship, and freedom are violently policed and reproduced—processes that have become even more central to defining belonging in the United States amid the current authoritarian turn. These patterns of racialized policing and border enforcement, however, are rarely acknowledged in official accounts, which frame impartiality and lawfulness and treat episodes and accounts of racialized violence or use of excessive force as isolated incidents rather than systemic outcomes.

Dr. Grit Grigoleit-Richter, currently serves as the principal investigator of several research projects, including intersectional perspectives on the U.S. welfare state and its subsequent project on intersections of race and gender in U.S. immigration, at the University of Passau. Her primary research interests span systemic racism in the U.S., critical race theory, inequality, diaspora and immigration, and racialized minorities in the U.S. She received her Ph.D. in American Studies with a dissertation on diasporic networks and the integration processes of the Hmong in the U.S., followed by research and teaching positions in sociology at the Hamburg University of Technology and the Helmut Schmidt University Hamburg. She co-edited the volume *Shifting Perspectives on Intersectionality* (2024), and most recently the special issue *Whiteness as Property: Re-assessing the Convergence of Race and Property in U.S. History*, which is forthcoming in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (2025).

Gross, Andrew

Georg-August Universität Göttingen

ALIENATION AND THE END OF NARRATIVE IN BELLOW'S DANGLING MAN

The protagonist of Saul Bellow's first novel, *Dangling Man* (1944), spends the bulk of the narrative waiting to be drafted into the army. Until that happens, everything in his life is on hold, and he feels alienated from those who have jobs or who have been shipped overseas. "Alienation" is the term suggested by Joseph's inner interlocutor—"the Spirit of Alternatives"—in a crucial moment of selfdoubt. Joseph rejects the term even though it is his own: "What if you declare you are alienated, you say you reject the Hollywood dream, the soap opera, the cheap thriller? The very denial implicates you." Part of his point is that rejecting the dominant cultural narratives (Hollywood, etc.) is another way of confirming them. But the problem goes deeper than this and is indeed philosophical—and formal—in nature. Part of the problem is the very notion of narrative itself. History, as conceived in the novel, is also a narrative, since any goal—what the Sprit of Alternatives calls an "ideal construction"—is utopian and positions and end to historical progress. Joseph joins the army when he realizes that he is waiting for a fiction: history has no goal. The novel thus marks Bellow's rejection of the teleological notion of history, and it marks the first of many defections from the Marxist goals that once defined *Partisan Review*, where Bellow published an early draft of the novel. Bellow's rejection of alienation would impact other early productions, culminating in *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953). Alienation is the negative confirmation of end-directed historical narratives, but the picaresque novel is the formal expression of a very different ethos. In Bellow, the opposite of the alienated individual is the picaro.

Andrew S. Gross is professor of American literature at the University of Göttingen, vice president of the German Association of American Studies, and editor-inchief of the *New American Studies Journal*. He is author of *The Pound Reaction: Liberalism and Lyricism in Midcentury American Literature*, which won the EAAS Rob Kroes award. He is also coauthor of *Comedy, Avant-Garde, Scandal: Remembering the Holocaust after the End of History*, editor of two special issues of *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, and author of articles on various subjects.

Groß, Sebastian

Georg-August Universität Göttingen

ALIENATION AS A PRINCIPLE OF OBJECTIVISM: THE IDEOLOGY OF FORM IN AYN RAND'S THE FOUNTAINHEAD

Few thinkers have been as influential in shaping the current neoliberal consensus as Ayn Rand. Written at a time of competing visions of freedom that later crystallized into geopolitical rivalry during the Cold War, Rand's philosophy rejects what it perceives as collectivist modernity and seeks to re-anchor "modern man" in a presumedly lost ideal of individualistic capitalism. Despite capitalism's dominant status in the Western world, Rand's Objectivist philosophy is characterized by a pervasive sense of alienation from contemporary society, its cultural norms and political institutions. Her literary fictions illustrate a world governed by an "immoral collectivism," an almost totalitarian regime of entrenched social conventions that obliterates personal identity and suppresses individual excellence.

Out of the moral ruins of this collectivist modernity emerges the figure of the Randian hero – the capitalist entrepreneur as "ideal man" – who overcomes the obstacles and alienations of society and reshapes the world in his own image. Rising above common mediocrity and conformity, the Randian hero reasserts the inherent supremacy of Objectivist ethics in a world that paints its staged crisis of individualist capitalism as a crisis of imagination.Contrary to conventional portrayals, Rand's literary fiction casts alienation as a precondition for a recognition of objective reality that creates the ideological foundations for the individual's transformation into an "ideal man." In The Fountainhead, this alienation is dramatized from a perspective rooted in its protagonist's total rejection of reconciliation with modern society. An aspirant architect shunned for his stylistic dissidence, Howard Roark embodies the virtues of Rand's concept of alienation: the superhuman desire to subjugate the world rather than be subject to it. Through its use of architectural form as an image of its conflict of ideas, the novel formalizes alienation as a consciously heroic act of intransigent individualism that evades the need for social integration and collective intelligibility; its melodramatic form reproduces Roark's – and Rand's – alienation as a literary polemic that reduces complex political realities to a set of diametrically opposed and inherently irreconcilable ideological extremes. Emerging triumphant at the novel's conclusion, the construction of Roark's skyscraper as a monument to individualist capitalism universalizes his alienation as he literally rebuilds society and the world in his own ideological image. In Randian thought, alienation becomes objective – and a principle of Objectivist philosophy.

Sebastian Groß is a doctoral candidate at the University of Göttingen and associate editor at the New American Studies Journal. He holds an M.A. in North American Studies and English Language, Literatures, and Cultures from the University of Göttingen, where he currently teaches classes on American literature and introductory courses on academic editing. Having previously worked on the appeal of populism in Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men* and American conservative interpretations of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* in his B.A. and M.A. theses, respectively, his dissertation focuses on fictions of authority in modern U.S.-American literature.

Guselli, Silvia

Università di Roma "La Sapienza"

"YEAH, WELCOME TO AMERICA, LAND OF THE FREE". "HOME OF THE SICK BASTARDS": CHILD MARRIAGE AND THE PERILS OF UNRESTRAINED LIBERTY IN AMERICAN CULTURE

This paper argues that excessive, unconstrained and non-institutionalised liberty can paradoxically facilitate coercion, exclusion and injustice and it focuses on the issue of child abuse and child marriage, considering therefore the protection/freedom of children and minors, versus the unrenstrained liberty of adults. The study unfolds in three intertwined narrative strands:
First, a critical reading of *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* (Season 20, Episode 20-2019), which portrays a thirteen-year-old girl brainwashed into marriage to her stepfather, draws attention to the risks involved in the lack of federal legislation regulating child marriage. Next, the memoir *Elizabeth, Child Bride* by Colleen Pease MacLean recounts her own story when she was a twelve-year-old girl sold by her father to settle the family debt in mid-19th century Maine, exemplifies the way individual freedom justifies child abuse. Finally, the novel *Child Bride: A Novel* (2019) by Jennifer Smith Turner depicts two teenagers thrust into marriage, navigating the emotional and societal burdens of premature adulthood in environments lacking protective safeguards. Collectively, these texts underline the dark side of unrestrained freedom: while the expansion of individual liberty catalysed American democracy, the absence of institutional constraints created spaces where freedom morphed into license to abuse and commit illicit acts.
Theoretically, the paper draws on Bedermann (1995), Syrett (2016) and Senator Durbin's "Child Marriage Prevention Act of 2024" to discuss the topic of child marriages in the USA along with Berlin (1958) and Anker (2021) who have studied the dark side of freedom. Berlin's dichotomy of liberty distinguishes negative liberty (freedom from interference) and positive liberty (the capacity to self-determine). Berlin argues that when either form is pursued in isolation, unchecked, freedom risks enabling abuse rather than empowerment. Anker proposes the concept of "ugly freedoms", which exposes how certain acts, although masked under the ideology of freedom, are actually malignant and evil and seek to dehumanise or enslave those subjected to them.
This study thus proposes a nuanced conception of American liberty that acknowledges freedom's emancipatory promise as the basis of America's democratic principle while also registering its capacity to foster evil when said liberty is not anchored by legal and ethical constraints.

Silvia Guselli is enrolled in the second year of the Ph.D. Course in "Studies in English Literature, Language and Translation-Curriculum in American Literature" at La Sapienza, University of Rome. In 2022 she obtained a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature from Goldsmiths College, University of London. In 2024 she obtained a Masters Degree in English and Anglo-American Studies at La Sapienza with a grade of 110 cum laude. Her doctoral project aims to explore the transformation of the notion of "civilization" in American culture from the end of the 18th century to the mid 19th century through the works of several writers of the time. She is also working on a new critical edition of Hector St John de Crèvecoeur's 1801 understudied work, *Voyage dans le Haute Pensylvanie et dans l'ètat de New York*.

Güzel Köşker, Nisa Harika

Ankara Üniversitesi

AMERICAN STUDIES IN TURKEY AND THE JOURNAL OF AMERICAN STUDIES OF TURKEY (JAST)

My talk will be about American Studies in Turkey and the *Journal of American Studies of Turkey* (JAST) as evolving and adaptive processes and as venues of critical inquiry. Emerging in the late twentieth century through the organization of the American Studies Association of Turkey (ASAT) and, later on, the *Journal of American Studies of Turkey* (JAST) in 1995, the discipline has steadily enhanced its institutional and intellectual presence. I will reflect on how Turkish scholars in the field have frequently approached American history, literature, and culture in comparative and interdisciplinary terms, addressing themes of race, ethnicity, gender, politics, and cultural identity in global and local frameworks, and how American political and cultural narratives are reimagined from a non-American perspective. On this front, I can discuss how American Studies in Turkey contributes to a redefinition of American Studies as a more transnational, interdisciplinary, and dialogic field of study.

Nisa Harika Güzel Köşker is associate professor in the Department of American Culture and Literature at Ankara University, Turkey. She holds a Ph.D. and M.A. from the same department and served as the department chair between 2017 and 2022. She is the recipient of the doctoral research scholarship granted by The Council of Higher Education in Turkey. She conducted research on nineteenth-century American women's writing in the English Department, Rare and Manuscript Library at the University of Pennsylvania, the Library Company of Philadelphia, and the National Archives. Besides her journal articles, her recent research has been published by Nobel Culture, Routledge, and Elsevier/Palgrave McMillan. She is the vice president of the American Studies Association of Turkey and the Editor-in-Chief of *Journal of American Studies Association of Turkey*.

Haas, Astrid

Universitetet i Bergen

OLAUDAH EQUIANO'S INTERESTING NARRATIVE AS A MARITIME MEMOIR

The proposed paper discusses the depiction of black mobility across borders of literary genre and—primarily maritime—geographic spaces in Olaudah Equiano's autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789). Although best-known for its depiction of the Middle Passage that led the narrator into North American and Caribbean slavery, *The Interesting Narrative* also portrays Equiano's subsequent maritime travels that helped him obtain his liberty but also entangled him in the complex web of maritime exploration, (slave) trade, and warfare. Moreover, while its portrayal of its author's enslavement has justified the text's classification as a slave narrative, its depiction of Equiano's life at sea in both slavery and freedom draws on multiple genres of Western autobiography that reach far beyond accounts of captivity.

The focus of this paper lies on a critical reading of Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* as a work of mobile autobiography, the seafarer's life narrative. This type of autobiography overlaps with other autobiographical genres such as the adventurer's memoir or the captivity narrative, as many accounts of life at sea focus on selected journeys and sailors' experiences of captivity as well as other struggles for personal liberty. The proposed talk analyzes how Equiano's *Narrative* uses features of a seafarer's autobiography to contest boundaries of Black spatial, social, and narrative mobility in the Anglophone Atlantic world of the later 18th century, especially the North American Atlantic seaboard colonies and the Caribbean archipelago. I specifically argue that, and show how, Equiano's text can be read as a maritime freedom narrative, as the narrator draws on the genre of the seafarer's life narrative to connect his travels across the Atlantic and in the Americas to his personal passage from an enslaved African boy to a free Black man, imperial agent, and antislavery activist.

Astrid Haas is Associate Professor of American literature and culture at the University of Bergen, Norway. Prior to her current position, she worked as a research fellow and lecturer at different universities in Germany and the UK. Her research interests include travel writing, drama, and autobiography in the Americas, Early American Studies, African and Latinx Diaspora Studies, Gender Studies, and Science Studies. She has published the monographs *Stages of Agency: The Contributions of American Drama to the AIDS Discourse* (2011) and *Lone Star Vistas: Travel Writing on Texas, 1821-1861* (2021). Her current larger research project is entitled "Black Inter-American Mobilities and Autobiography in the Age of Revolutions (1760-1860)."

ATLANTICS: FREEDOM NARRATIVES IN ENTANGLED WATERS

Hains, Rebecca C.

Salem State University

TOYING WITH GENDER: BRAND EVOLUTION IN LEGO'S MARKETING AND CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF PLAY

This paper traces LEGO's evolving marketing and brand orientation over the past five decades, examining how the brand has reinterpreted ideas about gender and play alongside shifts in cultural norms regarding childhood. LEGO has long promoted itself as the toy of creative liberty--an open system where any child can "build anything." Drawing upon a longitudinal analysis of LEGO's product themes, character representation, and marketing categories--from the gender-neutral advertisements of the 1970s to the highly gender-segmented campaigns of the 1980s and 1990s, and the company's more recent claims to inclusivity--this study interrogates the persistence of gendered logics beneath shifting discourses of creativity and choice. LEGO's implicit brand promise of freedom has been narrated very differently across these decades. In the 1970s, its ads depicted mixed-gender, open-ended building and highlighted children's imaginative autonomy in ways that reflected the decade's androgynous fashions. From the late 1980s through the 2010s, however, LEGO adopted pink-and-blue segmentation: girl-coded domestic and relational worlds versus boy-coded action and technology lines, paralleling marketplace shifts driven by the rise of children's television and its targeted advertising strategies. In 2021, following consumer pushback, the company publicly embraced "inclusive" marketing, downplaying gender labels and invoking universal creativity. Yet even as the rhetoric of freedom in play has become more explicitly egalitarian, underlying structures of play remain shaped by toy-industry logics that sort children by gender, with LEGO's website still offering segregated "toys for boys" and "toys for girls"—preceded by this disclaimer: "All LEGO® sets are made for boys and girls alike." Using original data collected in 2014 from LEGO's website (cataloguing 1,524 items and their gender tagging) and updated data from the current site, this paper identifies continuities and ruptures in LEGO's encoding of gender segmentation. Situating these findings within broader marketing paradigms—particularly consumer segmentation, brand orientation, and marketplace ideologies that equate personal freedom with consumer choice—the study reads LEGO's brand evolution as both marketing case and cultural text. Ultimately, LEGO's construction of play reveals the paradox of "freedom" in the children's marketplace: a discourse that celebrates individuality and empowerment while reinscribing the stereotypes it aims to transcend.

Rebecca C. Hains, Ph.D. (Professor of Marketing, Salem State University) researches children's media and consumer culture from a cultural studies/critical marketing perspective. She is the author *The Princess Problem: Guiding Our Girls Through the Princess-Obsessed Years* (Sourcebooks, 2014) and *Growing Up With Girl Power: Girlhood on Screen and in Everyday Life* (Peter Lang, 2012). She also has collaboratively edited several books–most recently, *Barbie in the Media: The Transmedia Presence of Mattel's Celebrity Doll* and *#Barbie and Social Media: Digital Discourses* and *Mattel's Celebrity Doll* (both Palgrave, 2025). Her work has appeared in journals including *Popular Communication*, *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, and *Girlhood Studies*. She was a 2023-2024 Fulbright Scholar to the Jagiellonian University and holds a Ph.D. from Temple University.

FREEDOM OF CHOICE? AMERICAN CHILDREN'S CONSUMER CULTURE AND THE CONTRADICTIONS OF LIBERTY

Haring, Nicole

Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz

CARCERAL IMAGINARIES: BELONGING, FREEDOM, AND ABOLITION DEMOCRACY

When W.E.B. Du Bois first used the term "abolition democracy" in his work *Black Reconstruction*, he reimagined the period immediately following slavery in the United States and urged readers to envision radical new social order that could be achieved through a reliance on a host of democratic institutions. More recently, Angela Y. Davis has engaged his work as a grammar for radical change in works such as *Abolition Democracy*; *Beyond Empire*, *Prisons*, *and Torture*, and in doing so identified three distinct forms of abolition: abolition of slavery, abolition of the death penalty, and abolition of the prison. With an eye on reconfiguring assumptions about bondage and carcerality, the arguments of both of these scholars assist in negotiating what freedom can look like. In light of recent events associated with the criminalization, detention, and deportation of migrants to serve political optics, disrupt lives, and shake up geopolitical orders, the insights of Du Bois and Davis stand out as a bridge that can stimulate the imagination at the same time that it helps to forge pivotal and necessary connections. Drawing on abolitionist theory, this talk aims at critically unpacking our carceral imaginaries. Cultural representations of carcerality in form of memoirs from women and queer folks incarcerated in the United States will be analyzed to showcase how our collective imagination needs to be disrupted by abolitionist notions to practice, what Adrienne Maree Brown, calls "authentic accountability in communities of care". Race, gender, and their intersections are relevant to this dialogues and types of exchange that this talk seeks to cultivate, as they operate as aspects of identity and personhood that make people, including those who are already marginalized, subject to what Ruth Wilson Gilmore refers to as "aggressively punitive" forms of government that target people internationally. Eventually, this talk aims to embrace what the Caribbean scholar Rinaldo Walcott calls "a new humanism." Observing that emancipation is not freedom, Walcott offers a forward-looking argument that the attainment of freedom for Black people will transform the human experience globally.

Dr. Nicole Haring is (Senior) Scientist at the Center for Inter-American Studies at the University of Graz, Austria. Her research interests focus on gender and feminist theory, contemporary US-American literature, and Inter-American studies. Currently, her research focuses on carcerality, abolitionist theory, and intersectional environmentalism. She is the lead researcher in the project "Camps, Carceral Imaginaries, and (In)Justices", where she recently co-edited the Special Issue of the *Sargasso Journal* "Camps, (In)Justices and Solidarity in the Americas" (with D. Walicek, J. Adams, R. Maierhofer, 2024) and is currently co-editor of the volume *Reconfiguring Carceral Imaginaries: Across Camps, Prisons, and Borders* (with D. Walicek, Palgrave, forthcoming 2026).

PAST AND PRESENT BOUNDARIES OF PRISON

Harlet, Emma

Université Bordeaux Montaigne / University of Louisiana at Lafayette

BAYOUS AND RIVERS: WOMEN, WATER, AND LIMINALITY IN LOUISIANA LITERATURE

Positioned at the crossroads of Southern, Creole, and French traditions, Louisiana emerges as a liminal marshland of identities. Southern in identity yet deeply tied to the region's French and Creole heritage, Louisiana female writers anchor their narratives in a distinctive regional landscape while simultaneously posing a more intimate question: what does it mean to be a woman at the turn of the century? Taking Louisiana as their field of study, these authors draw upon Creole culture and ways of life to offer alternative, liminal strategies of emancipation for their female characters. Waterways—bayous, lakes, the Mississippi River, and the Gulf of Mexico—are central to Louisiana's geography and imagination. As both natural features and symbolic borders, they serve as spaces to cross and navigate—thresholds where immersion can lead either to transformation or to drowning. Water, a metaphor for femininity and fluidity, becomes a site of emancipation: it enables women to transgress imposed boundaries, to explore their desires and (re) negotiate their identities.

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) famously culminates in Edna Pontellier's final act of liberation from the restrictive social conventions of marriage and motherhood by swimming away in the Gulf of Mexico, never to come back again. Chopin's short story "Beyond the Bayou" (1891) offers a complementary narrative: its protagonist confronts childhood trauma and physically (and symbolically) crosses the bayou, freeing herself from her chains of fear and limitation. Similarly, Louisiana Creole writer Alice Dunbar-Nelson infuses her stories with aquatic imagery. In "By the Bayou St. John" (1899) and "On the Bayou Bridge" (ca. 1902-1909), water functions as both spatial, temporal, and emotional references, evoking the tension between female desire and societal constraint, between the promise of liberation and the threat of alienation. These texts illuminate how Louisiana's themes of border, water, and land convey women's quests for selfhood and emancipation through sexual awakenings and resistance to the prisons of conformity and the mind. It is within liminal spaces, in states of inbetweenness, where identity becomes fluid and boundaries dissolve that women discover the freedom to imagine new forms of being. Between land and water, tradition and transformation, these narratives reveal that freedom is never absolute but always negotiated.

Emma Harlet is pursuing a joint PhD between the University of Louisiana at Lafayette in Francophone Studies and the University of Bordeaux-Montaigne in Anglophone Studies, under the supervision of Nathan Rabalais and Stéphanie Durrans. Her dissertation explores the notion of Creoleness in the works of Francophone and Anglophone Louisiana women writers from the late 19th and early 20th century. She examines how questions of language, identity, and gender intersect, and how Creoleness—understood as a fluid and evolving concept—serves as a means for these authors to address women's agency as well as racial and social tensions at the dawn of a new century. Her research highlights how these female voices redefine and engage with emerging roles and identities within a transforming Creole society, while shaping a distinctive literary and cultural landscape in Louisiana.

SOUTHERN WOMEN WRITERS AND EMANCIPATION STRATEGIES

Herges, Laura

Heidelberg Center for American Studies

THE MILITARY-ENTERTAINMENT COMPLEX AND THE DEATH OF CRITICAL FILMMAKING

The American military supports film productions – that alone is not a secret. The most prominent example is the Navy setting up recruiting tables in cinemas playing *Top Gun* (1986) and *Top Gun: Maverick* (2022), whose productions they were deeply involved in.
What most film viewers are not aware of, however, is the sheer size the so-called *military-entertainment complex*: the Department of Defense and the CIA have supported more than 2,500 films and tv shows. They provide production teams with weapons, troops, filming locations and technical advisors, which helps the film studios save millions of dollars. But their help comes at a different cost: censorship. In exchange for their support, the DoD and the CIA can change film scripts as they please, for example by changing or cutting specific scenes, dialogues and in some cases even entire characters.
This paper investigates how the DoD and the CIA shape and distort films they support by erasing or euphemizing critical elements. It analyzes how military-critical films are turned uncritical, produced at a much lower budget, or – in the worst case – not produced at all. A special focus will be on films that are based on real-life events, such as *The Tuskegee Airmen* (1995), *Black Hawk Down* (2001) and *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012). These films claim to be historically accurate, but omit the military's taboo topics, such as failure in combat, racism in the military, and real-life war crimes.
I draw from a collection of film scripts, letters and emails from the *Department of Defense Film Collection* at the National Archives, investigative articles about films the CIA and the DoD have supported, and sources about the historical events these films are based on, such as news articles and interviews. After a brief overview of the military-entertainment complex, I am going to illustrate its censorship with some striking examples, focusing on the erasure of historical accuracy for the sake of a military-friendly whitewashed version of history.

Laura Herges is a PhD candidate at the English department of Heidelberg University; her supervisor is PD Dr Philipp Löffler. She holds degrees in English studies (MA) and Romance studies (BA) from Heidelberg University. Her dissertation project, *The Military-Entertainment Complex: "Reframing History for a New Generation,"* focuses on the depiction of real-life operations of the U.S. military abroad in movies that were produced with the support of the military-entertainment complex after 9/11. She analyzes how the Department of Defense and the CIA whitewash history in retrospect to portray themselves in a positive light, and which impact the War on Terror had on the cooperation between these government agencies and the film industry. Her research interests include American foreign policy, post-colonial studies, film adaptations and feminist films.

CONSTRAINTS OF FREEDOM IN AMERICAN CINEMA: GANGSTERS, SOLDIERS, INSTITUTIONS

Hernando-Real, Noelia

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

'MY BODY NO CHOICE' AND THE DEROGATION OF ROE V. WADE: US WOMEN PLAYWRIGHTS AND THE POLITICS OF THE FEMALE BODY

When on June 24th 2022 the Supreme Court struck down Roe v. Wade, Molly Smith, artistic director of Arena Stage (Washington DC), felt devastated to see how "this most sacred choice—the choice about our bodies—was ripped away", a decision that, in her own view, underlined that in the United States "Women once again have been relegated to second-class citizens". Her response was the commission of eight pieces that answer to the Supreme Court and that formed the cycle "My Body No Choice" (2022). The cycle includes monologues by forefront US playwrights: Sarah Ruhl, Dael Orlandersmith, Mary Hall Surface, Fatima Dyfan, Anonymous, V, Lee Cataluna, and Lisa Loomer. Placing the discussion within the framework of the Critical Medical Humanities, this paper addresses the commodification of the female body in recent US politics and the potential of theatre to awake spectators to this reality. To do so, the paper will examine the format and content of the monologues, together with their staging. The paper will argue how "My Body No Choice" is heir to US second-feminist wave Consciousness-Raising meetings, while consciously escaping the failings of such wave. The polyvocality of the cycle manifests that, while all women should have the right over their own bodies, age, social class, race and ethnicity mark differences that need to be addressed and spoken up. While tackling with abortion, many of the monologues transcend this theme to make the audience think about other ways in which patriarchy has exerted control over the female bodies, from abuse, to rape, to medical decisions, and to the establishment of bodily standards that alienate women from their bodies. Besides discussing the plays themselves, this paper will also consider the staging of the cycle as a cathartic enterprise, supported by other theatrical events that the theatres that produced the cycle incorporated, such as the Whisper Wall, the Whisper Booth and talkbacks. All in all, the overall aim of this paper is to present the eight monologues as pathographies that underline the inequality of women in the so-called Land of Freedom and that use the stage to remind women that the fight for their bodily rights is never over.

Noelia Hernando-Real is Associate Professor of Anglo-American Drama and Theatre at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (Spain). She has authored *Lauren Gunderson and Feminist Theatre in the Twnety-First Century* (2025), *Self and Space in the Theater of Susan Glaspell* (2011), *Voces contra la mediocridad: la vanguardia teatral de los Provincetown Players, 1915-1922* (2014), and *Rosas en la arena: los relatos de Susan Glaspell* (2022). She has coedited several volumes: *Performing Gender Violence, with Barbara Ozieblo* (2012), and *Negotiating Gendered Spaces* (2013) and *Gender Studies: Transatlantic Visions* (2016), with Isabel Durán et al. Her work on contemporary US women playwrights has been published by Routledge, Oxford UP, Cambridge UP, Palgrave Macmillan, among others, and by journals such as *Modern Drama*, *Theatre Journal*, *New England Theatre Journal*, *Eugene O'Neill Review*, REN and *Critical Stages*. She is a member of the Research Project "Illness Narratives: Towards a Gendered Health(care) Awareness" (PID2024-156710NB-I00).

PATHOGRAPHIES AND THE POLITICS OF FREEDOM: WOMEN'S BODIES, ILLNESS, AND INEQUALITY

Hoepker, Karin

Universität Konstanz

MID-20TH CENTURY ALIENATION: CONSTRUCTIONS OF CONFORMITY AND THE 'ORGANIZATION MAN

This paper focuses on how midcentury American culture constructed and contested the figure of the conformist corporate employee both in sociological critique and popular narrative. Sociological discourse that defined the period was concerned with what they diagnosed as a fundamental shift in "American character": the emergence of the organization-bound subject. C. Wright Mills's *White Collar* (1951), David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), and William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956) articulated a shared anxiety about the costs of what they identify as corporate conformity. They depict both post-war suburban prosperity as well as white-collar workers alienated from authentic selfhood, trapped in bureaucratic structures that demanded the sacrifice of individuality for belonging.
Fiction and film have engaged with this trope of the sociological imagination, dramatizing organizational and suburban life. Works like Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955) and its Richard Hughes 1956 film adaptation, Robert Wise's *Executive Suite* (1954), as well as Rod Serling's television work (*Patterns*, 1955, and episodes of *The Twilight Zone*) tap into the period's fascination with alienation and the dehumanizing logic of corporate culture. Looking at productions in the tradition of the *Angestelltenroman*, I focus specifically on constructions of a fetishized white, middle-class masculinity that has been at the center of narratives of individualism and the entrepreneurial self since the mid-19th century. Reading these sociological and cultural texts alongside one another, this paper explores midcentury discourses of alienation, their recognizable narratives and iconography, as both the subject of a collective anxiety and a precondition for a new intellectual orthodoxy that would celebrate of heroic nonconformity as authentic selfhood. Central figures like Whyte's "Organization Man" render visible tensions between (non)conformity, organizational structures, and the public sphere, and continue to echo in works like Sennett's *Corrosion of Character* (1998) or Nicholas Lemann's *Transaction Man* (2019).

Karin Hoepker currently works at FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg and is a Principal Investigator of the DFG-research training group "Literature and the Public Sphere in Differentiated Contemporary Cultures." She has served as guest professor of North American Literature at U Konstanz, the JFKI Berlin, Bonn, and Vienna University. Her research focuses on literary knowledge production and the novel, speculation and fiction, urban studies, the semantics of love, and the future of work.

ALIENATION AND FREEDOM AT MIDCENTURY

Holland, Jennifer

University of Oklahoma

AIDS TOWN: RURAL PEOPLE WITH HIV/AIDS AND MOBILITY IN TEXAS, 1981-1992

In the 1980s, rural Texas seemed untouched by the AIDS epidemic; that disease was far away in New York and San Francisco, or at its closest, Houston. In fact, people lived with and died of AIDS in small towns across the state, but neither public health records nor their neighbors counted them. State officials recorded patients by the place of diagnosis, not the patient's place of residence, and both HIV tests and the doctors who knew how to diagnose the disease were in cities for most of the 1980s. Rural people with HIV/AIDS were on the move, unlike their urban counterparts, and their movements often tracked with the progression of their disease. Rural people came to cities for diagnosis and often for treatment and then many urban and rural people moved back to their rural families of origin near the end of life. Until the 1990s, these rural people were largely ignored because of state statistics. In the 1990s, those statistics began catching up with reality, but, by then, most rural people had felt their communities had been insulated from the disease for almost a decade. With anti-gay activists in their ears, many rural people came to believe gay people had conspired to bring AIDS to small towns and infect "straight" spaces. According to them, the only reasonable solution was punishment, a denial of care, and a rejection of both medical and gay rights.

Jennifer L. Holland is the Sara Louise Welsh Chair and L.R. Brammer, Jr. Presidential Professor of History at the University of Oklahoma, specializing in histories of gender and sexuality, the American West, and twentieth-century US politics. She is the author of the award-winning *Tiny You: A Western History of the Anti-Abortion Movement* (2020). Her next project is entitled *Straightening Out: How Anti-Queer Politics Captured Rural America*, which examines battles around queer rights and sexuality in the rural American West between the 1970s and the 2000s.

FREEDOM, MOVEMENT, AND THEIR LIMITS FOR MARGINALIZED PEOPLE IN THE AMERICAN WEST

Honos, Bálint

Universiteit Leiden / Roosevelt Institute for American Studies

FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM: THE SPATIAL CONTESTATION OF BLACK CITIZENSHIP IN ANTEBELLUM CALIFORNIA

This paper offers a unique perspective on the historical evolution and contradictions of Black citizenship and community organization in antebellum California (1849-1860). It highlights the politics of exclusion and strategies for social inclusion practiced against and by Black Americans, offering a novel perspective on California history and the history of citizenship. The paper employs a case study examining the spatial contestation of citizenship in California and how spatial and social contexts informed the conceptualization of citizenship. This social historical narrative expands on standard legal and agency-based accounts of citizenship by examining how historical agents engaged with their structural environment. The proposed paper explores the perspective of labor in the mining fields and the intellectual endeavors of abolitionists, focusing on their meeting points, including the streets of San Francisco, courthouses, convention halls, and boats departing for Canada to escape the impending Civil War. This paper will outline the epistemology and method that can uncover these new perspectives. The effort outlined here tries to go beyond definitional approaches to citizenship and discern its historically specific conceptualization by showcasing sites of contestation. California in the antebellum period was a uniquely diverse and engaging environment. Despite being labeled a "free state," California's laws restricted minorities from testifying in court, denied them voting rights, and limited their basic participation in political life. This paper explores the method to uncover the determined and significant efforts of Black miners, barbers, cooks, homemakers, entrepreneurs, artists, and activists who strived to enact and realize their citizenship. The primary focus is on the dialectical relationship between already existing conceptions of citizenship in America and how this informed the contestation of unfreedom in California, where Black people did not enjoy citizenship status either legally or in practice. By introducing this new method, the study contributes to the historiography of citizenship and the history of the American West. It also questions the realization, limits, and contradictions of conceptualizing citizenship by reframing the narrative from the perspective of those excluded and how they tried to realize their freedom by contesting citizenship in many locations throughout California.

Bálint Honos is a PhD Candidate at the Institute for History at Leiden University and the Roosevelt Institute for American Studies (RIAS) in Middelburg. He comes from Hungary, and he is researching community organization and Black citizenship in antebellum California (1812-1861). His dissertation, titled *Forming the Frontier*: *The Politics of Exclusion and Black Community Organization in Antebellum California*, explores how Black people conceptualised citizenship depending on their environment. He is stressing the unique nature of California, which was accepted into the US in 1850. It was still forming its political institutions, and despite being a "free state", it still permitted the existence of slavery. The dissertation aims to explore social agency, its structural constraints, and how its historical dynamics exerted social change.

Huber, Karoline

Ruhr-Universität Bochum

THE UNFREEDOM OF GENDERED RESILIENCE IN THE CLI-FI BILDUNGSROMAN

Climate change resilience is often treated as a monolithic concept, although the subject matter is more nuanced and, as this talk argues, has a considerable gendered aspect. The novel *The Light Pirate* (2022) by Lily Brooks-Dalton identifies certain forms of resilience as masculine and others as non-masculine through its system of characters. Hence, the portrayal of resilience in this and other climate fiction texts reflects a sense of unfreedom from the gender binary by repeating gendered narrative structures. In the novel, masculine conceptions of resilience attempt to preserve societal structures past the point of reason, holding onto the idea of a society that is already gone, resorting to violence if necessary; whereas feminine or queer resilient forms offer viable alternatives by creating a new world. Wanda, the female protagonist is rewarded for her resilience and agency in the climate changed world and builds a matriarchal society with her nonbinary partner in the climate wreckage. Her resilience is fostered by Phyllis, a retired biologist and doomsday prepper who becomes Wanda's mentor and prepares her for the breakdown of societal structures. Central male characters in the novel, like Wanda's father and older brother, concern themselves with repairing the infrastructure of society even after it becomes clear that this can only be a temporary fix; while minor male characters such as Wanda's bully Corey and his father who attempts to ransack Wanda and Phyllis' abode are characterized by their violence and cruelty. Cli-fi narratives which foreground women as strong and resilient can fall into regressive paradigms of the female Bildungsroman of the 18th and 19th century, which promoted endurance through suffering. *The Light Pirate*, a cli-fi novel that contains many elements of the female Bildungsroman, reproduces this dynamic. Through its gendered depiction of confronting climate change, the novel reinscribes the gendering structure it is trying to escape.

Karoline Huber is currently working as a PhD candidate for the English department at the RuhrUniversity of Bochum. Her dissertation investigates generational tensions in the Anglophone climate fiction Bildungsroman. Her research interests include science fiction, Anglophone climate fiction, and (de)-extinction. She has published peer-reviewed articles in *AmLit* and *Ecozon@* as well as a public-facing essay in *The Los Angeles Review of Books*.

Hughes, Keith

University of Edinburgh

THE CONVICT/EX-CONVICT AS THE LOAD-BEARING SUBJECT IN SOME WORKS BY CHESTER HIMES AND & WALTER MOSLEY

This paper considers formal and semantic convergences, and historically-contingent divergences, in some of the writings of Chester Himes and Walter Mosley. My focal point is the literary figuration of the convict/ex-convict as a social subject bearing a racialized, and thus politicised, load. Himes's late insistence on the 'absurd' fact of Black existence in USA -perhaps most powerfully expressed in the two volumes of autobiography he wrote late in life, *The Quality of Hurt* (1971) and *My Life of Absurdity* (1972)- are read alongside some of Mosley's Socrates Fortlow stories, most particularly 'Equal Opportunities' and 'The Wanderer', both from *Always Outnumbered, Always Outgunned* (1997). In these texts, we see the convict/ex-convict -both real (Himes) and imagined (Fortlow)- in constant struggle with the racialised structuring of both the carceral and the supposedly 'free' social world beyond the prison walls. The specific tensions between incarceration and creative expression, both key to Himes and Mosley, will be further elucidated through a brief look at Etheridge Knight's poetry – and Terence Hayes' more recent revisiting of these works.

The clear racial demarcations of the prison system are themselves embedded, for both Himes and Mosley, in the hegemonic capitalist system: as Black people in America were, according to Mosley, 'the first pure slaves of mass production', then they were 'the first bona fide members of the modern proletariat'. For Socrates Fortlow, this intersectional formulation of systemic forms of control and appropriation of value presents a problematic of self-creation – a problematic that Mosley figures both through a combined engagement with a variety of African and European cultural forms, and a constantly shifting and hybrid form of Socratic engagement and social action.

These literary works will be addressed through, and alongside, varying theoretical and polemical lenses, including: Angela Davis on the historically-conditioned racism of the US carceral system; H. Bruce Franklin on prison writing as a genre, and George Lipsitz on 'the racialisation of space and the spatialisation of race'. The paper concludes by wondering whether, and how, the 'absurdities' identified by Himes find any form of amelioration in Mosley's writing.

Keith Hughes lectures in American Literature at the University of Edinburgh. Following completion of his PhD on 19th-C Scottish and American Literature, he did postdoctoral research at Harvard University's W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for African American Studies, and here developed an abiding interest in African American literature. This is now the core of Keith's teaching and research interests; he has devised and run undergraduate and postgraduate courses in The Black Atlantic, Black American Fiction, African American Modernism, and Contemporary Black American Fiction. Some of the topics that he has produced and presented work on are 'Walter Mosley, Socratic Method, and the Black Atlantic', 'Frederick Douglass and Robert Burns', 'The Blackness of Stevenson's Atlantic', and 'Richard Wright's anti-African Pan-Africanism'. Keith is currently working on a monograph on the later works of Richard Wright.

Hunt, Megan

University of Edinburgh

JIM CROW AT THE BOX OFFICE: CINEMA, CULTURE, AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN 1963

This paper seeks to increase scholarly understanding of cinemas as key sites in the African American freedom struggle. Often overlooked in studies focused on schools, housing, and public transport, the cinema rarely figures in wider assessments of desegregation policy and civil rights strategy. Meanwhile, studies of race and cinema in the 1950s and 1960s often focus exclusively on representation onscreen rather than the freedom to enter and equally enjoy the physical space of the movie theatre. But 1963 proved a critical year in which prominent constituencies of the modern civil rights movement identified both culture *and* cultural venues as key to social and political freedom, both as venues for Black consumption and as sites of unfettered representational and employment possibilities. Examining the connections between these concurrent economic and intellectual developments and the events of 1963 therefore adds further nuance to existing narratives of federal and cultural efforts that later culminated in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 on the one hand, and the Black Arts Movement of the late 1960s and 1970s on the other. It also raises vital questions about freedom of consumption at the height of the civil rights era, and efforts to balance concepts of Black "buying power" with an emerging culture of Black production, which provided opportunities for identity expression previously unavailable via mainstream markets, but which ultimately sought to challenge white hegemony in American cultural industries.

Megan Hunt is lecturer in Modern and Contemporary History at the University of Edinburgh, where she teaches courses relating to civil rights, white liberalism, and popular culture. Her first monograph, *Southern by the Grace of God: Race, Religion, and Civil Rights in Hollywood's American South* was published by the University of Georgia Press in 2024. She is the co-editor of *Teaching American Studies in Britain: Perspectives and Possibilities*, forthcoming in 2026, and served on the HOTCUS steering committee for many years.

Ibarraran-Bigalondo, Amaia

Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea

FREE IS THE WEST (OR NOT): WESTERNS, WOMEN, QUEERS AND OTHERS

The historical American West and its literary and cinematographic representations is a male space. Categorical as this statement may seem, it responds to the supposedly true reality of the American West. This, supported and exported by countless literary artistic and cinematographic texts (i.e. western dime novels, Hollywood and European Westerns) has turned into a historical truth, and employed to construct a "western" gender normativity, especially regarding masculinity. It has defined what an American man is and should be: a cowboy. However, recent revisions of both the history of the making of the West and of its representation in the arts have proved that the cowboy was never alone and gender roles, as established as they were, were sometimes challenged. With this idea as a starting point, this paper aims at proposing an overview of the revision of gender which is being carried out in 21st century "western" artistic products, with the final aim of concluding whether such revisions may affect the founding structure of the western genre and the western space as a mostly male universe. For this purpose, a review of some of the most (r)evolutionary works will be proposed.

Amaia Ibarraran-Bigalondo is a full professor at the University of the Basque Country, where she teaches contemporary North American Literature and Culture. Her research has been focused on the study of Chicana Literature and Culture and has published several articles in international journals. She is a member of the REWEST research group (Research Group in Western American Literature). She is author of *Mexican American Women, Dress and Gender: Pachucas, Chicanas, Cholas* (Routledge, 2019) and editor of *Spanish Perspectives on the American West in 21st Century Literature, Cinema and Culture* (Peter Lang, 2025), *The New American West in Literature and the Arts* (Routledge, 2020), *Transcontinental Reflections on the American West: Words, Images, Sounds beyond Borders* (Portal Eds., 2015), *The Neglected West* (Portal Eds, 2012).

WHOSE FREEDOM, WHOSE WEST?

Ibarraran-Bigalondo, Amaia

Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea

BECOMING A 'NEW MAN'; EVOLVING NOTIONS OF CHICANO MASCULINITY IN LUIS J. RODRÍGUEZ'S THE REPUBLIC OF EAST LA

Luis J. Rodríguez's life and work underscores that he is constantly on the move; he is an (r)evolutionary human being who, ever since he was a child, has lived in a constant state of reinvention and personal, intellectual, and social development, and this introduces a productive critical exploration of Chicano masculinity. His 1993 memoir, *Always Running – La Vida Loca; Gang Days in LA*, evidences as much, and so does the rest of his work, both as an activist and a writer. In the final paper on this panel, Amaia Ibarraran-Bigalondo constructs a conceptual bridge between Rodríguez's first testimonio, *Always Running*, and his short story collection, *The Republic of East LA* (2002), with regards to the depiction and mobilization of masculinity. Bigalondo carefully moves beyond problematic models of Chicano masculinity that have been prescribed by gang structures, and towards an attempt to articulate a more critical masculinity that is mindful and meta-critically aware of heteropatriarchal structures, and equally committed to confronting them within a broader political society. Indeed, a consistent endeavour of Rodriguez's work beyond writing – as an educator and activist – is his critical assessment of heteropatriarchy pursuant to a new model of manhood, which he undertakes with varying levels of success.

Amaia Ibarraran-Bigalondo is a full professor at the University of the Basque Country, where she teaches contemporary North American Literature and Culture. Her research has been focused on the study of Chicana Literature and Culture and has published several articles in international journals. She is a member of the REWEST research group (Research Group in Western American Literature). She is author of *Mexican American Women, Dress and Gender: Pachucas, Chicanas, Cholas* (Routledge, 2019) and editor of *Spanish Perspectives on the American West in 21st Century Literature, Cinema and Culture* (Peter Lang, 2025), *The New American West in Literature and the Arts* (Routledge, 2020), *Transcontinental Reflections on the American West: Words, Images, Sounds beyond Borders* (Portal Eds., 2015), *The Neglected West* (Portal Eds, 2012).

THE LIFE, LITERATURE AND LEGACY OF LUIS J. RODRÍGUEZ: IN THE LONG RUN

Iuli, Maria Cristina

Università del Piemonte Orientale "Amedeo Avogadro"

FREEDOM RADIO: MALCOLM X SPEECHES AND BLACK POWER ON RAI, "TERZO PROGRAMMA"

DISCOURSES OF FREEDOM: HISTORY-MAKING SPEECHES, ESSAYS, AND MANIFESTOS IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Jarmołowicz-Dziekońska, Małgorzata

Uniwersytet w Białymstoku

FREEDOM BELONGS TO THE STRONG: SHATTERED LIBERTY AND JAPANESE-AMERICAN INTERNMENT THROUGH THE PRISM OF THE INTERNEES

The American nation prides itself on liberties inscribed in its sociopolitical mode of conduct, which first nested in the Declaration of Independence and nowadays most strongly reverberates with all its might as a primary means of expressing personal autonomy. However, history testifies against these principles. As it transpires, "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" are not for all. The internment of the Japanese and Japanese Americans during World War II proved that the notion of the enemy can be as malleable as the government needs. Thus, the repercussions of this incarceration have revealed that any inclination towards democratic backsliding brings rotten fruit and all actions will be judged by forthcoming generations. In this paper, I attempt to demonstrate that Japanese Americans— through their testimonial narratives in memoirs and autobiographies—have constructed an alternative view of the past that poses a challenge to the dominant representation of the past in the narratives of the U.S. government. Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston's *Farewell to Manzanar*: A *True Story of Japanese American Experience During and After the World War II Internment* (1973), Yoshiko Uchida's *Desert Exile: The Uprooting of a Japanese-American Family* (1982), Daniel Okimoto's *American in Disguise* (1971) and Bill Hosokawa's *Out of the Frying Pan: Reflections of a Japanese American* (1998) provide a rich and informative source of eyewitness testimonies that inscribe into a collective perspective of first-hand experience within both sociohistorical and literary contextual frameworks, and meaningfully engage in discourse on the Second World War internment of the Japanese and Japanese Americans.

Małgorzata Jarmołowicz-Dziekońska (PhD, Department of Anglophone Literatures, Faculty of Philology, University of Białystok, Poland) dedicates her research work to the relationship of literature and culture by exploring their textual intersections and mapping their locus within the matrix of the contemporary literary criticism. Her major fields of academic interest comprise ecocriticism, postcolonial and cultural studies with a focus on ethnicity and identity formation in the context of immigrant narratives. In her monograph, *JapaneseAmerican Literature through the Prism of Acculturation* (New York: Routledge, 2023), she engages in discourse on acculturation and acculturation strategies adopted by Japanese immigrants and their Japanese-American offspring, who struggle with their hybrid ethnic identities and resulting tensions between their American and Japanese selves.

PRISONS IN CALIFORNIA

Jevtic, Marko

Universität Konstanz

"THE WORLD IS YOURS": GANGSTER GAMES AND THEIR FANTASIES OF (BLACK) POWER

Since Brian De Palma's *Scarface* hit silver screens in 1983, the phrase "the world is yours" has crystallized the gangster's mythology of self-made freedom. Video games, too, trade on the seductive fantasy that the criminal is the only figure who truly lives without limits. This is made particularly evident in *Scarface: The World is Yours* (2006), which rewrites the movie's ending in such a way that protagonist Tony Montana does not bleed to death under a statue carrying the words "The World is Yours"; instead, Tony, the player-character, survives and eventually becomes the ruler of a vast underworld empire. In the context of an open-world video game, the phrase "the world is yours," which warns against fatal hubris in the movie, is repurposed as an unconditional promise of boundless freedom. This freedom is made tangible because "you" (i.e., the player) can become a gangster in a world that was specifically designed to be yours.

This presentation will investigate how the gangster both enables and embodies the typical power fantasy of open-world games. At the same time, it examines how forms of the gangster different from the Italian mobster and Latin American drug dealer modify, complicate or critically question this power fantasy. More specifically, I will discuss the game *Mafia III* (2016), since its main narrative is set in the still-segregated Louisiana of 1968, in which the black protagonist's freedom is restricted by the color of his skin. I will argue that *Mafia III* uses the gangster as a means to experience a Black Power fantasy, where its ludic interactivity invites the player to enact forms of violent resistance against racial oppression.

Marko Jevtic pursues a PhD in media studies at the University of Konstanz. Coming from literary studies, his current research on video games uses narratological approaches to investigate how interactivity helps shape, create, and affect processes of identity negotiation between the game and its (implied) player. His other research interests include negotiations of masculinity in film noir and rap music, narratives of radicalization in pop culture, and eco-terrorism in video games.

WHEN THE WORLD CLOSES IN ON YOU: FREEDOM, GAMEPLAY, AND VIDEOGAMES

Johnson, Ronald Angelo

Baylor University

THE ENTANGLEMENT OF RACE AND FREEDOM IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Viewing the early United States through a transnational lens facilitates a fuller discussion of the complex, uneven search for freedom during the American Revolution. This paper connects the ideals and actions of multiracial founders in British North America (later the United States) with those of Afro-Caribbean inhabitants in Saint-Domingue (later Haiti) to argue that across the western Atlantic world people of European and African descent, along with colonists of mixed parentage, sought different kinds of freedom from different foes.

The end of the Seven Years' War—though followed by temporary peace—set the stage for protests and fights over the meaning and scope of freedom. After the Treaty of Paris of 1763, European writers and orators of colonial North America and the Caribbean regularly used terms like slavery and freedom to describe increasingly contentious relationships with their respective imperial governments. In this paper, *Liberty* will be used to describe the objective of their demands for greater political autonomy, distinctive from seeking liberation from chattel slavery. The words slavery and freedom more poignantly encapsulate the struggle of Black people against being forcibly kidnapped, trafficked, and enslaved by other human beings. Therefore, in this presentation, *freedom* will refer to what Black people sought in their search for an end to enslavement. Free people of mixed parentage—predominantly born of African mothers and European fathers—campaigned for *equality* with their white colonial neighbors. During the examined period, members of this cohort did not generally seek emancipation for enslaved populations.

Examining the American Revolution as a cross-colonial, transracial story between the two peace treaties of Paris, 1763 and 1783, helps us to investigate a myriad of unexpected ways that rebellion and resistance in North America and the Caribbean were intertwined. In a story of revolution and race, the distinctive use of *freedom*, *liberty*, and *equality* is intended to highlight the unbridgeable gulf between the concurrent use by different populations and the disparate appropriation of the powerful, radical, revolutionary concept of freedom.

Ronald Angelo Johnson holds the Ralph and Bessie Mae Lynn Chair of History at Baylor University (USA). He embraces a transnational approach to study diplomacy in the early United States within the Atlantic world, and with a particular emphasis on Haiti. He is the author of the book *Entangled Alliances: Racialized Freedom and Atlantic Diplomacy During the American Revolution* (Cornell University Press, 2025). His previous publications include *Diplomacy in Black and White: John Adams, Toussaint Louverture, and Their Atlantic World Alliance* (UGA Press, 2014) and a co-edited volume, with Ousmane K. Power-Greene, *In Search of Liberty: African American Internationalism in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World* (UGA Press, 2021). He delivered the keynote address at 2025 Conference of the Réseau Européen pour le Développement de l'Histoire de la Jeune Amérique (RéDEHJA) in Nantes. He is co-editor of the *Journal of the Early Republic* (JER).

VISIONS OF (UN)FREEDOM: AFRICANS, AMERICANS, AND THE FATE OF DEMOCRACY FROM THE AGE OF REVOLUTIONS TO THE GILDED AGE

Joy, Natalie

Northern Illinois University

‘OF AN UNCONSTITUTIONAL AND SINFUL COLOR”: BLACK ABOLITIONISTS, NATIVE AMERICAN ANCESTRY, AND US CITIZENSHIP IN THE EARLY 19TH CENTURY

This paper considers how, before the 14th Amendment, some Black men staked a claim to US citizenship on the basis of their Native ancestry. After the American Revolution, formal and informal relationships—most often between African American men and Native women—resulted in many people of mixed ancestry living in Native and Black communities in the northeastern United States. A number of prominent Black abolitionist men, including Charles B. Ray and William P. Powell, were the children or grandchildren of these relationships, and they retained a strong sense of pride in their biracial or multiracial ancestry even if they seem to have primarily identified as African American. In the decades before the 14th Amendment established birthright citizenship, some men of color strategically deployed their Native ancestry to make claims to U.S. citizenship, including by applying for passports. Public notaries and other officials tasked with creating and certifying the documents needed to apply for a US passport could assist or impede these efforts. For example, in his 1849 passport application, Powell made no mention of his African ancestry, instead insisting that he was “of Indian Extraction.” His application was ultimately unsuccessful, almost certainly because a notary deliberately called attention to Powell’s African ancestry. Despite his failure to secure a passport, Powell’s efforts to claim US citizenship partly on the basis of his Native ancestry suggests his understanding of its potential utility.

Natalie Joy is an associate professor of history at Northern Illinois University in the United States. She is working on a book, under contract with the University of Pennsylvania Press, on the centrality of Native Americans to the American antislavery movement from the 1820s to the 1860s. Her research has been supported by a number of sources, including an NEH fellowship at the New-York Historical Society in 2016-17. In June 2018 her article, “The Indian’s Cause: Abolitionists and Native American Rights,” was published in the *Journal of the Civil War Era* as part of a special issue on “The Future of Abolition Studies” guest edited by Manisha Sinha. Most recently, she was the 2023-24 Bonn-Yale-Anton-Wilhelm-Amo Fellow at the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies at the University of Bonn in Germany. In 2026, she will be a Research Fellow at the Obama Institute at the University of Mainz, Germany.

IN THE SHADOWS OF SLAVERY: FREE BLACK CITIZENSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES, 1783-1865

Juncker, Clara

Syddansk Universitet

RICE AND RECONSTRUCTION: EMANCIPATION STRATEGIES IN ELIZABETH W. ALLSTON PRINGLE’S A WOMAN RICE PLANTER (1914)

In her memoir A *Woman Rice Planter* (1914), Elizabeth W. Allston Pringle, the daughter of a wealthy South Carolina rice planter, offers her reflections on managing a rice plantation in the post-Civil War era, when the plantation system had collapsed economically. A *Woman Rice Planter* dramatizes practical and psychological negotiations with, and visions of, freedom. Pringle frames her narrative around the loss of the antebellum rice economy and struggles to retain the freedom and leisure of her family’s former way of life. She does not, however, grant a similar freedom to the emancipated African Americans who remain as laborers on the plantation, in that she often represents them through a paternalistic and stereotypical lens that reflects the racial hierarchies of the Jim Crow era. She fares better on the issue of gender and authority. As a woman planter, Pringle occupies an unusual role and avails herself of the masculine-coded domain of plantation management while still adhering to notions of Southern white womanhood. In the process, she creates a stage for her own emancipation by developing a close relationship with the land around her. She depicts the transformation of Southern agriculture through her accounts of failing crops, economic instability, and environmental challenges, which reflect the broader map of rice culture in the Lowcountry. She also transforms herself through the act of writing, which allows her to participate in, and control, the narrative of the post-Civil War South. Pringle does not, however, reconcile, or resolve, the tension between survival and memory. She records the practical difficulties of sustaining plantation life and crafts a narrative that memorializes the lost world of the Southern elite. The memoir blends agricultural history, racial ideology, and gendered authorship in a way that grants visions of freedom to Pringle and her peers. The former enslaved workers thus had to develop their own emancipatory strategies. Though filtered through Pringle’s paternalistic and racially biased gaze, these strategies point to a wider pattern of post-emancipation agency, in that workers sought to redefine freedom not only as release from bondage but as control over their labor, time, and community life, even as planters like Pringle interpreted such actions as decline or disorder.

Clara Juncker (Ph.D., Tulane University), Dr. Phil., University of Southern Denmark, has published widely in journals including *The Mississippi Quarterly*, *The Southern Quarterly*, *The Hemingway Review*, *Literature/Film Quarterly*, and *College English*. Her books include *Trading Cultures: Nationalism and Globalization in American Studies*, *Through Random Doors We Wandered: Women Writing the South*, *Transnational America: Contours of Modern U.S. Culture*, *Circling Marilyn: Text, Body Performance*, and *Black Roses: African American Women Writers*. She has lectured at universities throughout Europe and the United States and at universities in Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Macau, Lebanon, and The People’s Republic of China. She is the former Director of the Center for American Studies, President of the Danish Association for American Studies, and of the Nordic Association for American Studies and has served on the Board of EAAS. Since her time at Tulane, she has a special relationship with the American South, especially Louisiana.

SOUTHERN WOMEN WRITERS AND EMANCIPATION STRATEGIES

Kalous, Isabel

Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg

HERBAL REMEDIES, VOLUNTARY CHILDLESSNESS, AND REPRODUCTIVE AUTONOMY IN THE LATE 19TH CENTURY

This paper examines visions of reproductive freedom in late nineteenth-century America, an era that saw a concerted effort to regulate female bodies and control their reproduction through the criminalization of abortion. While abortion before quickening had been a common and unregulated practice until the early nineteenth-century, restrictive legislation was implemented across the U.S. by the end of the nineteenth century. However, prohibiting abortion was complicated, and women continued to challenge and circumvent these restrictions. They found ways to exert a degree of reproductive SELF-DETERMINATION though commercially marketed herbal remedies such as Pennyroyal Pills and Lydia Pinkham's Vegetable Compound. Promoted as remedies for general female ailments, these widely accessible products often contained ingredients known for their contraceptive or abortifacient properties. They offered women a degree of freedom to control their reproductive lives, thus challenging male-dominated medical authority and attempts to govern female bodies.
Plants, flowers, and herbs associated with contraception and abortion, such as pennyroyal and parsley, appeared frequently in advertisements for these remedies. As symbols of reproductive autonomy, they also appear in literature from that period. One example is Sarah Orne Jewett's regionalist novel The Country of the Pointed Firs (1896), which portrays the remote New England village of Dunnet Landing, whose residents are primarily older, childless women. The recurring symbolic presence of pennyroyal in the narrative suggests a community that has taken control of its reproductive destiny, creating a female-centered world largely free from reproductive expectations and pressures. In my paper, I examine Jewett's vision of reproductive SELF-DETERMINATION as a response to the prevailing reproductive imperative of the time – i.e. the political and scientific discourse that urged white, native-born American women to fulfill their national duty to procreate. Although the depiction of independent women and their supportive networks can be read as a proto-feminist utopia, this vision is not without tensions: While emphasizing female agency, Jewett also paints a picture of a Dunnet Landing as a town in decay, hinting at the societal costs and potential disappearance of a community that opts out of biological reproduction. This ambivalence highlights The Country of the Pointed Firs's engagement with women's reproductive autonomy and contemporary cultural anxieties, particularly nativist fears about demographic decline and the future of white America.

Isabel Kalous is a senior lecturer and postdoctoral researcher in American cultural and literary studies at Friedrich-Alexander University Erlangen-Nuremberg. She holds a Bachelor's and Master's degree in International Cultural and Business Studies from the University of Passau and a PhD in English and American Literature from Justus Liebig University Giessen. She is the author of the monograph *Black Travel Writing: Contemporary Narratives of Travel to Africa by African American and Black British Authors* (transcript, 2021). Her main areas of research and teaching include cultural mobility studies and travel narratives, African American literature, climate change fiction, and reproductive justice. In her current research project, she examines representations of non-motherhood and voluntary childlessness in American literature and cultural discourses from the nineteenth century to the present. Since 2023, she is an associated member of the research training group "The Sentimental in Literature, Culture, and Politics" at FAU.

Kanzler, Katja

Universität Leipzig

FREEDOM AND CARE IN NK JEMISIN'S GREAT CITIES DUOLOGY

NK Jemisin's *The City We Became* (2020) and *The World We Make* (2023) is a pair of speculative fiction novels that—in the symbolically rich manner afforded by the genre—engages with the dynamics of freedom struggle. The novels imagine a world in which cities, when coming of age, gain sentience and manifest in human avatars. The duology's focus rests on the embattled 'birth' of New York City: In its plot, NYC is being attacked by a cosmic nemesis who wants to stop the city's awakening to consciousness in its track and subjugate it to its rule. This nemesis, who manifests as a character called The Woman in White, symbolically evokes several constellations of usurpation and subjugation, especially colonialism, White supremacy, and the classed dynamics of gentrification. The novel's story centers the resistance that is mounted by the city's newly born avatars—avatars of NYC as a whole and of each of its boroughs, who come together to fight for their joint freedom.

It is this narrative of resistance and struggle for freedom that I want to discuss in my paper. I want to read this narrative as an astute reflection on freedom. I will argue that the duology makes a point in going beyond liberalist conceptions of freedom as individualist autonomy. Instead, it outlines a notion of freedom as non-domination that is enabled by relationships, especially relationships of care-based solidarity. I want to unpack how the texts draw on their genre's fantastic mode to think through the work that is entailed in "solidarity care" (Myisha Cherry), outlining it as a practice of solidarity that foregrounds the embodied nature of social beings and the equally embodied labors involved in looking out for one another when social justice is under attack.

Katja Kanzler is Professor of American Literature at Leipzig University in Germany. Her research is governed by an interest in how literature and related forms of cultural expression work as venues in which US-American society reflects on itself – in which it thinks through, rehearses, or fights over interpretations of social reality, and in which it makes social alternatives thinkable. Among other things, she has published on literary negotiations of gender and its intersections with other relations of power, on the role of narrativity in processes of social meaning-making, and repeatedly on the poetics and politics of popular culture.

Karczewska, Anna Maria

Uniwersytet w Białymstoku

FREEDOM AND RIVERS: COLONIAL CAPTURE AND ECOLOGICAL LIBERATION OF THE COLORADO RIVER

This paper represents a transnational conversation on the idea of freedom through the lens of river systems, asking: what it means for a river to be free and alive. Using David Owen's Where the Water Goes: Life and Death Along the Colorado River (2017) as a central case study, I trace how the slow violence of extraction, dams, diversion and bureaucratic regulation has transformed the Colorado river into a managed resource – emblematic of a broader American impulse to domesticate the wild. In contrast, I place Owen's narrative alongside Robert Macfarlane's Is a River Alive? (2025) which draws on Indigenous epistemologies, legal personhood and poetic thought to reimagine rivers as living, agentive beings. While Owen documents the costs of infrastructural control in the American West, Macfarlane's transnational perspective (including cases such as Río Los Cedros, the Magpie River and the River Adyar) invites us to rethink freedom as something not exclusively human. To contextualize this contrast, I draw on decolonial thought and feminist materialisms, presenting the notion of gestational freedom: the freedom to hold, nourish, and sustain life without being owned or managed. Seeing rivers as gestational rather than extractable reframes ecological justice as a liberation of entangled life forms from regimes of control—particularly in settler-colonial contexts like the United States, where nature has historically been viewed as a frontier to conquer or a resource to manage. Ultimately, this paper argues for a more-thanhuman politics of liberation that challenges dominant American frameworks of freedom, ownership, and autonomy.

Anna Maria Karczewska is a graduate in English and Spanish Philology. She is Assistant Professor at the University of Białystok, where she teaches at the Faculty of Philology. She has a PhD in cultural studies from the University of Social Sciences and Humanities (SWPS) in Warsaw. She has written a monograph New Journalism as a Window onto the 1960s Counterculture (2017), she has also published articles related to Latin American culture and literature. In August-October 2020, she was a Visiting Fellow at the Pontifcal Bolivarian University (UPB) in Medellín, Colombia. She is a recipient of the Polish National Science Center research grant Miniatura 5 (2021) for the project "Medellín: the portrait of trauma and urban violence in the works of Colombian journalists." Her latest article, entitled "Hydrocentric reading of rivers. Waterways in Wade Davis' Magdalena: River of Dreams. A story of Colombia" is the result of a research stay in the Colombian city of Honda, at the Magdalena River Museum (The project was financed from the grant received from the Polish Ministry of Education and Science under the Regional Initiative of Excellence programme for the years 2019-2022).

Kehan Liu, Gail

Temple University

HE UNPROMISING ECONOMIC FREEDOM: (POST-)NEOLIBERALISMIN CONTEMPORARYCHINESE AMERICAN CULTURAL PRODUCTION

The Washington Consensus, often known in the same vein as neoliberalism, has shaped global socioeconomics since the 1980s. Defined by its very emphasis on the free market and individualism, neoliberalism has presented complex relations between its promotion of freedom and its actual exertion of oppression. This complexity has particularly intersected with Chinese collectivist traditions ever since neoliberalism appeared in the Chinese market and operated in the Chinese way, all of which profoundly impacted the experiences of Chinese immigrants in the United States and Chinese Americans. Over time, Chinese Americans—frequently stereotyped as a model minority—have shifted from performing cheap, manual labor to occupying elite professional roles, fueling debates around economic freedom and privilege. Yet recent shifts, such as U.S. outbound tariffs, seem to hint at an unfree "post-neoliberal" moment that reinforces white American interests through frameworks of meritocracy. Ironically, this unfree meritocracy is the very system by which many Chinese Americans have long navigated their place in U.S. society.
My research examines how these tensions materialize in contemporary Chinese American cultural production, specifically, in three novels—Ling Ma's *Severance* (2018), Weike Wang's *Joan Is Okay* (2022), and R. F. Kuang's *Yellowface* (2023)—and the Netflix series *Beef* (2023). Each text illuminates the interplay of neoliberal and post-neoliberal structures through depictions of merit-based work and financial aspirations, revealing the simultaneously strategic, dynamic, and precarious Chinese Americanness manifested in the form of economic (un)freedom. I argue in this paper for the fragility of model minority status under shifting political and economic pressures. Ultimately, my research explores what it means and what it may yet mean to be Chinese in a U.S. increasingly defined by contested economic notions of freedom, merit and post-neoliberal realignments.

Gail Kehan Liu is currently an English PhD student at Temple University, USA. Her research interests mainly engage with Asian American literature, neoliberalism in American ethnic literature, and economic and political policies in American literature. She is now focusing on the mutual impact between neoliberal policies and Chinese American cultural production. She holds an MRes in American Studies from University of Nottingham and an MA in English from Beijing Jiaotong University. Her recent publications appear in ANQ: A *Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews* and *American, British, and Canadian Studies*.

Kimak, Izabella

Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej

Those of us who balance academic work with parenting are well aware of the challenges involved in juggling these two roles. I have been a single mother for almost a decade now, and while my children are now teens – leaving me more time to focus on work – raising them by myself when they were younger did take a toll on my academic career and overall well-being. When I look at my CV today, I can clearly see a certain gap of several years, coinciding with the first few years after my divorce. I would love to share my reflections on being a single mom in academia as part of your roundtable, but I will be equally happy to simply attend this important meeting.

Izabella Kimak is an Assistant Professor at the Department of British and American Studies at Maria Curie-Sklodowska University in Lublin, Poland. Her research interests encompass contemporary US-American literature, with particular emphasis on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. She is the Secretary General of the European Association for American Studies as well as elected representative of the Polish Association for American Studies to the EAAS. A Kosciuszko Foundation fellow and a recipient of the Polish National Science Center research grant for the project "Sweet Home Chicago? The Windy City and American Writers of Polish Descent." She has just received a Fulbright Senior Award for the project "Mapping the Polish Midwest: Polish American Literature and Place-Making."

ACADEMIC MOTHERING/PARENTING ROUND TABLE

Kirk, John

University of Arkansas at Little Rock

BLACK SOLDIERS AND THE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM IN WORLD WAR II: THE 94TH ENGINEERS, THE NAACP, AND THE "ARKANSAS INCIDENT"

On Thursday, August 14, 1941, an armed group of white civilians, white state police, and white state troopers attacked Black soldiers of the 94th Engineer Battalion and their white commanding officers as they marched along Highway 67 between the towns of Gurdon and Prescott in southwest Arkansas. Several truckloads of white military police watched on and did nothing to intervene. The Black soldiers, mainly from the Detroit and Chicago area, had been sent from Fort Custer in Michigan to take part in manoeuvres the week before. Fearing for their lives, that night around one hundred Black soldiers fled, most of them eventually making their way back to Fort Custer. What the NAACP referred to as the "Arkansas Incident" raised a storm of controversy and brought to a head a number of complaints that had been received about the treatment of northern Black soldiers in southern states in 1941. Black soldiers of the 94th Engineers, their families, and their friends, sent a flood of letters to Black leaders, Black newspapers, Congressmen and Senators, the War Department, and Pres. Franklin D. Roosevelt. The NAACP demanded the immediate desegregation of the US Army; the appointment of more Black military police; a federal order directing southern states to protect Black soldiers; and the prosecution of those who had attacked the 94th Engineers. The NAACP also arranged for the successful defence of six Black soldiers who had been court-martialled for desertion. Although the War Department did eventually acquiesce to the employment of more Black military police, the NAACP's other demands were ignored. The 94th Engineers went on to distinguished service in the war, including in the Naples-Foggia and Rome-Arno campaigns. This paper uses the "Arkansas Incident" as a lens through which to examine the contradictions and complications that arose from mobilizing a Jim Crow US Army in a fight for freedom and democracy.

John A. Kirk is the George W. Donaghey Distinguished Professor of History at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. He has authored, edited, or co-edited ten books including *Redefining the Color Line: Black Activism in Little Rock, Arkansas, 1940-1970* (2002); *Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement: Controversies and Debates* (2007); *Race and Ethnicity in Arkansas: New Perspectives* (2014); and *The Civil Rights Movement: A Documentary Reader* (2020). Kirk has also published numerous book chapters in edited collections and articles in a wide variety of journals including the *Journal of African American History*, *Journal of American Studies*, *Reviews in American History*, and *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Society and Culture*. His work has featured in various media outlets including *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Atlantic*, *The Huffington Post*, *History Today*, *BBC History*, *PBS*, *CNN*, *The History Channel*, and *BBC Radio*.

BLACK SOLDIERS, VISIONS OF FREEDOM AND MEMORY IN WORLD WAR II

Kleidona, Evgenia

Aristotéleio Panepistímio Thessaloníkīs

RESISTING NORMS, EMPOWERING SELVES THROUGH DIGITAL MEDIA: HOW TWINE GAVE VOICE TO QUEER EXPERIENCE

As a primary form of sociocultural expression that is constantly reshaped by the technological advancements of the twenty-first century, digital storytelling via Twine is becoming an increasingly powerful medium in the context of LGBTQ+ identity politics. Twine's revolutionary nature is examined within the broader sociocultural and sociopolitical context in the US. Flourishing in a decade of landmark changes and forward steps for the LGBTQ+ community and at the same time setting a counterparadigm to the GamerGate discourse, Twine serves as an illuminating example of the mutual interrelation between digital media on the one hand, and culture, society and politics on the other. Its subversiveness can be located in three main elements: authorship, representation and gameplay. Being free, open-source, and highly userfriendly, Twine brought to the public a level of accessibility not offered by other authoring systems before its release in 2009. This advantage contributed significantly to its popularization, especially among voices that had been thus far marginalized or excluded from mainstream game development. Twine quickly turned into a powerful vehicle of self-empowerment and representation, enabling an avant-garde of queer authors and creators to defy the dominant discourses in game design and tell their stories on their own terms. It is, therefore, not accidental that many Twine games or narratives focus on queer characters, and through them, bring to light personal stories and experiences. However, as the presentation demonstrates, this queer dimension is also communicated through the game mechanics, which offer to the reader/player alternative forms of pleasure and engagement that resonate with queer experience. The presentation brings together theories in queer and game studies, including Anastasia Salter and Stuart Moulthrop's exploration of Twine's queerness, Bonnie Ruberg's work on queer games, as well as Jesper Juul's and Jack Halberstam's discussions on failure in games. Shedding light on earlier Twine games, such as Porpentine's *With Those We Love* Alive (2014), as well as more recent works, such as Anya Johanna DeNiro's *A Bathroom Myth* (2017) and Naomi Norbez's *A Single Ouroboros Scale* (2022), this presentation foregrounds Twine as a powerful means for both personal and social activism, highlighting its pivotal role in contemporary American literature and culture.

Evgenia Kleidona, Ph.D. candidate, is a lecturer at CITY College, University of York Europe Campus, and a research assistant at the Institute of Modern Greek Studies (Manolis Triandaphyllidis Foundation). She is currently a PhD Candidate in the Department of American Literature and Culture, School of English, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTh). She holds an MA in Historical and Balkan Linguistics as well as a BA in Philology and in English Language and Literature from the same University. Reflecting her diverse academic background, her research is characterized by interdisciplinarity, bringing together her interest in Linguistics, American Literature and Culture, Digital Media, and Gender Studies. As a member of the Multimodal Research and Reading Group of the School of English, AUTh, she has been exploring the interrelation of multimodality, digitality, and interactivity. Her recent work focuses on Interactive Fiction with emphasis on Twine

Knewitz, Simone

Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn

Appropriation as Decolonial Gesture: The Documentary Poetics of Layli Long Soldier and Jordan Abel

This paper presents a comparative reading of two works of contemporary Indigenous documentary poetics: Oglala Lakota poet Layli Long Soldier's *Whereas* (2017) and Nisga'a poet Jordan Abel's *Empty Spaces* (2023). Both poets interrogate the relationship between American democratic ideals—freedom, justice, and equality—and the lived realities of Native communities, which face erasure, violence, and dispossession. By placing these works in dialogue, the paper foregrounds how Indigenous poetics unsettle the rhetoric of democracy and reveal its colonial foundations.

The analysis concentrates on poetic form, and particularly on strategies of appropriation as methods of resistance to the settler colonial state. In *Whereas*, Long Soldier responds to the U.S. Congressional Resolution of Apology to Native Americans (2009), a text embedded within a larger piece of legislation and never performed as a public apology. Through formal experiment—fragmented lines, ruptured syntax, and silences—she critiques the hollow, bureaucratic language that obscures ongoing dispossession. Abel's *Empty Spaces*, by contrast, appropriates James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, a seminal nineteenth-century novel that shaped popular imaginaries of Indigeneity. By rearranging and reframing Cooper's descriptions of landscape, Abel dismantles the racist literary myths that naturalized conquest and reclaims land as a site of Indigenous presence rather than settler fantasy.

The paper situates these works within a broader theoretical framework that understands documentary poetics as a counterhegemonic intervention. As Leong argues, documentary poetics can serve as an "unofficial, demotic practice that authenticates marginalized experiences at the fringes of our cultural memory" (4). In this context, appropriation emerges as what Walter Mignolo terms a "decolonial gesture," a strategy that exposes colonial logics embedded in law, literature, and history while opening space for Indigenous modes of truthtelling.

Long Soldier and Abel demonstrate how Indigenous documentary poetics reconfigure the meaning of freedom. Rather than reproducing the settler myth of liberty tied to expansion and conquest, their work reclaims freedom as survival, memory, and SELF-DETERMINATION. By interrogating both the language of state power and the narratives of settler literature, these poets reveal how form itself can serve as a decolonial practice, unsettling the contradictions of democracy and envisioning alternative futures grounded in Indigenous sovereignty.

Simone Knewitz is Lecturer for North American Studies at the University of Bonn, Germany, where she also completed her dissertation and post-doctoral degree. She has held research fellowships at George Mason University, George Washington University and Harvard University and taught as deputy professor of American Studies at the Universities of Münster, Hamburg, and Mannheim. In her book *The Politics of Private Property: Contested Claims to Ownership in U.S. Cultural Discourse* (Lexington Books, 2021) she has explored the ways in which property narratives have historically contributed to the unequal dissemination of wealth and race-based structures of exclusion in the U.S. Further publications include the monograph *Modernist Authenticities: The Material Body and the Poetics of Amy Lowell and William Carlos Williams* (Winter, 2014), as well as numerous essays on literature and popular culture. Her current research project explores contemporary poetic interventions into political protest movements

Knudsen, Edward

University of Oxford

BOUND TO BE FREE? VISIONS OF CONSTRAINT AND LIBERTY IN US TRADE POLICY DEBATE, 1981-PRESENT

Is “free trade” a form of economic liberty, or rather a type of constraint? Ever since US President Reagan argued that the United States must learn from the 1930 Smoot-Hawley tariff and resist the ‘siren song of protectionism,’ pro-free trade US presidents and policymakers have consistently framed tariffs as a ‘temptation’ to be avoided—including through restrictive means. This pairs with a “there is no alternative” discourse in which the unimpeded flows of goods and capital are portrayed not as a policy choice, but rather as an inevitability.

To answer this question, the paper examines competing visions of freedom in international commerce from the Reagan administration to the current second Trump administration. Through an analysis of presidential speeches on trade, it finds that international economic exchanges have been portrayed in three different types of freedom. Under Reagan, trade was viewed as a *freedom struggle*, something ultimately worthwhile but by no means inevitable. In the post-Cold War era of HW Bush, Clinton, W Bush, and Obama, trade took on the form of an inalienable freedom, something that must be pursued *even if it requires constraining others*. More recently, the Trump administration has portrayed the ability to restrict trade as a freedom to be reasserted. This paper will examine these contrasting ideas of freedom and compare them to different theoretical articulations of economic liberty, asking what they ultimately reveal about the underlying policy assumptions and visions of globalization.

Edward Knudsen is a doctoral researcher in international relations at the University of Oxford and an Affiliate Policy Fellow in European political economy at the Jacques Delors Centre in Berlin. His research focuses on the political economy and economic history of the US and Europe in the 20th century, specifically how the historical memory of economic events is constructed and deployed. Previously, he worked in the US and the Americas Programme at Chatham House think tank in London on projects which explored the future of transatlantic economic and security relations. He holds a Master’s in International Political Economy from the London School of Economics and Political Science and a Bachelor’s degree with majors in history and economics from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

BOUND TO BE FREE? MARKET FREEDOM AND POLITICAL CONSTRAINTS AFTER THE NEOLIBERAL TURN

Koenigsknecht, Nicole

Universität Zürich

“FREEDOM FROM WHAT?”—RUPTURING COLONIAL CONTAINMENT IN/THROUGH NOOPIMING: THE CURE FOR WHITE LADIES

Since well before 1776, European colonial presence on Turtle Island has brought about immense disruptions, through disease, warfare, and settlement, to Indigenous lifeways. For the Anishinaabeg specifically, the contemporary geopolitical border shared by the United States and Canada bisects much of their traditional territories. As settler-colonial nation-states whose existence is predicated on the continued occupation of Indigenous lands, the US and Canada fundamentally obstruct the Anishinaabeg’s ability to exercise purportedly inalienable rights such as the freedom of movement, expression, and religion. *Noopiming: The Cure for White Ladies* (2020), a novel by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg), thematizes these colonial constraints as its characters must navigate capitalist infrastructures, settler policies, and widespread ecological degradation throughout their homeland. Though they manage to engage in relationality, perform responsibilities, and conduct ceremony, the characters’ persistence in cultivating an “actual good life” despite these challenges exposes the ways in which the settler state denies them basic freedoms as colonial subjects. Beyond its content, *Noopiming* further serrates supposedly stable categories of literary form. Borrowing from Simpson’s own analytical framework as outlined in *Theory of Water: Nishnaabe Maps to the Times Ahead* (2025), this paper argues that *Noopiming* ruptures colonial containers. Its prose, poetry, and song flow together to undermine neat generic boundaries and challenge notions of linear time. Indeed, water, in all its states of matter, plays an integral role in the text. Mashkawaji, *Noopiming*’s primary narrator lies suspended in a frozen lake. From the ice they introduce readers to seven of their relatives, both human and non-human, whose embodied relationships with Mashkawaji and each other constitute the narrative’s core. Epitomizing an “aesthetics of turbulance,” Noopiming resists settler-colonial containment and embraces an expansive, radically egalitarian Anishinaabeg world.

Nicole Koenigsknecht is a settler scholar originally from the territory of The Three Fires Confederacy, the place now known as Michigan, who lives and works in Switzerland. After completing a Master of Arts at the University of Vienna, she recently began a position as doctoral research and teaching assistant to Professor Dr. Katharina Gerund, the chair of American literature and culture, at the University of Zurich. Her PhD project focuses on consumption and nourishment in contemporary North American Indigenous literatures. As an active member of Austria’s Young Americanists and the Emerging Scholars Forum of the Gesellschaft für Kanada-Studien (GKS), she is passionate about forging transatlantic connections between young scholars across North America and Europe.

RELATIONAL SOVEREIGNTIES: INDIGENOUS (RE)VISIONS OF FREEDOM ACROSS LAND, BODY AND IMAGINATION

Kolsal, Yagmur Su

Universität Münster

CAVEMEN, FLEXITARIANS, AND VEGAN ACTIVISTS: THE RHETORICAL USE OF FREEDOM OF CHOICE IN POLITICS OF SUSTAINABILITY, CONSERVATIVE REFUSAL, AND ETHICAL VEGANISM

Across the political spectrum, various stances are being taken regarding the role of individual choices in sustainability as research continues to reveal the long-term planetary impact of different production pathways. One of the most politically charged arenas in which the importance ascribed to sustainable consumer choices plays out is food politics. From the advocacy of "carnivore diets" by right-wing commentators and the agriculture industry's green-washing of beef, to the environmentalist campaigns that promote sustainability by advocating for the consumption of less meat, dairy, and eggs, the importance of dietary choices in the politics of sustainability has been increasing. In addition, charges against veganism in the realm of political discourse are often based on the notion of the freedom to choose one's dietary practices. The applications of such a rhetoric range from the defense of the sacrosanctity of "personal choice" to the erroneous claim that veganism is an essentially white, settler-colonial practice that disregards the freedoms and traditional food systems of Indigenous Peoples.

While food has always been a politically charged social symbol, this paper is interested in mapping the rhetorical use of freedom of choice in the construction of political identities that incorporate the support or refusal of vegan practices in the current political landscape. In addition to an investigation of food politics' role in different visions of freedom in sustainability discourses and conservative denial, this paper is also interested in putting these visions in conversation with the philosophy they instrumentalize: ethical veganism. While sustainability discourses emphasize the freedom to have a future on an inhabitable planet and the consumer choices this requires, right-wing refusal turns its gaze backward, attached to the idea of the freedom to live as it imagines once to have been possible. This paper contends that, in contrast, ethical veganism's ethos of communal interspecies freedom is rooted in the present where each consumer choice, including but not limited to food, comes with the moral duty to respect and protect the freedom of those who are denied (neo-)liberal individual liberties as subjects.

Yagmur Su KOLSAL (she/her) is a third-year doctoral candidate in American Studies and Book Studies at the Graduate School Practices of Literature at the University of Münster (Germany) and a DAAD fellow. She holds an MA in English Literature from the Middle East Technical University (Turkey). Her dissertation project is on the affective aesthetics of the reader-generated contemporary microgenre "dark academia" and its online aesthetic dimension. In addition to her dissertation topic that utilizes affect theory and aesthetics in its analyses, Yagmur Su is also interested in the following: critical vegan studies; contemporary literature and neoliberalism; food studies; horror and the Gothic; and literature and social media

Konovalova, Zhanna

Kazanskii federalnyi Suniversitet

RETHINKING THE AMERICAN DREAM AND FREEDOM IN AMERICAN LITERARY NONFICTION IN THE LATE 20TH CENTURY

The paper addresses the critical perception of the phenomenon of the American dream in literary nonfiction by Norman Mailer, Gay Talese, Jimmy Breslin, and Ted Conover. The American Dream, a foundational concept shaping the identity of the United States, underwent significant evolution throughout US history. Encompassing ideals of freedom, success, upward mobility, and the pursuit of happiness, it reflected the dynamic societal, economic, and cultural changes. American literary nonfiction has had a long-lasting history of addressing the most topical phenomena and concepts, including those of the American dream and American freedom. In the late 20th century, N. Mailer, G. Talese, J. Breslin, and T. Conover continued their aesthetic experiments with documentary genres in order to raise a range of issues including the search for identity and liberation, racial and ethnic inequality, immigrants' standards of living, which led them to rethinking and re/demythologizing the dream of equal rights and freedom in the USA. Building upon this foundation, the paper delves into specific examples from the selected authors' literary nonfiction to illustrate the nuanced and often contradictory portrayals of the American dream. The authors argue that these writers, employing techniques such as immersion journalism, scene-by-scene plot structure, and status details, expose the American dream's inherent limitations and its uneven distribution across different segments of American society. Through their hybrid writing (factual basis presented through personal narratives), the writers reveal the stark realities faced by marginalized communities, challenging the idealized vision propagated by mainstream media and political rhetoric. The authors conclude that N. Mailer's and J. Breslin's literary nonfiction highlights the disillusionment experienced by those who strive for success within a flawed system, while G. Talese's meticulous observations of social dynamics and T. Conover's undercover explorations of marginalized subcultures provide further evidence of the widening gap between the promise of freedom and upward mobility and the lived experiences of many Americans. The recurring motif of freedom gets reinterpreted not as an abstract ideal, but as an achievable individual possibility in the context of the rigid social order.

Zhanna Konovalova, PhD, is an Associate Professor at Kazan Federal University, where her courses include American Literature, British Literature and ESL. She received her PhD in Journalism dealing with the American Dream in American literary nonfiction of the second half of XX century (2009). Her research interests include American literary nonfiction of XX century, documentary tradition in American literature, New Journalism. Some of her books and publications are The Impact of Natural Disasters on Intercultural Dialogue and Its Reflection in Dave Egger's Zeitoun (2023), Revisiting the National History of the 1619 Project in Media Discourse in English (2022).

Kovács, Ágnes Zsófia

University of Szeged

A SOUTHWARD JOURNEY FROM FREEDOM TO BONDAGE IN MAT JOHNSON'S PYM

Since the 1970s, neo-slave narratives have been retelling stories of Antebellum slaves in an imaginary form, trying to reconstruct psychological experiences of slavery absent from the archive. As a reaction, several contemporary African American authors reflected on the literary overuse of slavery. For instance, Percival Everett's (2001) *Erasure* illustrates a literary resistance to the neo-slave narrative's grip, as expressed through the expectations of the literary marketplace. In 2008, Colson Whitehead wrote satirically about "novels of Black misery" that offer a quick route to literary and marketing success.

The paper explores Mat Johnson's *Pym* (2011), situating it in the debate concerning literary (over)representations of slavery. Johnson's *Pym* is a satirical rewriting of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838) from an African American perspective. It recounts an all-Black crew's return to the South, Antarctica, where they play an active part in initiating an ecological disaster. The paper argues that Johnson's *Pym* not only rewrites Poe's text to expose its Black sources, namely Dirk Peters's *The True and Interesting Narrative of Dirk Peters*, but it also revises the neo-slave narrative form in its speculative representation of mobility and nature. In the novel, the Black crew moves South in the hope of finding both money and freedom, but end up in bondage to local white Neolithic people who inhabit ancient caves under the ice. The enslaved travelers try to escape to a white American millionaire's Biodome nearby that emits heat, melting the ice and the caves. The clash between the slavers and the fugitives eventually causes an ecological disaster. The paper argues that Johnson's *Pym* revises the neo-slave narrative genre by turning the direction of African American mobility southward and by speculatively creating a polar geography that exposes the existing power structures underlying global warming.

Ágnes Zsófia Kovács is an Associate Professor at the Department of American Studies, University of Szeged, Hungary. Her research interests include late 19th-century proto-modern fiction, conversions of literary modernisms, popular fiction genres, and contemporary multicultural American fiction. Her current research maps Toni Morrison's literary legacy in contemporary African American novels. She published three books: *The Function of the Imagination in the Writings of Henry James* (2006), *Literature in Context* (2010), and *The Memory of Architecture in Edith Wharton's Travel Writings* (2025). She co-edited *Space, Gender, and the Gaze* (2017) and edited Edith Wharton's *Osprey Notes* (2021). She is the editor of *TNTe Journal* (Szeged), and sits on the editorial board of *Americana e-Journal* (Szeged) and *Acta Philologica* (Cluj). She is the current president of HAAS.

MOBILITY IN CONTEMPORARY BLACK ATLANTIC WRITING

Krasuska, Karolina

Uniwersytet Warszawski

LOCATING SOVIET-BORN WRITING IN THE US IN THE AMERICAN LITERARY FIELD: TOWARD A MATERIALIST CRITIQUE

Understood as "Soviet-born" (Krasuska), writing by Jewish migrants from the former Soviet Union functions as critically negotiating the immigrant diasporic present and the Soviet past. Further, "Soviet-born" links this literary output to geopolitical dynamics that go beyond Eastern Europe as the classic locale of Ashkenazic writing, extending it into the Soviet "empire of nations" (Hirsch) and with a perspective on the Global East (Müller). Because of the concomitant non-Jewish migration from the former Soviet Union post-1991, associated with the "new immigrant whiteness" in the US (Sadowski), Soviet-born diasporic Jewishness finds itself in tension with the framework of "global Russian culture" (Platt). This opens the prospect of reading this literature across multiple overlapping and conflicting Russian-speaking diasporas, beyond the imagined exceptionalism of "Soviet Jews" saved by the global social movement. This presentation probes these geopolitical and diasporic intermigrant entanglements beyond ethnic particularism using the example of two texts by Soviet-born migrant authors in the context of the Russian invasion of Crimea and full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Earlier texts engaged the broader Soviet landscape of nationalities, e.g. Anya Ulinich's *Petropolis*, Ellen Litman's *Mannequin Girl*, Sana Krasikov's *One More Year* and the texts not plotted around the invasions interpellated major ethnic migrant groups in the US (e.g. Gary Shteyngart, Keith Gessen). However, two key narratives focused on the Russian invasion on Ukraine, Irina Reyn's 2019 novel *Mother Country* and Sana Krasikov's 2022 short story "The Muddle," concentrate on juxtaposing (Jewish) Ukrainian and Russian positions. Moreover, Krasikov's text appears in the immediate context of a flurry of textual production by Soviet-born migrant writers that reconfigure the ethicized landscape, locating themselves as Ukrainian and sometimes as "Jewish refugees" (e.g. Julia Kolchinsky-Dasbach). Consequently, the presentation asks questions about the relationship of literature of protest (Trodd) and conceptual complexity as well as strategic parochialism.

Dr Karolina Krasuska is Associate Professor at the American Studies Center, University of Warsaw, Poland, the founder of the research group Gender/Sexuality at the ASC and co-founder of its Gender and Sexuality MA Program. Her research areas include twenty- and twenty-first-century transnational literature, centrally Jewish American literature, and gender/queer studies. She graduated from European University Viadrina, Frankfurt/Oder, was Visiting Fellow at SUNY Buffalo, and a member of the research group Gender as a Category of Knowledge, Humboldt University, Berlin. She is the author of a 2012 Polish-language monograph examining modernist texts from a transnational, gender-oriented perspective, a co-editor of *Women and the Holocaust: New Perspectives and Challenges* (2015), and translates gender/queer theory into Polish, including Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (2008). Her two recent books, *Soviet-Born: The Afterlives of Migration in Jewish American Fiction* (2024) and *Poradzieckie* (2021), expand her transnational literature interests into the twenty-first century.

JEWISH AMERICAN WRITING AND THE UNITED STATES' REGIMES OF MIGRATION: REIMAGINING NARRATIVES OF IMMIGRATION

Kratzenstein, Leonie

Universität Leipzig

MONSTROUS BODIES AND STRANGLED FREEDOMS IN GRETCHEN FELKER-MARTIN'S CUCKOO

In the culture wars that target queer youths in an early 21st-century US, the discourses of freedom, religious, social, or physical, are frequently wielded as a method of control. Gretchen FelkerMartin's *Cuckoo* (2024) uses this contradiction to illustrate the current state of queer teenagers in the United States, particularly through a narrative of queer adolescence under siege. The novel's central horror, that is, the monstrous transformations into alienlike beings of several teenagers who return from an Evangelical conversion therapy camp, functions as a metaphor for the conversion to heterosexuality that they are forced to undergo. The threat of the camp is thus not exclusive to the convertees but also seeps into their communities and thus calls into question how such institutions affect the freedom to move within rural states and to express themselves within their religious upbringings.

Felker-Martin's use of body horror literalizes a demand for legibility of queer young adults: When the characters' bodies mutate beyond recognition, they are marked as threats to be destroyed. Their subsequent destruction at the hands of their parents showcases the punitive social consequences of stepping outside sanctioned identities and examines the family's role in the torture and rejection of their LGBTQ+ children. At the same time, though, the novel refuses to collapse freedom into repression alone. *Cuckoo* raises questions of the characters' liberation and relief of coming out, as well as shows dependence and allyship within the acquired community that the camp, despite its horror, seems to afford. In my analysis, I will scrutinize the novel's engagement with discourses of freedom, especially its use of family and community ties, reading it through the lens of affect theory and its involvement with happiness and oppression. Theoretical frameworks by Sara Ahmed (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion*) and Lauren Berlant (*Cruel Optimism*), for instance, will serve as a lens through which I seek to decipher the novel's entanglement with bodily affects of trepidation and fear, created through its gory body horror. Angst and restrictions are brought into tension with freedom, as they are expressed spatially as well as psychologically in a narrative structure that emphasizes community by deploying a cast of individuals side by side.

Leonie Kratzenstein is a PhD candidate in American Studies at Leipzig University. Her research focuses on queerness, ritual, and affect in contemporary US media productions, as her doctoral dissertation examines how narratives discussing contemporary conversion therapy critique Evangelical fundamentalist ideologies as well as religious violence in rural areas of the United States, and, at the same time, perhaps continue to carry their underlying mechanisms. She is especially interested in sensationalism and entertainment in these texts, particularly through a focus on how these narratives utilize technologies of intimacy to create affects on screen/on the page. To fund her research, she holds a scholarship by the Studienstiftung d. dt. Volkes.

FEELING FREE(DOM): AFFECTS AND/OF LIBERTY IN US LITERATURE

Kudriavtseva, Irina

Bielaruski dziaržaŭny ŭniviersitet zamiežnych moŭ

POLYPHONY OF VOICES AND CELEBRATION OF DIFFERENCE IN FLASH FICTION AMERICA: 73 VERY SHORT STORIES

The paper will address the polyphony of voices and the celebration of difference and creative freedom in the collection *Flash Fiction America: 73 Very Short Stories* (2023) demonstrating, besides the possibilities of the genre and its poetics, the social, geographic, cultural, and ethnic heterogeneity of the USA. Its focus is vividly expressed in the afterword to the collection written by James Thomas, one of the founders and editors of all the books in this series: "*Flash Fiction America* is democratic. The book is a house with many small windows, but a door big enough to let everyone in. The stories are told in many different ways and through multiple voices, and that's the point, it is noisy. The book was made to entertain, but also edify, with new writers in mind. It is full of narrative strategies, new ways of telling truths that will break the fall, resonate with meaning."

The analysis of the characters (of various ages, ethnicities, professions, etc.), plots, conflicts, settings, modes of narration and linguistic features of the stories will show not only what makes each story different and unique, but also what brings them together presenting the chronotope of America with its past and present, its geographical, cultural, economic and political realities, struggles and discourses. True to the principle "less is more", the authors used the compressed form of flash fiction to delve into such diverse issues as individual and group identity, gender roles and stereotypes, coping with situations of crisis arising from poverty, disease, abuse, loss of a family member, teenage pregnancy, divorce, drug addiction, adultery, ethnic differences, discrimination, etc., and to represent characters in a variety of cultural and social contexts. Comic and tragic, optimistic and pessimistic, joyful and sad modalities of individual texts create collectively the feeling of human worth and value, the connection between freedom and the family, and out of the "slices of life" in the collection emerges a complex panorama of contemporary America.

Irina Kudriavtseva is PhD Associate Professor at the Department of Belarusian Philology and Foreign literature at Belarusian State University for Foreign Languages (Minsk, Belarus). Her major area of research is the literature and culture of the American South and the contemporary short story. She is the author of the monograph *Southern Accent: The Genre and Style Specificity of Short Stories by Writers of the American South, 1930–1980* (in Russian, MSLU, 2016) and has published articles that explore various aspects of the American fiction of the 20-21st centuries, most recently "Representation of Migration Experience in *The Dollmaker* by Harriette Arnow" (*Performative Identities in Culture: From Interaction to Social Media*, Brill, 2024). She is a member of the Belarusian Association for American Studies and has presented papers at international conferences including those organized by the Southern Studies Forum of the EAAS.

FREEDOM TO BE ME: STRUGGLES WITH STEREOTYPES, DISSENT, AND CELEBRATION OF DIFFERENCE IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN WRITING

Kuroś, Aleksandra

Uniwersytet Jagielloński

FREEDOM FRAMED: THE SUPREME COURT AND THE CONTRACTION OF INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY IN CONTEMPORARY GENDER JURISPRUDENCE

What does it mean for freedom to be framed by the very institution entrusted with its preservation? In the post-Dobbs constitutional landscape, the United States Supreme Court has assumed a more active role in defining the scope of individual liberty rather than merely safeguarding it. Across a growing body of decisions concerning reproductive rights, gender identity, and bodily SELF-DETERMINATION – from Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization (2022) through United States v. Skrmetti (2025), which upheld state bans on gender-affirming care for minors, and now Chiles v. Salazar, which challenges state restrictions on gender-affirming care – the Court has cultivated a jurisprudence of selective restraint. Within this discourse, freedom is neither expanded nor revoked, but curated and redefined. Employing a qualitative content analysis of judicial opinions and dissents, the study identifies patterns in the Court's reasoning and doctrinal shifts in areas such as reproductive autonomy and gender identity. A comparative approach is used to evaluate how the Court's recent rulings diverge from or align with prior precedents. Through close reading of constitutional language and argumentative structure, the analysis maps how interpretive strategies, such as originalism and textualism, function as mechanisms for delimiting the constitutional subject of freedom.
This research draws on the concept of politicization of justice, institutionalism, feminist legal theory, and critical legal studies. The idea of politicization of justice helps to explain how the Supreme Court operates not only as a judicial body but also as a political institution shaped by partisan influences. Institutionalism provides a framework for understanding how the Court's position within the American system of checks and balances affects its decisions and the broader functioning of the state. Feminist legal theory makes it possible to examine how constitutional reasoning often reflects gendered assumptions and how legal neutrality can reproduce inequality. Finally, critical legal studies highlight the connection between law and power, showing that judicial reasoning is never fully objective but embedded in broader political and social contexts.
In conclusion, the study shows that the Supreme Court's recent jurisprudence does not simply interpret freedom but actively reshapes it, turning a constitutional ideal into a political instrument that reflects the tensions of contemporary American society.

Aleksandra Kuroś is a second-year PhD candidate at the Doctoral School of Social Sciences at Jagiellonian University in Kraków, specializing in political science and administration within the interdisciplinary program *Society of the Future*. She holds both a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in American Studies from Jagiellonian University, as well as a Bachelor's degree in English Philology. Her academic interests focus on the U.S. Supreme Court, reproductive rights, and the relationship between law, politics, and gender. Aleksandra is the recipient of the prestigious SYLFF Fellowship (2025/26) awarded by The Tokyo Foundation in recognition of her academic excellence and leadership potential. She has presented her research at numerous international conferences and published works examining the impact of judicial decisions on women's rights and democratic governance in the United States.

Kurowicka, Anna

Uniwersytet Warszawski

ACADEMIC WELL-BEING

The question of academic well-being is of particular interest to EAAS's Women's Network because gender significantly affects one's chances for well-being at the university. If we assume—as I do—that the expectation of constant productivity coupled with limitless administrative duties is antithetical to our well-being in academia, we must also ask whether these pressures are equally applied to men and women both. After getting a PhD, many women in academic jobs start to fall behind their male peers in terms of career development. This is due not only to the often unequally distributed responsibilities of parenthood, but also to the amount and intensity of administrative work that tends to be assigned to women, which often involves emotional work for the benefit of students or other employees. As a result, women are made responsible for other people's well-being, while the pressures of their administrative tasks arguably make their own well-being impossible to achieve. In my contribution to the roundtable, I would like to focus on this gendered paradox of making the university a place where people can thrive by assigning the responsibility for this to women.

Anna Kurowicka is an Assistant Professor at the American Studies Center, University of Warsaw. She has published on asexuality in Sexualities, Teksty Drugie, Feminist Formations, and many edited collections. Her current research is focused on cultural representations of asexuality, connections between asexuality and queer theory, and asexuality and genderlessness in sf. She is currently working on a project on representations of asexuality in American popular culture funded by the National Science Center. She is a co-chair of the Gender/Sexuality Research Group and a member of the Speculative Texts and Media Research Group at the ASC. As part of an international research project "Queer Theory in Transit: Reception, Translation, and Production of Queer Theory in Polish and German Contexts," she investigates how American queer theories are taught at Polish universities.

Lambert, Raphaël

Kansai University

BLACK FUGITIVITY AS A PRAXIS OF FREEDOM

Fugitivity, whether it arises from pursuers, historical contexts, societal conditions, conventions, personal dilemmas, or traumas, acts as a recurring motif in literature, theatre, film, and various narrative art forms throughout history and across cultures. Nevertheless, fugitivity takes on a different coloration when examining artistic portrayals of Black existence in the United States, as it transcends mere motif to become deeply rooted in the Black experience. This is evident from Frederick Douglass's flight to freedom to Assata Shakur's exile in Cuba, the televised O.J. Simpson chase of 1994, and more broadly, the instinctive behavior, shaped by fear and distrust, of evading encounters with law enforcement. Despite headways in civil rights, the integration of the Black community into the mainstream, and its gradual ascent into the middle class, anti-Blackness has endured, fostering a sense of community identity, which contemporary thinkers have remodeled into a separatist stance, viewing Black fugitivity not as a pitiful consequence of ostracism but as a form of resistance and liberation from systemic oppression. A prominent advocate of this perspective is Fred Moten, who equates Blackness with fugitivity, defining it as "a desire for and a spirit of escape and transgression of the proper and the proposed. It's a desire for the outside, for a playing or being outside, an outlaw edge proper to the now always already improper voice or instrument" (*Stolen Life*). In conjunction with Moten, Tina Campt articulates the notion of fugitivity as a form of refusal, "a rejection of the status quo as livable and the creation of possibility in the face of negation i.e. a refusal to recognize a system that renders you fundamentally illegible and unintelligible" ("Black Visuality"). Following a concise introduction to the concept of fugitivity within the arts, my talk will focus on Black fugitivity as a radical endeavor to affirm what Moten and Stefano Harney refer to as the "vitality" of "Black sociality" (*The Undercommons*), serving as a bulwark against prevailing systems of control.

Raphaël Lambert has been living in Japan for twenty-three years. He resides in Kyoto and teaches African American literature and culture in the Department of American and British Cultural Studies at Kansai University in Osaka. His essays have appeared in the *Journal of Modern Literature*, *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, and *African American Review*. He also published "Translating Diversity from Ralph Ellison to Kenzaburō Ōe" in *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* (2023) and co-edited *The African American Novel in the Early Twenty-First Century* (Brill 2024). Additionally, he has written two monographs: *Narrating the Slave Trade*, *Theorizing Community* (Brill 2019) and *Black Hopes/Black Woes: Early African American Optimism and 21st Century Afro-pessimism* (Routledge, 2025). His latest essay, "The Allmuseri God in Charles Johnson's Middle Passage," is forthcoming in *Arizona Quarterly* (Fall 2025).

Le Bihan-Colleran, Christèle

Université de Poitiers

FREEDOM UNDER THREAT ON US CAMPUSES: FROM A LEFT-WING TO A RIGHT-WING "POLITICAL CORRECTNESS"?

The "political correctness" movement emerged on American campuses in the middle of the 1980s, in the context of a revival of conservatism in the United States. This movement, which was associated with left-wing politics, not only called for the recognition of diversity, especially within the mainstream curriculum, but also for the adoption of measures to ensure respect for and greater sensitivity toward ethnic, racial and sexual minorities as well as women. The speech codes, which were put in place in several universities following a series of mostly racial incidents, were met with harsh criticism at the highest level of the government. Indeed, in a speech delivered on May 4th,1991 in which he focused on the nature of freedom, Republican President Georges H. W. Bush denounced "political correctness" for threatening freedom of speech. During his first presidential campaign, Republican Donald Trump accused Democrats Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton of having "put political correctness above commonsense, above your safety, and above all else." His opposition to "political correctness" is credited in part for his electoral victory in 2016. As Trump is beginning his second term, he has launched a financial attack on several Ivy League universities, notably to coerce them to make changes in the courses they teach, thereby infringing academic freedom.
Adopting a historical approach, this paper will first retrace the genealogy of the "political correctness" movement, to then analyze the extent to which both this movement and President Donald Trump have threatened academic freedom and freedom of speech on University campuses, by trying to impose their own orthodoxy. It will thus be argued that Trump, who claimed to be "politically incorrect," is now endeavoring to impose a right-wing "political correctness."

Christèle Le Bihan-Colleran is an Associate Professor in American Studies at the University of Poitiers (France) and a member of the interdisciplinary research group MIMMOC (*Mémoires, Identités, Marginalités dans le Monde Occidental Contemporain*). She earned her PhD with a dissertation on the rise of the "political correctness" movement on American campuses and has since developed a research agenda focused on multiculturalism, identity politics, and their impact on higher education and American society. Her publications include "*Multiculturalism in the United States*: A *Fait Accompli*?" and a co-edited volume on the challenges of cultural diversity in the labor market (2020). Her work also focuses on the history of feminism and feminist thought, as reflected in her article "Feminist Linguistic Theories and 'Political Correctness': Modifying the Discourse on Women?" (2020). More recently, she has examined reproductive rights activism in "Abortion Rights in the Social Movements of the 1960s and 1970s: A Divisive Issue" (2024).

Lehtinen, Sanna

Helsingin yliopisto

ALLIGATOR ALCATRAZ AND THE PARADOXES OF FREEDOM: LEGAL STRUGGLES OVER THE EVERGLADES

In the summer of 2025, in the United States, a new immigration detention center was opened in the protected Everglades wetlands in Florida. The center's environmental impact was not assessed before its construction, even though the Everglades' unique ecosystem supports a wide variety of plants and animals, including many threatened and endangered species protected by law. Instead, the center was named Alligator Alcatraz, where species like crocodiles, alligators, and pythons—as President Trump put it—should guard the detainees from escaping. However, the law has since been put to the test, as in August 2025 a district court first ordered a two-week halt to construction while a federal judge considered whether the center violated environmental laws. After that, a federal court ordered the detention center to be closed because of environmental and human rights violations. In September 2025, however, a federal appeals court granted requests from the State of Florida and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to halt the enforcement of that order.

The Everglades stands at the intersection of American ideals of freedom and the contradictions embedded within them. Alligator Alcatraz represents a prevailing hegemony in which the exclusion of others is paradoxically used to justify the very values of American liberty. At the same time, the Everglades has long been portrayed in popular culture as a place of escape and refuge for Indigenous peoples as well as for non-human species. Furthermore, The Everglades represents a fragile natural heritage site increasingly threatened by climate impacts and human activities. These ongoing transformations not only endanger the humans and other species spatially connected to these landscapes but also alter the kinds of heritage transmitted to future generations in a temporal sense. Furthermore, the presidential administration embodies the public authority responsible for safeguarding this heritage—yet in these instances, it is the very actor enabling its destruction. My research follows the legal case of Alligator Alcatraz and the broader struggle over the future of the Everglades, examining how the case exposes the paradoxes of freedom within legal frameworks that both justify and restrict access to the Everglades.

Sanna S. Lehtinen (LLD, MSc, MA) is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Faculty of Law, University of Helsinki. Her fields of study include critical environmental law, cultural policy and heritage studies, spatial justice, and legal geography. In her dissertation, *Drowning Lawscapes: State Responsibility for Future Generations' Rights to Coastal Heritage* (2025), she explores liminal heritage that is at risk of drowning due to the ecological crisis, with one of the case studies situated in the Everglades (US). She has served as a Visiting Scholar at the University of California (2022–2023) and conducted research periods at Università Ca' Foscari Venezia (2024 & 2021). Currently, she is working on her postdoctoral research in the Ponte project.

Lindgren Leavenworth, Maria

Umeå universitet

A MAP TO FREEDOM: STORYTELLING AND ENTANGLEMENTS IN SAM J. MILLER'S BLACKFISH CITY

Sam J. Miller's science novel *Blackfish City* (2018) is set in a far future in which the constructed island of Qaanaaq, floating in the Arctic Ocean, is one of the last inhabitable places in a world ravaged by climate change and societal breakdown. The initially bureaucracy-free city is in the novel's present restricting its inhabitants' autonomy and opportunities both materially and symbolically, and stories brought along from "the Sunken World" as well formulated by and disseminated through a multilingual underground broadcast function as "map[s] to freedom" (10, 33). Both storytelling practices and the stories themselves thus function as ways to protest and overcoming restraining structures and systems. While storytelling is intellectual and imaginative ways to gain liberty, Miller also depicts material and embodied tensions between freedom and restraint. A disease referred to as the Breaks, which interlinks the infected via their memories and dreams, and a process known as nano-bonding, which physically and psychologically entangles Inuit characters and animals, are both predicated on the notion of breaking free of the human body.

This paper aims firstly to demonstrate how aspects of Miller's novel mirror the inequities and constraints of our current world, via analyses of its authoritarian government, economic disparity, and technological control. Secondly, it will exemplify how a resistance movement forms through the broadcast and storytelling more broadly. With the speculative elements of the Breaks and nano-bonding as analytical nodes, and with readings based in a new materialist framework (in particular Alaimo 2010 and Haraway 2016), the paper will illustrate how an interplay of collective and individual processes are usefully highlighted by the central notion of freedom, and how speculative fiction contributes imaginative possibilities that can enable perceptual paradigm shifts, thereby suggesting paths towards a more sustainable future.

Maria Lindgren Leavenworth is Professor of English literature at the Department of Language Studies, Umeå University, Sweden. Her current research focuses on forms and functions of speculative (or non-mimetic) fiction, and particularly on how speculative texts in various ways engage with questions of social, cultural, and environmental sustainability. Her recent monograph *The Imagined Arctic in Speculative Fiction* (Routledge 2024) explores the ways in which the Arctic is envisioned and what function it is made to serve in a selection of works, from Mary Shelley's 1818 *Frankenstein* to contemporary narratives that engage with the vast ramifications of anthropogenic climate change.

Liu, Shuyue

University of Nottingham

“MORE THAN KUNG FU GUY”: CONTESTING THE RACIALISED LIMITS OF AMERICAN FREEDOM IN INTERIOR CHINATOWN

Charles Yu’s National Book Award-winning novel, *Interior Chinatown* (2020), constitutes a significant intervention into the long tradition of Asian American literature that critiques the racially “exclusive” nature of American freedom. This literary tradition has documented the denial of full citizenship and liberty for Asian Americans through political and cultural exclusion. Yu powerfully extends this critique into the 21 st century through the metaphorical setting of Hollywood in his second-person narrative, formatted as a screenplay. The protagonist, Willis Wu, a second-generation Taiwanese American film extra, finds his career confined to a rigid hierarchy of stereotypical roles from “Generic Asian Man” to the symbolic pinnacle of “Kung Fu Guy”. In the novel, Willis’s acting career caters to the “Orientalised” myth of Chineseness and exemplifies what I term as “Asian American absent presence” and “presence-as-absence”, mechanisms used in Hollywood to compel racialised performance and deprive Asian Americans of their freedom of self-representation. To suggest such deprivation, the narrative inserts authoritarian, white-dominated discourses into Willis’s interior consciousness. The novel does more than diagnose a problem, however; it charts a pathway toward liberation from ethnic performance. When Willis desperately climbs up the acting ladder, he realises the structural violence inherent in the promise of assimilation and success, eventually escaping from the prescribed role of a martial arts master in Chinatown. Following this epiphany, Willis’s coercive internal monologues, dictated by the script, gradually give way to his critical, self-authored reflections, often rendered through formal shifts into dialogue and speech. This progression models a possibility for reclaiming discursive agency and Asian American subjectivity

By documenting Willis’s psychological growth through this narrative shift, Yu’s novel contests the conceptualisation of the United States as a purely “free” nation and foregrounds the ongoing effort by ethnic minority groups to reject performative assimilation to white hegemonic values. It asserts that American freedom must encompass the right to author one’s own story and exist beyond stereotypical imagining. Yu’s novel thus solidifies its place within a vital literary history that not only critiques the failures of American freedom but also reimagines and expands its very meaning.

Shuyue Liu is a PhD candidate in American Studies at University of Nottingham. Her research focuses on Asian American literature and digital humanities. Her latest publications include ‘Empathy, Curiosity, and Critique: An AI-Assisted Mapping of Non-Academic Reception of Asian American Literature’ in *Textual Practice* (2025), ‘Space, Time, and Progression: Narrating Chinese Americans Between Worlds in Literature” in *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* (2025), ‘Amy Tan’s Thing-Narrative in *The Valley of Amazement*’ in *Critical Arts* (2024), and ‘A Multidimensional and Digital Humanistic Analysis of Style in Amy Tan’s Novels’ in *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* (2023).

RECLAIMING FREEDOM BEYOND BORDERS: ETHNICITY, GENDER, AND ECONOMY IN ASIAN AMERICAN CULTURAL PRODUCTION

Loock, Kathleen

Leibniz Universität Hannover

BACKWARDS INTO THE WEST: SERIAL TEMPORALITIES, SETTLER FREEDOMS, AND THE LOGIC OF THE YELLOWSTONE PREQUELS

This paper examines Taylor Sheridan’s prequel series to *Yellowstone* (2018–2024)—1883 (2021–2022) and 1923 (2022–2025)—as cases of backward seriality, in which settler freedom, violence, and Indigenous resilience are remade through the prequel form. Both prequel series extend the most-watched U.S. drama not by advancing its timeline into the present and future, but by reconstructing its past. This temporal reversal merges serial storytelling with mythic world-building: the *Yellowstone* universe grows backward, echoing the mythology of the American West as an ever-expanding frontier whose narratives of freedom conceal histories of conquest, precarity, and ongoing structural inequities. 1883 dramatizes the Duttons’ early struggles along a perilous frontier, emphasizing environmental hazards, banditry, and the challenges of migration over Indigenous threats. Its ambition lies in countering traditional Western myths, presenting settlers as vulnerable newcomers negotiating a harsh landscape rather than as heroic conquerors. By contrast, 1923 links the horrors of past colonization—Catholic boarding schools, land dispossession, and settler violence—to contemporary injustices faced by Native Americans. Indigenous characters and storylines foreground the persistence of structural inequities across generations, embedding a progressive critique of racism and settler colonialism within a series otherwise considered a conservative “red-state” show. Drawing on scholarship on seriality, remaking, and the prequel, this paper theorizes the logic of the prequel as a temporal framework through which 1883 and 1923 retrospectively define and reshape the world of *Yellowstone*. While the events of *Yellowstone* have already happened, its prequels reconstruct the Dutton family’s past as a mythic origin story that transforms our understanding of the present—extending the Western myth across generations, landscapes, and narrative timelines. In this sense, the prequel series dramatize television’s own logic of expansionism: they remake the past to stabilize the present and enact visions of freedom that remain bound up with settler violence and cultural mythmaking.

Kathleen Loock is Professor of American Studies and Media Studies at Leibniz University Hannover and director of the Emmy Noether Research Group “Hollywood Memories: Cinematic Remaking and the Construction of Global Movie Generations,” funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). Her research focuses on Hollywood’s remaking practice, seriality, and the role memory and cultural repetition perform on the levels of identity formation and for the maintenance of imagined communities. She is author of She has published on serial narratives, remakes, sequels, reboots, and the nostalgia franchise as well as on TV series revivals, and written, edited, or co-edited six books and special issues on these topics, most recently *Hollywood Remaking: How Film Remakes, Sequels, and Franchises Shape Industry and Culture* (University of California Press, 2024). Her video essays have been published in [in] Transition and Tecmerin, shortlisted for the Adelio Ferrero Award, shown at international festivals, and listed on *Sight & Sound*’s best video essays poll in 2019, 2022, and 2023.

RE/GENERATION, VIOLENCE, AND AMERICAN CULTURE WARS: SETTLER FREEDOMS IN YELLOWSTONE

Luczak, Ewa Barbara

Uniwersytet Warszawski

WANDERING, NEURODIVERSITY AND RACIAL SURVEILLANCE: BETWEEN MORRISON'S SULA AND JUNOT DIAZ'S THE BRIEF WONDROUS LIFE OF OSCAR WAO

In "Autism, Wandering, and the Racial Surveillance of Neurological Difference," Leon J. Hilton underscores how the disregard for neurological difference within Black communities in the United States reinforces both the racialization of neurodiversity and the medicalization of race. Hilton focuses in particular on the concepts of fugitivity and the figure of the wandering body, exploring how these ideas are mobilized by what he terms "the ordered regimes of racializing surveillance." Drawing on Sarah Jane Cervenak, Hilton contends that "wandering has served as a significant modality through which Black philosophy, performance, and aesthetic practices have grappled with the violent racial exclusions of Enlightenment rationality" (229).

This paper examines the role ascribed to mobile Black bodies whose neurodiverse modes of engaging with the world are central to Toni Morrison's Sula and Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. Junot Díaz, recipient of the Pulitzer Prize, has on numerous occasions acknowledged his deep affinity with and indebtedness to Morrison's work. While he typically references Morrison's pioneering efforts in remapping and expanding the contours of the American literary canon, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* may also be read as engaging with another of Morrison's preoccupations: the intersections of race, movement, and neurodiversity. Morrison's *Sula* can be interpreted as revolving around a protagonist marked by a form of cognitive difference. The novel traces the moment when Sula's neurodivergence is rendered a disability through the socially normative impulse to immobilize her wandering body. Díaz revisits a similar tension in his own novel, seeking to reconcile the conflict between neurodivergence and a disciplining, immobilizing society through an alternative narrative strategy.

Dr. Ewa Barbara Luczak is full professor at the Institute of English Studies, University of Warsaw, and President of the Polish Association for American Studies in the years 2021-4. She is the author of *Pathologizing Black Bodies: The Legacy of Plantation Slavery* (Routledge 2023); *Mocking Eugenics: American Culture against Scientific Hatred* (Routledge 2022), *Breeding and Eugenics in the American Literary Imagination* (Palgrave 2015); *How Their Living outside America Affected Five African American Authors: Toward a Theory of Expatriate Literature* (2010). She was a Corbridge Trust fellow at the University of Cambridge UK, Fulbright visiting scholar at UCLA, and at UC Riverside, Kosciuszko Foundation visiting scholar at Johns Hopkins University and at the University of California Irvine, as well as visiting professor at Nanjing University of Astronautics and Aerodynamics, China. Luczak's scholarly interests include early 20th century American cultural and literary history, modernist literary studies, history of ideas, critical eugenic studies and medical humanities. Currently she is working on a book contracted with Bloomsbury *Genius Men: Beyond the Biocultural Myth*.

THE HAUNTING LEGACY OF TONI MORRISON: CELEBRATING BLACK FREEDOM AND THE ETHICS OF CARE AND RESISTANCE

Lynes, Katherine

Union College

"A POLICEMAN HE WANTED ME / TO BEHAVE": GARDENS AND HOME IN BLACK ECOPOETICS

In an interview, Gregory Pardlo echoed WEB Du Bois's famous phrase about the problem of the 20th century, the problem of the color line: "the problem of the 21st century will be figuring out how to dismantle the mythology of race while honoring the real relationships and histories that we constructed while under the spell of that mythology. And there is something about the ways our attitudes toward nature are bound up in the impulse to dehumanize others through, for example, the mythology of race — in the impulse, even, to place nature in the service of humanity" (Smith). In the context of the African Diaspora in the United States, the lines between taken-in-service garden spaces and offered-as-refuge garden spaces are blurred. The lines between what we consider to be a house and oikos, the Greek root of ecology, are also blurred. This paper explores the blurred lines between practical function (food and survival) and aesthetic pleasures of a personal garden which are also, in their way, a mode of survival. Lyrae Van Clief-Stefanon's "Garden" represents a controlling reaction toward nature, a controlling impulse that is really a reaction to the outside negative forces (a policeman he wanted me / to behave) inflicted upon those of the African Diaspora, especially when they are in outdoor spaces. By looking at the various ways gardens function in Black ecopoetics, we move into a world of newness, a world of reconception; we enter a world that asks us to see what others see, to use our pens and minds to reshape the world, to relearn our history by making connections between the soil and all of the human experiences in and on it. Reading these poems may usefully teach us to revel in, experience, and interrogate our interactions with natural forces, with history, with one another, and with the social costs of ignoring our natural world and of limiting access to the natural world as home.

Katherine Lynes is an associate professor of English, affiliated with the Africana Studies Program and the Environmental Studies Program at Union College in Schenectady, NY. Her research combines African American poetry and poetics and ecocriticism. She has published four articles to this effect: "The Ecologies of African-American Poetry Collections." *Comparative American Studies*, (7)2, June 2009; and "'Sprung from American Soil': the "Nature" of Africa in the Poetry of Helene Johnson." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, (16)3, Summer 2009; and "'a responsibility to something besides people': African American Reclamation Ecopoetics." *African American Review*, (48)1, Spring 2015; and "'Words fail me here': The Subject of Nature in Black Ecopoetry," a book chapter in *The US and the World We Inhabit*, Cambridge Scholars, Dec 2019.

TRANSFORMATION AND MALFORMATION OF MOVEMENT IN AMERICAN OUTDOOR SPACES

Madley, Benjamin

University of California, Los Angeles

"WHAT A STRUGGLE FOR GOLD!": CHEROKEES IN THE CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH, 1848-1860

Largely forgotten today, Cherokee miners in the California Gold Rush were part of a world-transforming event that poured some 28,783,000 ounces of gold into the global economy. They were migrants twice over. United States Removal Policy pushed most Cherokee people from their ancestral homelands in the Southeastern United States to new homes in Arkansas and Oklahoma. Thousands arrived via the infamous Trail of Tears. Conditions in Arkansas and Oklahoma—shaped by broken US promises and bloody internal conflicts—were difficult, to say the least. Thus, when news of California gold reached Arkansas and Oklahoma, many Cherokees undertook a second overland odyssey. They traveled for up to five months or more and, in the process, established the Cherokee Trail to California via Salt Lake City. Others took the southern route, crossing the Colorado River and the Mojave Desert to reach the golden state. Once there, Cherokee people struck gold repeatedly, prospected in each of California's three major gold mining areas, gathered gold in at least fifteen named locations, and left enduring legacies. Eight California Gold Rush locations are named after them, including a Northern California town. One Cherokee gold miner wrote California's first novel. Another became San Diego Chief of Police. Two founded major California newspapers still in publication today. Returning to the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma, one served as Principal Chief and another as Assistant Principal Chief. Cherokee participation in the Rush also established both California's enduring Cherokee community as well as ties between that community and the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma. Drawing on archival sources from Arkansas, California, Oklahoma, and beyond, this presentation will be the first in-depth history of Cherokees in the California Gold Rush and their afterlives.

Benjamin Madley is Professor of History and American Indian Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. Educated at Yale and Oxford, he writes about Native America, the US, and colonialism in world history. The author or co-author of more than twenty articles and book chapters, his work has appeared in *The American Historical Review*, *The Journal of American History*, *Pacific Historical Review*, and other journals. Yale University Press published his first book, *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846-1873*. It received numerous prizes, including *The Los Angeles Times* Book Prize for History. Madley is currently completing a book about Native American miners in the California Gold Rush.

NATIVE AMERICAN MIGRATIONS: FREE AND COERCED

Madsen, Deborah

Université de Genève

INDIGENOUS FREEDOM IN THE SHADOW OF US CHRISTIAN ZIONISM: WILLIAM APESS AND THE "LOST TRIBES OF ISRAEL"

In a 2018 address to the Israeli Knesset, Vice President Pence declared: "In the story of the Jews, we've always seen the story of America. It is the story of an exodus, a journey from persecution to freedom, a story that shows the power of faith and the promise of hope. My country's very first settlers also saw themselves as pilgrims, sent by Providence, to build a new Promised Land." The settler trope of the North American colonies as the New Zion, and the self-modeling of New England Puritans as the New Israelites, not only continues to characterize the public rhetoric of US national formation but historically has provided Indigenous writers with a powerful narrative of resistance and freedom.

In this presentation, I will explore William Apess's short text, "The Indians: The Ten Lost Tribes" (1831), as an instance of Indigenous appropriation of US national rhetoric. Apess's subversion of American exceptionalism and his promotion of Native rights is contextualized by contemporaneous accounts of Native Americans as the lost tribes of Israel. For instance, Mordecai Manuel Noah's 1837 *Discourse on the Evidences of American Indians Being the Ten Tribes of Israel* followed his efforts in the 1820s to establish the nation of Israel (which he proposed to call "Ararat") in western New York, on traditional Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe lands. Apess positions Indigenous peoples within the Christian Zionist narrative that assimilates the Biblical Israel to the settler US, and thus he is able simultaneously to dismantle the providential importance attributed to settlers (as the New Israelites) and also to claim that the status of Indigenous communities as descendants of God's original "Chosen People" underlines the urgency of their political claims to sovereignty, rights, and freedoms. In this 250th anniversary year of the settler nation, William Apess's voice deserves to be heard as a powerful testament to Indigenous resistance and the struggle for freedom.

Deborah Madsen is Professor of American Literature and Culture at the University of Geneva, Switzerland. She began her academic life with a specialism in literary allegory, which has led to a research career largely devoted to the ways in which different forms of rhetorical expression respond to social and cultural crises: American Exceptionalism, Feminism and Ecofeminism, race-based immigration, and US settler colonialism in relation to Critical Indigenous Studies. Her recent publications include a chapter of the *Oxford Handbook of Allegory*, entitled "Allegorical Typology, Typological Allegory in American Literature," on subversions of the US national narrative, and the edited volume *American Futures / American Futurisms* (2026).

RELATIONAL SOVEREIGNTIES: INDIGENOUS (RE)VISIONS OF FREEDOM ACROSS LAND, BODY AND IMAGINATION

Madsen, Deborah

Université de Genève

Seeding the US Republic: Veganism, Freedoms, and US National Character

"For what purpose is man a free agent? Why is it given to him to exercise the right of choice?"
Sylvester Graham

Veganism in the early Republic promised freedoms *from* disease, immorality, violence, enslavement, war, and land scarcity, as well as freedoms *of* SELF-DETERMINATION and self-perfection. The US was viewed by utopian vegan thinkers like Bronson Alcott as the ideal location for this personal and project of improvement based on the exercise of freedom because he accepted the myth of "virgin land" awaiting an Edenic reawakening. Thus, early US veganism served not only the cause of Republican freedoms but also the colonial project of the settler nation. This presentation builds on Kyla Wazana Tompkins' work on Sylvester Graham's "Imperial Dietetics" and the work of Indigenous vegan theorists like Billy-Ray Belcourt, Margaret Robinson, and Angela Laws, who have exposed the weaponization of animal and plant agriculture as a strategy of settler colonialism, to explore this discursive doubleness of republican "freedom" via the dual meaning of "seed" in early American vegan activism. The key figure is Sylvester Graham, who promoted individual freedom to choose as selfimprovement through dietary reform. US national character is at stake in his campaign against processed foods and also masturbation, the common solution to which is the adoption of "the vegetable diet." The interests of the US colonial project are served through a national identity grounded in Graham's advice concerning "seeds." Masturbation, or the onanistic spilling of human seed, contradicts the reproductive logic of settler colonialism that demands the demographic replacement of Indigenous peoples. The avoidance of sexual over-stimulation by means of a simple vegan diet based on wheat bread solves the reproductive issue and normalizes imported European seed (specifically wheat) as the staple American grain, replacing Indigenous corn. In this early Republican moment, veganism resonated strongly with dominant discourses of national identity formation: as a "Pythagorean diet" that would harmonize the US diet with the ideals of the classical imperial republics; and the exceptionalist idea of a new Euro-Indigenism expressing harmony between settlers and the land. The substitutive logic of settler colonialism was thus served by vegan understandings of US formation as an issue of personal as well as national freedoms.

Deborah MADSEN is Professor of American Literature and Culture at the University of Geneva, Switzerland. She began her academic life with a specialism in literary allegory, which has led to a research career largely devoted to the ways in which different forms of rhetorical expression respond to social and cultural crises: American Exceptionalism, Feminism and Ecofeminism, racebased immigration, and US settler colonialism in relation to Critical Indigenous Studies. She is Principal Investigator of the project *Vegan Literary Studies: An American Textual History, 1776- 1900*, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation.

Maior, Enikő

Partium Christian University

The question of academic well-being has become increasingly urgent in light of structural transformations within higher education. Precarity, competitive performance metrics, and prolonged transitional phases between doctoral study, postdoctoral research, and permanent appointments have created conditions of uncertainty that disproportionately affect early-career scholars. These challenges intersect with broader systemic issues, including gender equity, international mobility, and institutional cultures that often privilege output over sustainability. Research demonstrates that wellbeing and productivity are not mutually exclusive but mutually reinforcing, provided that universities adopt intentional policies that promote inclusivity, transparency, and a healthy work–life balance. I am particularly interested in the comparative dimension of academic well-being, considering how different national and institutional contexts frame the discourse on mental health, mentoring, and resilience. At this round table, I aim to contribute to a critical dialogue on how academic institutions might reconfigure policies and practices to align professional success with sustainable models of personal and collective flourishing.

Enikő Maior, PhD. is full professor at Partium Christian University, Oradea and Obuda University in Budapest. Currently she is the vice rector for education at Obuda University, Budapest. She graduated from Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj Napoca and received her Ph.D. from the West University of Timisoara. She is the author of several books and has published articles in collective volumes and journals on the problems of identity in Jewish American literature. In the first half of 2013 she was a SCIEX fellow working at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. In the first half of 2018 she was a Fulbright fellow at Central Connecticut State University, CT., U.S.A. She got her habilitation from the West University of Timisoara in 2020.

Mąkowska, Joanna

Uniwersytet Warszawski

Who can afford to be free in academia? I consider myself a "passionate skeptic" regarding well-being in precarious and hierarchical academia. This phrase, coined by Adrienne Rich, reflects my commitment to healthy work conditions while acknowledging the systemic issues that often render terms like "work-life balance" and "academic success" mutually exclusive. Both terms are tied to the idea and practice of freedom: freedom from economic fear and the freedom to think independently. But who is "free" in today's academia? Given how challenging it is to secure a tenured position, most academics not only lack a sense of well-being but also live in fear. How can academia thrive if its underlying affect is fear? It took me four years to get a tenure-track job, and I consider myself lucky. Like many of us, I worked as an adjunct with a heavy teaching load and completed a postdoctoral fellowship while publishing, applying for grants, and translating. This gives me a perspective on the fact that our career and freedom are often built on the lack of balance, and motivates me to act towards change rather than forget once our situation improves.

Joanna Mąkowska holds a Ph.D. in American Literature and is an Assistant Professor at the University of Warsaw's American Studies Center. Her research interests include modernist and contemporary literature, poetry and poetics, documentary and protest writing, American ecocriticism, and feminist and posthumanist theories. She has published in *Modernism/modernity*, *Women's Studies*, *Arizona Quarterly*, *James Baldwin Review*, and *The Routledge Companion to Ecopoetics*, among other venues. She was a Fulbright Scholar at the State University of New York at Buffalo and a Kosciuszko Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow at Duquesne University. A recipient of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education's scholarship for outstanding young researchers. She is currently advancing her project "A Form of Protest: Documentary Assemblages in American Poetry," funded by the Polish National Science Center. A literary critic and translator, she recently brought into Polish Natalie Diaz's *Postcolonial Love Poem*, for which she was nominated for the Ossolineum Prize for the Translation of Poetry, and Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric*.

ACADEMIC WELL-BEING

Manolescu, Monica

Université de Strasbourg

TRANSATLANTICA: FRENCH PERSPECTIVES ON AMERICAN STUDIES

Transatlantica is an open-access American studies journal published by the French Association for American Studies. It adopts a bilingual, interdisciplinary, intermedial and transatlantic position in the larger landscape of American studies journals.

In my talk, I would like to discuss three kinds of "visions" that Transatlantica tries to express and shape in the current context: first, a vision of continuity and resistance, by pursuing topics that are under pressure in American universities right now (the climate crisis, Black Lives Matter, Indigenous Studies, censorship as a phenomenon and subject of investigation); a vision that affirms the specificity of French research on American topics/cultural figures, for instance by publishing issues on writers who are little studied in the United States and who attract great academic interest in France (for instance, Brian Evenson); and a vision of cultural mediation, by emphasizing the various actors and institutions that mediate American culture in France (literary and musical festivals, exhibitions, translation projects).

Monica Manolescu is professor of American literature and art at the University of Strasbourg and Chair of humanities at the University of Strasbourg Institute for Advanced Study. She is co-editor in chief of the French American studies journal Transatlantica. Her most recent publications are the Cahier de l'Herne Nabokov and L'Ouragan Lolita (the French critical edition of Véra Nabokov's previously unpublished journal), both edited with Yannicke Chupin in 2023. She is an honorary member of the Institut Universitaire de France.

AMERICAN STUDIES, PRESENT AND FUTURE: VISIONS FROM EUROPEAN JOURNAL EDITORS

Marano, Salvatore

Università di Catania

‘EARFLUXSATISVIE-THRU-HEYPERSIEVING’: ABRAHAM LINCOLN GILLESPIE’S ‘PURPLEXICON DISSYNTHEGRATAIONS’ OF SYNTAX

When in *Being Geniuses Together* Robert McAlmon describes his first meeting with William Lincoln Gillespie, in addition to the portrait of a typical Left Bank expatriate he provides the reader with a sample of the latter’s unique neolinguistic creations: “I am Lincoln Gillespie and find you the only form packing, symbol realisticator, tuckfunctioning moderncompactly.” A now forgotten member of the continuous pilgrimage that brought American artists to Paris *entre deux guerres*, Gillespie was a trailblazer innovator whose verbal proficiency and relentless exploration of language ignited the imagination of no less than Eugene Jolas. Between 1927 and 1932, he contributed regularly to *transition* texts in which the influences of Joyce (whom he considered a model) and Gertrude Stein (of whom he always discussed with uncanny insight) appear in an original crossover with music. Indeed, music as organized rhythmic and melodic form of primary orality is the kingpin of his assault to writing. After all, he, who in his native Philadelphia had learned to play the mandolin and the guitar, in Paris lived in George Antheil’s Left Bank apartment as a paying guest and shared with the composer his musical knowledge. A bohemian who spent his most creative years between the Latin quarters in Paris and the Greenwich Village in New York, Gillespie was a master of the spoken word, and it is precisely for his oratory skills that he is mostly remembered in the autobiographies and letters of Samuel Putnam, Gil Orlovitz, Cyril Connolly, Henry Miller, Kay Boyle and Robert McAlmon. Like Joe Gould, the friend of E.E. Cummings and the fabled author of a legendary *Oral History Of Our Time*, the expatriate who had been at home in France and had become an exile in his native Philadelphia where he returned because of severe medical conditions was obsessed by the mission of liberating language from the constraints of syntax. As if to anticipate the contemporary creative regime of live performance and the critical reflection on the “phonotext” — whereby, according to Garrett Stewart, the discrete nature of notation is always in danger to obliterate the vital flux of speech on which poetry ultimately relies —, Gillespie spent his life by acting his art in the here and now of presence and, when notating it on the page, in dismantling the very norms that make the life of language storable and transmissible, but that at the same time put it on probation.

Salvatore Marano is Associate Professor of Anglo-American Literature at the University of Catania. His work explores the interrelations of the arts in Modernist and Postmodern Literature and the role of space in urban writing, in concrete/Language/e-poetry, and in performance. He has written on play, game and literature, on the experimental fiction of Walter Abish, John Barth, William Burroughs, Harry Mathews, on the poetry of Gertrude Stein, Amy Lowell, Mina Loy, E. E. Cummings, Hart Crane, Larry Eigner, Joy Harjo. He is the author of *La rosa senza perché. Getrude Stein e la scrittura* (1991), *American Games. Essays on Literature and the Imagination* (2001), co-author of *Lo spazio obliquo. Georges Perec fra segno e disegno* (Roma 2015) and *Boombox and the City* (2022), and the editor of *Performance: dal testo al gesto* (2017), *Il velo di Maya* (2017), *Other Americas: The Dark Side. The Province. Cyberspace* (2024), *Ambiguità del gioco* (2025).

AGAINST THE TYRANNY OF LANGUAGE. THREE (POST)MODERN QUESTS FOR LIFE, LIBERTY, AND HAPPINESS

Marchi, Viola

Universität Bern

VISUALIZING OPPRESSION AND PRACTICING FREEDOM IN PAUL BEATTY’S THE SELLOUT AND PERCIVAL EVERETT’S THE TREES

How can freedom be visualized when systemic violence remains pervasive? How can liberation be imagined when the present is haunted by the persistent resurgence of historical trauma? And what happens to our understanding of freedom when it is constructed through outrageous images of oppression and racial violence, albeit obviously satirical?

This paper examines Paul Beatty’s *The Sellout* (2015) and Percival Everett’s *The Trees* (2021) as literary interventions that repurpose images of racial violence and exploitation to forge new practices of freedom. Set during Obama’s second term and Trump’s first presidency, respectively, both novels grapple with the hollow promises of a so-called post-racial society and, in so doing, they contest the very foundations of U.S. freedom rhetoric while simultaneously enacting alternative practices of futurity.

I argue that both novels evoke spectral images that manipulate and reconfigure the visual field with the effect of ultimately reshaping the ontology of the surrounding social landscape. The phantasms they summon (slavery and segregation in Beatty’s novel, the specter of Emmett Till and the legacy of lynching in Everett’s) function as creative acts of image-making that seek to enact, in the flickering present, what Tina Campt calls freedom, namely “a grammatical practice” (116) of Black feminist futurity, a way of prefiguring in the now a collective future that insists on its own inevitability and that involves “a responsibility to create one’s own future as a practice of survival” (114). In this sense, the spectral becomes not a sign of absence or loss, nor simply the trace of a past that returns to haunt the present at the moment of the waning of the future, but a mode of visual and ontological disruption that opens space for new forms of social being.

Viola Marchi is a postdoctoral researcher in Literary Theory at the University of Bern, Switzerland. She studied English and Italian Literature in Pisa and Bern and received her Ph.D. in English from the University of Bern. She has published on theories of community and the common and she is the co-editor of *Throwing the Moral Dice: Ethics and the Problem of Contingency*, published by Fordham University Press. Her current project, tentatively called *Phantasmagorical Interventions*, investigates the politics and aesthetics of media configurations of bodies and images in African-American literature and visual culture.

UNMADE AND REWRITTEN: BLACK COUNTERNARRATIVES TO DOMINANT HISTORIES

Martin, Laura

Université Toulouse-Jean-Jaurès

REFRAMING LIBERTY: ENSLAVED WOMEN'S EMOTIONAL RESISTANCE IN THEIR CORRESPONDENCE

Much has been written about enslaved women's various strategies of resistance to gain a degree of freedom. Among the forms of resistance most visible in historiography are flight from slavery, marronage, work slow-downs, and poisoning. This paper sheds light on an alternative vision of freedom by shifting the focus away from those strategies traditionally emphasized by historians, and instead approaching it through the lens of the history of emotions.
Focusing on ninteenth-century enslaved women's correspondence, I examine the letter as a space of autonomy in which a form of emotional liberty could be articulated. Indeed the private character of enslaved women's correspondence provided a privileged emotional refuge for the expression of their intimacy. Moreover, the very act of writing a letter, or having one written for them, was a powerful assertion of agency as enslaved people were not allowed to read or write and thus had little access to the resources necessary for epistolary writing. When letter writing was permitted on plantations, those letters were often carefully watched by owners. The documents under study suggest that enslaved women were aware of this surveillance and made a strategic use of their emotions to renegotiate power relations and navigate the dehumanizing emotional regimes imposed by the institution of slavery. Bridging the physical distance imposed by the slave system, these letters reveal a varied spectrum of emotions that challenge the dominant emotional stereotypes spread by the planter class. As such, they constitute counter-archives of freedom, enabling us to broaden our understanding of enslaved women's claims to liberty

Laura Martin is a third-year Ph.D. candidate in the Centre for Anglophone Studies at the Université Toulouse-Jean Jaurès. Supervised by Pr. Nathalie Dessens, her dissertation explores enslaved women's expression of emotions in slave narratives, letters, and court testimonies from the antebellum period in the United States.

STORIES OF UNFREEDOM: NEW APPROACHES TO THE AMERICAN SLAVE NARRATIVE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Martínez-Falquina, Silvia

Universidad de Zaragoza

REIMAGINING FREEDOM: RESONANCE AND MINO-BIMAADIZIWIN IN MARCIE RENDON'S WHERE THEY LAST SAW HER

This paper examines freedom through Indigenous relational thought and resonance theory in White Earth Anishinaabe author Marcie Rendon's *Where They Last Saw Her* (2024). Rather than embracing the liberal ideal of freedom as individual autonomy, Rendon's novel envisions it through collective responsiveness and reciprocity that strengthens connections with humans, land, and more-than-human beings. Drawing on Hartmut Rosa's theory of resonance (2019), which he defines as a dynamic and reciprocal relation between subject and world through which both are affectively moved and transformed, and the Anishinaabe principle of *mino-bimaadiziwin* (Edward Benton-Banai 1988; Leanne Simpson 2011; Lawrence Gross 2014), which conceptualizes the good life in relation, I argue that the novel articulates what I call resonant Indigenous freedom—a decolonial mode of being grounded in care, interdependence, and land-based responsibility. Rosa's theory of resonance offers a critique of alienation and acceleration—both based on disconnection—in late modernity, and it helps illuminate Rendon's attention to connection and responsiveness. Yet, as critics note (Simon Susen 2019; Amanda Anderson 2023; Florian Brossette & Claudia Bieling 2023; Charles Taylor 2023), this valuable theory remains anthropocentric and focused on specific transformative events. In contrast, Indigenous thinkers such as Glen Coulthard (2014), Vanessa Watts (2013), or Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013), among others, propose an Indigenous ethics in which critique and sovereignty arise through reciprocal responsibility and the constant kinship with the world. My reading of Rendon's narrative through both resonance and *mino-bimaadiziwin*, a specific example of Indigenous ethics, is aimed at unveiling a relational conception of freedom that resists colonial logics of mastery and separation. The novel articulates this value through Quill, its protagonist. When she hears the scream of a woman reverberate through the winter woods, Quill is transformed for good and starts her awakening to the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. Over the course of the novel, she becomes increasingly attuned to land, community, and ceremony. She learns to transform grief and fear into action, and her awakening leads toward collective engagement and resistance. By grounding resonance in *mino-bimaadiziwin*, this analysis of *Where They Last Saw* Her redefines freedom as the capacity to sustain and restore relations within a living world, which unveils an Indigenous vision of interdependence, care, and collective responsibility.

Silvia Martínez-Falquina is Associate Professor (accredited to Full Professor) of North American Literature at the University of Zaragoza. She is the former editor of *Nexus* (fall issue) and *Miscelánea: A Journal of English and American Studies*. A specialist in Native American women's fiction, she has published *Indias y fronteras: El discurso en torno a la mujer étnica* (KRK, 2004) and has coedited *Stories Through Theories/Theories Through Stories: North American Indian Writing, Storytelling, and Critique* (with Gordon Henry and Nieves Pascual, MSUP, 2009), *On the Turn: The Ethics of Fiction in Contemporary Narrative in English* (with Bárbara Arizti, CSP, 2007), and a Special Issue of *The European Legacy* titled *Beneath the Waves: Feminisms in the Transmodern Era* (with Silvia Pellicer-Ortín and Bárbara Arizti, 2021). Her latest articles and book chapters have appeared in Peter Lang, Routledge, *Cultura, lenguaje y representación*, *Lectora: revista de dones i textualitat*, *World Literature Studies*, Michigan State University Press and Atlantis. As part of the Contemporary Narrative in English research group, she is currently working on the project "Literature Of(f) Limits: Pluriversal Cosmologies and Relational Identities in Present-Day Writing in English" (LimLit) at the University of Zaragoza.

RELATIONAL SOVEREIGNTIES: INDIGENOUS (RE)VISIONS OF FREEDOM ACROSS LAND, BODY AND IMAGINATION

Maxey, Ruth

University of Nottingham

AUTISM AND EXPRESSIVE FREEDOM IN RECENT AMERICAN LITERATURE

Against the historical backdrop of institutionalisation memorably depicted in Barry Levinson's popular, Oscar-winning film *Rain Man* (1988), autistic Americans have been subjected to the forces of misinformation and discrimination. Such attitudes continue to permeate U.S. public discourse, as witnessed only last month through the Trump administration's harmful and unscientific claims about the causes of autism and potential 'treatment' for this form of neurodifference. Yet since the 1990s, autobiographies examining autistic experience have provided American writers with multiple possibilities for expressive freedom. Despite being forced to operate within a neuronormative and often exclusionary nation, authors from Temple Grandin and Dawn Prince-Hughes to John Elder Robison, Michael McCreary and Jory Fleming to Tito Rajarshi Mukhopadhyay and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha have eschewed the language of disability and impairment through their production of pioneering memoirs about autism. In so doing, they have claimed the act of writing to explore varied forms of liberation from neurotypical hegemony, hierarchy and control – physical, social, linguistic, emotional and ideological – celebrating kinetic, sensory, affective and ideational variation and asserting their right to speak an alternative truth and name their particular lived experience. In this paper, I ask why, across differences of race, class, gender and sexuality, these writers have chosen literature as their preferred mode for examining their own neurodivergence and I explore its particular agential possibilities as distinct from other representational forms. Also interrogating the thematic role of beyond-human relationships, whether creaturely or involving inanimate objects paradoxically animated by the text, I investigate the imperative for spatial mobility within these texts. My paper thus looks at the many connections;states of possibility, both utopian and dystopian; imagined communities; and forms of being so richly illuminated within a range of autistic life writing from Grandin's *Emergence: Labelled Autistic* (1995) and Prince-Hughes' *Songs of the Gorilla Nation* (2004), Robison's *Look Me in the Eye: My Life with Asperger's* (2007) and Piepzna-Samarasinha's *Dirty River: A Queer Femme of Color Dreaming Her Way Home* (2015) to Fleming's *How to Be Human: An Autistic Man's Guide to Life* (2021).

Ruth Maxey is Associate Professor of Modern American Literature at the University of Nottingham, UK. She is the author of two monographs, *South Asian Atlantic Literature, 1970- 2010* (Edinburgh University Press, 2012) and *Understanding Bharati Mukherjee* (University of South Carolina Press, 2019), which was named a Choice Outstanding Academic Title in 2021. Her edited books are *India at 70: Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (Routledge, 2019, with Paul McGarr); *21st Century US Historical Fiction: Contemporary Responses to the Past* (Palgrave, 2020); *The Collected Short Stories of Bharati Mukherjee* (Temple University Press, 2023); and *Power Plays in Transnational American Fiction: Gender, Race and Genre – Essays in Honor of Judie Newman* (2026, with Daniel King). Her essays have appeared in *Ariel*, *Comparative American Studies*, *Critique*, *European Journal of American Studies*, *Textual Practice*, *Postcolonial Text*, *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, *Cambridge Quarterly*, *Wasafiri*, and *South Asian Review*, amongst other journals, and within numerous edited volumes.

FREEDOM AND IDENTITY

McBride, Preston

Pomona College

"FAMILY SEPARATIONS: NATIVE AMERICAN CHILDREN IN THE UNITED STATES' INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOL SYSTEM"

Well-known examples such as the slave trade in Indigenous bodies, American Indian Removal, and American Indian Relocation policies constitute the bulk of literature on the Native American forced migration. This paper addresses an overlooked aspect of the topic despite being several times the size of the "Trail or Tears." The forcible transfer of children to American Indian boarding schools is one of the largest known migrations of Indian peoples. Beginning in 1879, United States officials took hundreds of thousands of American Indian children from their families and tribal nations to boarding schools. Federal boarding school officials—carrying out an assimilationist federal mandate established in 1879—frequently cajoled, threatened, bribed, committed fraud, persuaded, and forced students into attending boarding schools. The federal government also passed compulsory education laws and threatened to withhold food, rations, and other annuities if parents refused to comply. Even when the federal government passed laws mandating parental consent to limit illegal behavior, officials violated it with impunity. Movement and migration did not cease once students went to boarding schools. Schools sent students on the "outing program," a forced labor program shifting students the from the school into local households to perform domestic or agricultural labor. Many students sought to escape the confines of the school or these outing homes before their three-to-five year enrollments expired. Students left the schools by either completing their terms of enrollment, graduating, running away, failing to return from leave, being sent home sick, or in a coffin. Despite being largely absent from the historiography of forced migrations, American Indian boarding schools fundamentally transformed the landscape of Native North America, restricting Indigenous economies, migration patterns, and exchanges. They deserve a more thorough investigation and this paper begins that process.

Preston McBride is an assistant professor of history at Pomona College where his teaching focuses on early United States history. With a specialization in Native American, medical, and environmental histories. Educated at Dartmouth College and UCLA, Preston has been awarded fellowships and grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, UCLA, USC, the School for Advanced Research, the UC Humanities Research Institute, and Dartmouth College. His work has been featured in several PBS documentaries, a play at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, dozens of newspapers. He has also co-curated an exhibit on photography and submitted a joint petition to the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances. His work has appeared in the *Cambridge World History of Genocide*, *California History*, and he is currently finishing a book on student health, environmental conditions, and infectious diseases at federal boarding schools for Native Americans.

NATIVE AMERICAN MIGRATIONS: FREE AND COERCED

McGowan, Philip

Queen's University Belfast

"THE LOST, THE OUTCAST, THE OVERCOME, THE EFFACED, THE RUINED": SAUL BELLOW'S THE VICTIM (1947) AND REGIMES OF AMERICAN ALIENATION

Set during an intensely hot New York summer, Saul Bellow's second novel *The Victim* (1947) is an intriguing noir exploration of post-war paranoia and persecution. Its central character, Asa Leventhal, becomes increasingly convinced that he is the victim of a concerted campaign of revenge and retribution by a former associate, the alcohol-dependent Kirby Allbee, which initially appears to be rooted in blatant anti-Semitism. Leventhal comes to represent a figure marked by, and viewed through, regimes of alienation: with his wife away, he is subjected to a New York that is both oppressive and hostile; his perceived outsider status feeds a growing paranoia based in religion and race; conscious of his own family history of insanity on his mother' side, Leventhal's summer deteriorates into an introspective confrontation with his own sense of selfhood; Allbee's reappearance presents an alter ego hell-bent on disrupting and destabilising Leventhal's world. The novel navigates a series of ethical and moral questions – what role, if any, does an individual play in the fate of another – and Bellow leans into routines of American carnival culture to differentiate the lives and worlds of Leventhal and Allbee. There are three set-piece moments of particular interest in the novel that this paper will address. The first comes on a visit to the zoo during which Leventhal becomes "oppressed and intoxicated" by the knowledge that Allbee could be watching him all of the time: "Changed in this way into his own observer, he was able to see Allbee, too, and imagined him standing so near behind him that he could see the weave of his coat, his raggedly overgrown neck, the bulge of his cheek, the color of the blood in his ear; he could even evoke the odor of his hair and skin." The second and third involve confrontations between Leventhal and Allbee in which they trade racial and cultural insults, with both accusing each other of being monsters and Leventhal dismissing Allbee as "a freak [...] out of a carnival." A year previously, William Lindsay Gresham's novel *Nightmare Alley* was published – the first film version was released late 1947, starring Tyrone Power – an unrelenting exposition of carny culture, incarceration and alienation that maps intriguingly onto Bellow's own novel.

Philip McGowan is Professor of American Literature and Associate Dean for Internationalisation at Queen's University Belfast. He served two terms as the President of EAAS (2016-24), having chaired IAAS (2011-16). His research and teaching interests are in twentieth- and twenty-first-century American literature and culture, and has published on the poets Elizabeth Bishop, John Berryman, Anne Sexton and Wallace Stevens, with further publications on Saul Bellow, Nelson Algren, and William Maxwell. He also has a keen interest in the work of F. Scott Fitzgerald: he edited the centennial OUP edition of *This Side of Paradise* (2020), the Penguin U.S. edition of *The Great Gatsby* (2021), and the Penguin Classics edition of *The Great Gatsby and Stories from All The Sad Young Men* (2025). He is the author of *American Carnival: Seeing and Reading American Culture* (2001) and *Anne Sexton and Middle Generation: The Geography of Grief* (2004).

McGowan, Philip

Queen's University Belfast

LEARNING TO SEE WITH ELIZABETH BISHOP

In her essay "Writing poetry is an unnatural act..." from the late 1950s, Elizabeth Bishop provides arguably the perfect analogy for the process of writing poetry: "My maternal grandmother had a glass eye. It fascinated me as a child, and the idea of it has fascinated me all my life. She was religious, in the Puritanical Protestant sense and didn't believe in looking into mirrors very much. Quite often the glass eye looked heavenward, or off at an angle, while the real eye looked at you. [...] Off and on I have written out a poem called 'Grandmother's Glass Eye' which should be about the problem of writing poetry. The situation of my grandmother strikes me as rather like the situation of the poet: the difficulty of combining the real with the decidedly un-real; the natural with the unnatural; the curious effect a poem produces of being as normal as sight and yet as synthetic, as artificial, as a glass eye." While the precise date of the essay may not be known, it does precede what is arguably Bishop's most visual collection, Questions of Travel from 1965. This paper will explore that collection's varied visions of multiple Americas, in Brazil as well as elsewhere, in tandem with this brilliantly observed commentary of the endless task of the poet. It argues that Bishop – a writer who appears so effortless in her art – makes the artificial perfect (to misquote Robert Lowell's praise for her), and then has the audacity (or is it courage?) to show readers that she is actually offering us artificiality, whether in the line 28/29 line break of 'Arrival at Santos' or the wholly "inscrutable" constructedness of 'Sestina'. The backdrop for these poems is one that moves us across continents, texts, sources, and memories as Bishop weaves a collection of new-found freedom (in Brazil for example) caged within the "rigid house" of her poetic construction

Philip McGowan is Professor of American Literature and Associate Dean for Internationalisation at Queen's University Belfast. He served two terms as the President of EAAS (2016-24), having chaired IAAS (2011-16). His research and teaching interests are in twentieth- and twenty-first-century American literature and culture, and has published on the poets Elizabeth Bishop, John Berryman, Anne Sexton and Wallace Stevens, with further publications on Saul Bellow, Nelson Algren, and William Maxwell. He also has a keen interest in the work of F. Scott Fitzgerald: he edited the centennial OUP edition of This Side of Paradise (2020), the Penguin U.S. edition of The Great Gatsby (2021), and the Penguin Classics edition of The Great Gatsby and Stories from All The Sad Young Men (2025). He is the author of American Carnival: Seeing and Reading American Culture (2001) and Anne Sexton and Middle Generation: The Geography of Grief (2004).

McGuinn, Nicholas

University of York

TEACHING GLOBAL IMMIGRATION; LUIS J. RODRÍGUEZ, NEMACHTILLI (THE SPIRIT OF LEARNING) AND THE GERMAN SCHOOL CURRICULUM

One of the important ways that Luis J. Rodríguez's work speaks to youth across borders is by his validation of students that already have worth and knowledge despite their general disempowerment in society. Writing for *The English Journal* in 2005, Rodríguez evokes the native American Nahuatl word *Nemachtilli*, which he translates into English as 'the spirit of learning'. This spirit, Rodríguez argues, though 'innate in every child', is discouraged and even repressed by a public education system in which 'most schools ... have become factories, preparing children to be consumers and "productive" citizens, not active and interested readers and creators'. Having conducted fascinating work in German High Schools in which they guided students in studying select Rodríguez poems, McGuinn and Naylor ascertain the relevance of Rodríguez's poetry in a German curriculum that has a section on US literature in relation to the 'ambiguity of belonging' that intersects with tense debates in German society about immigration and citizenship, thereby providing a case study on the global reach and resonance of Rodriguez's work. Their fieldwork was crucially supported by German head teacher, Steffen Brand, in order to probe how Rodríguez's poems can empower young people through illuminating the importance of language in developing identity.

Nicholas McGuinn is a Visiting Fellow at the University of York, UK. where his research and publication interests include English and Drama pedagogy. He received a Vice Chancellor's Teaching Award from the University of York in 2009 and, in 2013, was named as one of the 'Faces at Fifty' in commemoration of the University of York's fiftieth anniversary celebrations. In 2019 – 2020, Dr McGuinn was the Ottilie Wildermuth Visiting Professor in the Department for English and American Studies at the University of Tübingen, Germany. He is author of *International Perspectives on Drama and Citizenship Education: Acting Globally* (2021) Nicholas has recently co-edited *Engaging with Environmental Education through the Language Arts: Interdisciplinary and Creative Approaches to Fostering Ecoliteracy* with Amanda Naylor.

THE LIFE, LITERATURE AND LEGACY OF LUIS J. RODRÍGUEZ: IN THE LONG RUN

Mehring, Frank

Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen

AQUATIC BATTLEGROUNDS: WATER, WAR, AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMAGINATION -

This talk explores the entangled relationship between water, war, and climate change through the interdisciplinary framework of the blue humanities, situated within the broader environmental humanities. Rather than treating oceans, rivers, and waterways as passive backdrops, this perspective foregrounds them as active forces in shaping human history, culture, and ecology. Structured in three parts, the presentation draws together historical and imaginative case studies.

First, it considers water as a weapon of destruction in times of war, focusing on the deliberate flooding of land between the Netherlands and Germany during World War II. This strategy not only displaced communities but also caused long-term ecological damage. The case is placed in dialogue with the Ukraine War, where dam explosions and mass inundations show the continuing use of water as both tactical tool and environmental catastrophe. Second, the talk turns to wars over water as a vital life resource, engaging with historical disputes over freshwater access alongside fictional scenarios in literature and film that imagine future water conflicts. These narratives highlight how scarcity, survival, and justice shape cultural understandings of water as more than a commodity: as a shared yet contested element essential to life. Finally, the third part builds on these perspectives by proposing an interactive landscape installation: a bike route punctuated by artistic interventions that make visible the intersections of water, war, and climate change. By situating art directly in the environment, this exhibition would connect ecological vulnerability and historical memory with embodied, public engagement.

By weaving together military history, cultural imagination, and curatorial practice, the talk demonstrates how the blue humanities provide a critical lens for recognizing water not as backdrop but as a central agent in shaping conflict, ecology, and cultural expression in an age of climate crisis.

Frank Mehring is professor of American Studies at Radboud University Nijmegen, and President of the Netherlands American Studies Association (NASA). He is co-founder of the journal *American Literatures* and has published widely on transatlantic culture, intermediality, and memory. His books include *Sphere Melodies on Charles Ives and John Cage*, *Transcultural Confrontations of German Immigrants and the Promise of American Democracy*, and *The Multicultural Modernism of Winold Reiss*. He also edited *Transcultural Spaces: Challenges of Urbanity, Ecology, and the Environment in the New Millennium*. Mehring's research increasingly engages the field of environmental humanities, exploring how landscapes, memory, and culture intersect across borders. He is passionate about outreach: he directs a regional museum forum, organizes exhibitions, gives public lectures, and fosters cultural exchange initiatives. Through these activities, he aims to bridge academic scholarship and community engagement, making humanities research accessible and relevant beyond the academy.

FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM IN THE ANTHROPOCENE? ECOLOGY AND WARFARE IN CONTEMPORARY US CULTURE

Mendoza, Mary E.

Penn State University

RACIAL BIAS AND STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE: POLICING LATINOS IN THE AMERICAN WEST

What does it mean to move freely in the American West? From the nineteenth century to today, a multitude of factors have prevented ethnic Mexicans from moving freely in their own homelands, neighborhoods, and across the United States Mexican border. In this paper, Mary E. Mendoza explores how the environmental conditions and racial bias in policing practices have operated in tandem to make Latinos (here defined as people of Latin American descent) one of the most vulnerable populations to structural racism in North America. The term "white settler supremacy" broadens our understandings of the United States' troubled settler colonial history (and present) from one that is often mostly associated with Native dispossession to one that encapsulates the experiences of many peoples across many environments and historical moments. It explicitly calls out whiteness, places emphasis on structural supremacy, and points to not only the eliminatory logic of settler colonialism but also the ways in which acts of expulsion, enslavement, exclusion, and exploitation have served as critical avenues for racial and colonial domination, as discussed in my co-edited book, *Not Just Green, Not Just White, Race, Justice, and Environmental History*.

Mary E. Mendoza is an assistant professor of history and Latino/a Studies at Penn State University, the co-editor of *Not Just Green, Not Just White, Race, Justice, and Environmental History* (Nebraska, 2025), and the author of *Deadly Divide: How Insects, Pathogens, and People defied the U.S.-Mexico Divide* (North Carolina, 2026).

FREEDOM, MOVEMENT, AND THEIR LIMITS FOR MARGINALIZED PEOPLE IN THE AMERICAN WEST

Metcalf, Josephine

University of Hull

RE-ENCOUNTERING RODRÍGUEZ; IT CALLS YOU BACK AND DRAWS YOU IN—THE PERSONAL PAPERS OF LUIS J. RODRÍGUEZ

Josephine Metcalf, who first interviewed Rodríguez by correspondence in 1997 and then in-person in 2005 when doing fieldwork researching street gang memoirs in California, details her experiences of 're-encountering' Rodríguez in the archives in order to make sense of him and his life's work from multiple and varied sources. Indeed, Rodríguez's personal papers were acquired by the Special Research Collections at the University of California, Santa Barbara in 2020. Though the Rodríguez archives are extensive, Metcalf focuses particularly on his prison letters, financial papers and familial correspondence. This paper explores a series of artefacts and documents that were located in the archives, contemplating the ways in which we might use them to help forward conversations about the Rodriguez narrative but to discuss the challenges we face in archival studies more widely. And as Metcalf will explain, these papers serve further purpose – exposing the complexities and tensions at stake (for both the researcher and the archivist) when we try to compile collections for someone who is certainly a literature figure, but also an activist, a politician, an educator, and more.

Josephine Metcalf is a Senior Lecturer in American Studies and Criminology at the University of Hull, UK where she is the co-founder and co-director of the Cultures of Incarceration Centre. Her research focuses on the representation of prisons and street gangsin literature and other pop-culture forms, and the ways these have been received by audiences. She has published on prison memoirs by authors such as Stanley Tookie Williams and Shaun Attwood and recently wrote a foreword for an anniversary edition of Joseph Bathanti's award-winning prison novel, *Coventry*. Jo is involved with reading / writing groups for people in prison in both the US and the UK and was recently a Visiting Scholar at the Interdisciplinary Humanities Centre at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

THE LIFE, LITERATURE AND LEGACY OF LUIS J. RODRÍGUEZ: IN THE LONG RUN

Milica, Iulia-Andrea

Universitatea din Iași

REWRITING FREEDOM: OCTAVIA BUTLER'S SPECULATIVE REVISION OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN DISCOURSE

Pointing to important dates in American history (the bicentennial celebration of American independence in 1976, Dana Franklin's present, and July 4, the last day of her past travels), Octavia Butler's novel *Kindred* rewrites nineteenth-century American historical and literary discourses through speculative means. The novel's protagonist, Dana Franklin, a Black writer from contemporary California, is violently transported to a Maryland plantation in the early nineteenth century. Her repeated, involuntary journeys across time transform the science fiction trope of time travel into a political and historiographic act: a literal confrontation with America's history of slavery as well as with its historical and literary reflections. Thus, Butler transforms Mark Twain's foundational narratives of progress and self-realization into counterfictions of survival, responsibility, and agency. The main reference is to Twain's novels, for example to Huck Finn's voyage toward freedom and Hank Morgan's technological conquest of the past in the form of time travel. Her rewriting of Twain's journeys is challenging, as they both reflect the patriarchal assumptions on which nineteenth-century notions of liberty depended, represented by the writer's canonical place in American literary history, and criticize the racism, industrialization, and hypocrisy of his times. *Kindred* also weaves together other nineteenth-century genres, such as the slave narrative and plantation novel, sentimental fiction, realism, and speculative adventure, to underline Dana's own passage from freedom to bondage, which becomes a painful but necessary understanding of the dependence of modern identity on a recognition of historical violence and silenced agency. Through Dana's struggle not only to survive slavery but also to understand and narrate it, Butler turns storytelling itself into a form of resistance, agency, and responsibility. In the dialogue between the narrative frame represented by Dana's present in the post–Civil Rights era, and her nineteenth-century time travels, Butler challenges the American notion of freedom by framing the Black woman's experience and reflecting her long journey through violence, survival, silence, compromise, agency, rebellion, freedom, and responsibility. Thus, the writer uses speculative fiction to dismantle the national mythology of progress and freedom reflected in nineteenth-century literary and historical perspectives, by addressing such issues as postmodern historiography, narrative ethics, collective and post-traumatic memory.

Iulia Andreea Milică (Blănuţă), PhD, is a professor of English and American Literature in the English Department of the Faculty of Letters, the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi, Romania and received her abilitation certificate in 2023. She has taught various disciplines in the field of American studies (Regionalism: The American South, American Drama, Realism and Naturalism, American Romanticism). Her teaching activites are supported by the research activity reflected in presentations in national and international conferences, publications in (conference) volumes or journals and in a series of books (Southern Cultural Dimensions in Flannery O'Connor's Fiction, Universitas XXI, Iasi, 2008, Literary Representations of the Southern Plantation, Junimea, Iași, 2013, and Studies in American Literature, Casa Editorială Demiurg, Iași, 2013. As of 2025, she is president of the Romanian Association of American Studies (RAAS) affiliated with EAAS.

Mo'e'hahne, Ho'esta

University of California, Los Angeles

"INFINITY THAT REACHES TO THE STARS": INDIGENOUS COSMOLOGIES, PLANT PEOPLES, AND RELATIONAL WORLDING

Across Indigenous cosmological knowledges, agricultural practices, and expressive cultures, plants hold unique (often-sentient) forms of personhood that transgress extractive, Euro-American, and anthropocentric notions of being, intelligence, and liveliness. This paper ponders how plants are represented as "persons" and "peoples" in 21st century Indigenous feminist fiction and the kinds of relational worldmaking such representations engender. I draw on Indigenous anti-colonial and ecological thought from across the Americas in order to consider Dakota author and food sovereignty activist Diane Wilson's novel *The Seed Keeper* (2021). I trace the ways that plant knowledge, the human cultivation of plants for consumption, and human practices of caring for seeds are intimately connected to the lives of Indigenous girls and women across generations in the novel – as they experience genocide and waves of communal and individual gender violence. Wilson's portrayals of plants, through and alongside Indigenous (human) femmes' traumas and resilience, in fact, position plants as agentive beings who are bound to Indigenous non-plant futures and the transmission of intergenerational knowledge. Taken together, I posit that the novel's aesthetic and narrative movements open generative ethical space for contemplating worldmaking through multispecies relational horizons. In other words, the novel gestures to anti-colonial worldmaking through ways that humans and non-humans relate to one another. For instance, in the poetic prose that open Wilson's novel, the seeds speak as sentient beings who have made lives with humans. And through their connections to the sun's radiation as well as their material and energetic linages to other stars, the seeds map their place within larger, near infinite worlds that encompass and extend beyond the Earth. By placing Wilson's feminist and ecological theorising in conversation with ethical vegan and multispecies frameworks, this paper thus contemplates an antispeciesist analytic that expands personhood and notions of relational ethics to plants. And in doing so, such ethical approaches conceive of Indigenous anti-colonial liberation and futurity across more-than-human and human worlds.

Ho'esta Mo'e'hahne (they/she) is a Southern Tsistsistas and Hinono'ei person who lives, learns, and works on Tongva homelands and waters. They are assistant professor of English at the University of California, Los Angeles where they are an affiliate faculty with the American Indian Studies Center (AISC) and a member of the LGBTQ Studies and the AISC faculty advisory committees. Ho'esta's writing and teaching consider gender, ecology, and wonder in Indigenous expressive cultures. They are currently completing a book that traces how queer and trans* Indigenous literatures, cinema, and performance use the erotic to craft decolonial genders, ecologies, and kinship networks in settler cities across Canada and the United States.

Monnickendam, Andrew

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

BEYOND AMERICAN MEMORIES: VIET THU NGUYEN, BAO NINH, AND DONG THU HUONG

Nguyen's travelogue and essay, *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War* (2016), narrates the experiences and meditations of an exile on his return to the country of his birth. As his parents, devout Catholics, fled from north to south, only later to emigrate to California, the writer has neither stable roots in his country of adoption or birth. One difficulty in making sense of "unforgettable afterimages" of conflict is that contrary to a diversity of perspectives, the narrator laments that "I always run into American memories" that inevitably fall into the category of Roger Stahl's *Militainment*. Nguyen's novel, *The Sympathiser* (2015), illustrates that so absolute is the efficacy of the militainment industry that the south-east Asian audiences inadvertently applaud their own destruction on screen.

This paper takes up one suggestion from the essay that engages with this conundrum and investigates a possible alternative to that cultural monopoly: two texts written from the viewpoint of two former combatants who name the conflict the American war and fought for their country's independence. The first is Bao Ninh's, *The Sorrow of War* (1991) a novel whose manipulated English title recalls Wilfred Owen, as does its early section's obsessive description of mud and the bodies of dead soldiers. Ninh's novel dismisses an idealized view of freedom fighters by dealing with two controversial issues: first, rape, and second, the fate of traumatized soldiers. Dong Thu Huong's *The Zenith* (2012) fictionalizes the last days of Ho Chi Minh, focusing on his deathbed visions and his distance from the politburo which, in this fictional account, created a benign image of "Uncle Ho" while behind the façade they pursued their own power-crazy policies.

In both novels, we can observe interplay if not a distinction between the political and the aesthetic. The political issues are an essential part of the narrative. Ninh's soldier-heroauthor faces censorship when attempting to publish his memoir; Huong's fictional Ho is told that from being independent, Vietnam has merely become China's vassal state. However, two rather different conclusions emerge, pointing more towards the universal rather than the specific. In the case of Ninh's veteran, his mental health issues derive from that intense trauma that affect countless returning combatants, a subject that has been widely studied, in particular since Kate McLoughlin's *Authoring War* (2011). Huong's dismissal of patriotism recalls the cliché that all good war literature is anti-war. This analysis concurs with Nguyen's own remarks from an earlier coauthored essay on Korean and Vietnamese war literature, "[m]oreover, the grievances carried by Korean and Vietnamese American war survivors are often primarily directed not at the U.S. military actions [...] but at the fratricidal atrocities [...] perpetrated by their communist enemies." This statement casts an interesting light on his more recent and abstract *To Save and Destroy*.

Prof. Andrew Monnickendam is Emeritus Professor of English Literature in the Department of English and German Studies at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. His research spans Scottish Romanticism, the historical novel, and the national tale, with a particular focus on Walter Scott and Christian Isobel Johnstone. He has edited the first modern edition of Johnstone's *Clan-Albin* (2003) and authored *The Novels of Walter Scott and His Literary Relations* (2013). His more recent work explores representations of war, reconciliation, and postwar memory in twentieth- and twenty-first-century literature. Among his publications are "The Trope of War in Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *Sunset Song*" (2016) and "Running into Memories in the Work of Viet Thanh Nguyen" (2024). He co-edited *Back to Peace: Reconciliation and Retribution in the Postwar Period* (2007), a Choice Outstanding Academic Publication.

Monzon, Aitana

Universidad de Zaragoza

LOVE MOVED STONES: VISUAL SOVEREIGNTY, AND THE MORE-THAN-HUMAN IN LOUISE ERDRICH'S IN/ACTIVE POETICS

This paper examines Louise Erdrich's stone poetics through the intersection of grounded normativity (Coulthard and Simpson 2016) and visual sovereignty (Raheja 2010). I argue that Erdrich reconfigures lyric as a decolonial contemplative practice of relationality with the more-than-human world. As justified by Lucy Alford in *Forms of Poetic Attention* (2020), contemplative attention inhabits the paradox of seeking to empty the self to receive the object of devotion, yet it requires discipline and focus. In Erdrich's poems, this paradox is embodied by stones, rendered as objects of presence and distance, intimacy and alterity, familiarity and unfamiliarity. Rocks as portrayed in "Stone Love" (2020), "Asiniig" (2004), and the short story "The Stone" (2019) do not stand as inert metaphors, but as agents of relation, carriers of memory, and participants in ceremonial rites. As a result, land is seen as the space devoted to memory and community as interwoven forms of Indigenous selfrepresentation and resistance to settler colonial hegemony.

Erdrich's poetics of attention is embedded in grounded normativity, for the poet locates sovereignty in the ethical non/human relationships of reciprocity, kinship, and cyclical unity that emerges from the land. Besides, the poems' imagery reclaims the way Native American landscapes are represented and remembered through the lens of visual sovereignty. By doing so, Erdrich challenges colonial readings that reduce the land as a natural resource, reclaiming thus Indigenous ecological knowledges. Her in/active poetics shares what Paula Gunn Allen (1976: 150) recognises as the "unity and relatedness of all the phenomena of life." Stones, often seen under Western eyes as non-sentient elements, become participants (Abram 1997: 43) in the lyrical subject's existence, influencing its subjective perception of longing, devotion, and wholeness. In Erdrich's poetry, these more-than-human beings are said to shape Indigenous sovereignty, enacted through attention, reciprocity, gift, and lyric imagination.

Aitana Monzón-Blasco is a poet and FPU research fellow at the University of Zaragoza. She holds a Degree in English Studies from the University of Zaragoza, Spain, where she was granted an Extraordinary Degree Award. She also holds a master's degree in Hispanic literature from the Autonomous University of Madrid. She is the secretary of *Philobiblon: Young Hispanists' Association journal* and she has worked as an Associate Lecturer in the University of Zaragoza. Her doctoral research focuses on the poetry of Pulitzer-Prize winner author Louise Erdrich. Her research interests include poetry, text genetics, and confluences between painting and poetry. As a poet, she has published *Dormir à la belle étoile* (Amarante, 2019), *La civilización no era esto* (2021, Winner of the International Award IV Premio Espasa Poesía) and *Salve* (Espasa, 2025).

Moore, Rachel

The Current

‘IT OFTEN RHYMES’: ART CONVERSATIONS WITH US HISTORY

This paper explores the vital role of art in shaping and reflecting democratic ideals, particularly its function as a voice of resistance, a tool for social critique, and a catalyst for community engagement. Drawing inspiration from Mark Twain’s idea that “History doesn’t repeat itself, but it often rhymes,” the paper examines how contemporary artists respond to critical moments in U.S. history, engaging with symbols of freedom such as the American flag and national anthem. Through their work, artists such as Nicholas Galanin and Hank Willis Thomas interrogate the meanings and implications of these icons, questioning whose narratives are told, whose voices remain marginalized, and how freedom is an ongoing pursuit rather than a given. For Freedoms re-interprets Norman Rockwell’s paintings based on the articulation of FDR’s State of the Union address, a reflection on the unfinished story of democracy, inviting consideration of the complexities of equity, justice, and freedom. Artists, visual storytellers, and documentary photographers present lived experiences, which invites participation in a broader conversation about the intersection of art, freedom, democracy, and activism. This paper underscores the role of creative expression in shaping the nation’s democratic journey and emphasizes the importance of ongoing engagement in the collective pursuit of a more just society.

Rachel Moore has been a driving force at The Current since 2010, first joining as an Independent Curator before serving as Assistant Director & Executive Curator (2011– 2016) and ultimately becoming Executive Director and Director of Exhibitions. An artist and independent curator, Moore is recognized for her work exploring art as a catalyst for change, public engagement, and contemporary curatorial practice. Moore holds an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a BFA from Alfred University. A Fulbright Fellow in Greece (2009–2010), she also co-founded Spoke, an experimental exhibition and event space in Chicago (2008–2011). Her curatorial projects and artistic work have been presented internationally in museums, galleries, and public spaces including the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art (Greece), DYNAMO Project Space (Greece), The Garfield Park Conservatory (Chicago), and The Current in Stowe, Vermont. She has presented widely on public art, curatorial practice, and the social impact of the arts, and has served as a Trustee of the River Arts Center in Morrisville, VT, and Chair of the Stowe Arts and Culture Council.

Moran-Nae, Andrei

Universitatea din București

THE FREEDOM OF LIMITS IN GAMEPLAY; OR, WHY PLAYERS DO NOT REALLY WANT TOTAL FREEDOM IN VIDEO GAMES

The dominant discourse on video games, especially when it comes to action-adventure role-playing games such as the *Grand Theft Auto* series, stresses the multitude of means of interacting with the gameworld afforded by the game engine. The AAA gaming industry seems to assume that the more freedom of (inter)action the player has, the more fun the gameplay experience is. Within this framework, ludic limitations are seen as impediments to having fun—an idea that this paper will challenge. Indeed, I will argue that limitations are fundamental to the experience of freedom, since freedom is first and foremost a cultural construct that requires an ideological operation of naturalizing limitations. To this end, I will draw on Michel Foucault’s notion of discipline and its reception in game studies in order to highlight the disciplinary nature of gameplay. I will subsequently draw on narratology to show how mechanics, rules, and procedures blend procedural and non-procedural modes. Finally, I will demonstrate how the diegetic dimension of play lends coherence to the fragmented gameplay experience and encourages players to adopt a docile attitude in relation to the game engine and not challenge the mechanical limitations of the game.

Andrei Nae is a lecturer at the University of Bucharest and an associate lecturer at the Echo School of Technology, Digital Arts and Video Games in collaboration with Abertay University, where zie teaches courses in game studies and seminars on twentieth-century and contemporary English literature. Zie is also a postdoc at Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, where zie works on ideology in paraliterature and vice-chair of Central and Eastern European Game Studies. Zir main academic interest lies at the intersection of game studies, cultural studies, and narratology. So far zie has been involved in several research projects, the most important being “Colonial Discourse in Video Games,” where zie held the position of principal investigator. Some of zir most relevant publications include the monograph *Immersion, Narrative, and Gender Crisis in Survival Horror Video Games* (Routledge, 2021), the article “From Saviour to Colonial Perpetrator: Manipulating Player Empathy in *Silent Hill 2* and *Silent Hill Origins*” featured in the 2022 *Parallax* special issue *Gaming and Affect*, as well as the edited volume *Video Games between Postcolonialism and Postcommunism* (De Gruyter, 2025).

Moro, Alfredo

Universidad de Cantabria

FREEDOM, FAILED AMERICAN DREAMS AND QUIXOTIC OTHERNESS: REFLECTIONS ON THE EARLY RECEPTION OF DON QUIXOTE DE LA MANCHA IN THE NORTH AMERICAN WEST

Cervantes, in one of the most quoted passages of his novel Don Quixote (1605-1614), transforms his hidalgo in a champion of Freedom, for, in Alonso Quijano's own words, freedom «[…] is one of the most precious gifts heaven gave to men» and for freedom, one «can and should risk one's life» (II. LVII). Taking aside the dubious results of the Spanish hidalgo's defence of freedom after liberating the galley-slaves, this passage would mould Don Quixote as a myth for Western Romanticism. For the Romantics, Don Quixote de la Mancha became the patron saint of lost, romantic causes. The reception of Cervantes' novel in the American West is marked by this process, as most of the Quixotic protagonists of the early transformations of the Cervantean novel in this context will evince a melancholic, nostalgic touch. Don Quixote's restoration of the lost values of chivalry will be transformed in what Heinz Peter Endress has called a «restorative Utopia» of the early Republican values, particularly in spaces like the American West, where the tension between the freedom of cowboy life and the progressive industrialization and subjection of the space to the aggressive dynamics of capitalism will be most marked. This paper seeks to explore this tension in a series of Quixotic novels and films which show a clear influence of the Western genre or could be defined as Quixotic Westerns. The analysis of Stephen Chalmers' Don Quickshot of the Rio Grande (1923), Richard Gardner's Scandalous John (1963) and Edward Abbey's The Brave Cowboy (1956), will demonstrate how the Quixotic figure is turned into a Utopian other representing the broken American dream, the lost values of the American West, on the verge of disappearance into an increasingly technified world where the Cowboy becomes a folkloric relic of a bygone time.

Alfredo Moro holds degrees in English and German Philology by the University of Salamanca, university in which he obtained his PhD in 2013 with a dissertation on the reception of Don Quixote in England and Germany during the second half of the eighteenth-century. His field of research focuses on the influence of Cervantes in authors such as Henry Fielding, Sir Walter Scott, C. M. Wieland, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe or Mary W. Shelley. He is also interested in more general aspects of the literary relationships between Spain, Great Britain and Germany during the long eighteenth century, as well as the early reception of Don Quixote in the USA. Moro has stayed at the universities of Cambridge, Münster and Piemonte Orientale as a visiting scholar. He is currently working as Senior Lecturer at the Department of Philology of the University of Cantabria.

WHOSE FREEDOM, WHOSE WEST?

Morresi, Renata

Università di Padova

THE NAZI IN THE GARDEN: FROM IDYLLIC SPACE TO HETEROTOPIC VISION IN THE AMERICAN IMAGINATION

The garden has long served as a charged site for staging moral and political fantasies across cultural representations. In William Wyler's *Mrs. Miniver* (1942), for instance, the English rose garden becomes a pastoral emblem of civilization and resilience: a space seemingly untouched by history. The intruding Nazi soldier is disarmed by grace, and the garden's harmony is eventually restored, though not without sacrifice. Yet the romantic notion of the garden as moral sanctuary and site of redemption conceals the violence required to sustain it. Drawing on Michel Foucault's reflections on heterotopias in "Des espaces autres" (1967), this contribution interprets the garden as a paradigmatic "other space": simultaneously real and symbolic, closed yet penetrable, capable of assembling heterogeneous temporalities and forms of power. Rather than representing an escape from history, the American myth of the "new Eden" emerges as a heterotopic construction built through displacement, expropriation, and erasure. Violence does not enter the garden from without; it is its founding condition. Jamaica Kincaid's writings on gardening make this contradiction explicit. *My Garden (Book)* (1991) and *An Encyclopedia of Gardening for Colored Children* (2024) show that beauty is full of traps and notions of innocence are built upon the labor and dispossession of others. Her work dismantles the illusion of a natural, innocent environment by exposing its colonial and racial infrastructures. Kincaid's garden stands as a counterpoint both to the English garden, an artifice of designed naturalness, and to the modern giardino italiano as envisioned by fascist theorists such as Luigi Dami (1924), who celebrated the subjugation of nature to human will. These two rhetorics of mastery find an uncanny echo in Paul Schrader's *Master Gardener* (2022), where the parable of suprematism and redemption embodied by a reformed neo-Nazi gardener exposes how both the garden's ordered geometries and its feigned irregularities mask histories of domination and domestication. The Black woman who disrupts this false peace gestures toward renewal. Or is it perhaps another delusion? Across these portrayals, the garden emerges not as an idyll outside history but as one of its most potent allegories, where cultivation, control, and violence are inextricably entwined.

Renata Morresi is a Research Fellow in American Literature at the University of Padua, Italy. Her work focuses on issues arising from the negotiation between languages and cultures, and on the intersections of class, race, and gender. She has written on modernist expatriate writers (Nancy Cunard, Claude McKay), on transnational Blackness, and on themes of intercultural encounter and friction across various genres, including contemporary poetry, cinema, and children's literature. As a translator, she has worked on Emily Dickinson, Robert Lax, Lorine Niedecker, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, and Louis Zukofsky. For her translation work, she received the *Premio Nazionale per la Traduzione* from the Italian Ministry of Culture in 2015. She curates the *Lacustrine* poetry series for the publisher Arcipelago Itaca Edizioni and serves on the editorial board of *FES – From the European South: A Transdisciplinary Journal of Postcolonial Humanities*.

TRANSFORMATION AND MALFORMATION OF MOVEMENT IN AMERICAN OUTDOOR SPACES

Mózes, Dorottya

Debreceni Egyetem

BLACK DIASPORIC FLÂNERIE, ESTRANGEMENT, AND DEPRESSION IN SAIDIYA HARTMAN'S LOSE YOUR MOTHER

This presentation explores how Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2007) reimagines the lineage of flânerie through the lens of diasporic wandering, depression, and estrangement. Drawing on Ann Cvetkovich's *Depression: A Public Feeling* (2012), I frame Hartman's travelogue as an enactment of what Cvetkovich calls "political depression," "created by the absent archive of slavery and the long-term effects of racism" (Cvetkovich 2012: 25). In this sense, Hartman's melancholia is not merely personal but historical, emerging from the absences, dislocations, and violences that structure Black life.

Building on my notion of "Black diasporic flânerie," I argue that Hartman transforms what Baudelaire described as the flâneur's quest to escape from "heartache and the thousand natural urban shocks" (qtd. in Benjamin 1997, 61) into a negotiation with racial loss and estrangement. The Black flâneuse travels to the homeland not to consume or master it, but to trace the fault lines of dispossession. In Hartman's work, flânerie becomes a method of historical inquiry, intertwining scholarship, travel, and mourning. Depression, in this framework, is recast as a mode of knowing—an ordinary and public feeling that registers the affective weight of diasporic history.

At the same time, the presentation engages critiques of Black memoir and travel writing, which caution against centering the diasporic self at the expense of African lives, local cultures and histories. Hartman's Ghana, as Ato Quayson (2024) notes, risks being reduced to the genesis of Blackness in the slave dungeon—a symptom of individualism that underscores the limits of diasporic flânerie. By situating *Lose Your Mother* within broader debates on Black travel and tourism, I argue that diasporic flânerie reconfigures the archetype through racial memory, alienation, and grief.

Dorottya Mózes is an Assistant Professor of American Studies at the University of Debrecen, Hungary. She is the author of *Identity, Style, and Performance in the Postcolonial Novel* (Debrecen University Press, 2019). Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Anglia*, *Journal of English Studies*, *Open Cultural Studies*, *Brno Studies in English*, *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, and edited collections by Brill and Ibidem Press. She co-edited "Ecofictions for an Endangered World: The Legitimacy of Hope," a thematic block in the *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* (2023). Her research combines African American literature and culture, spatial and environmental studies to examine the complexities of Black movement in America. Her current book project, *Black Flânerie: Geographic Practice and Imagination Inside Contemporary Spaces of Enclosure*, investigates how a range of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century texts reimagine the concept of flânerie to challenge the spatial violence imposed by racial capitalism.

MOBILITY IN CONTEMPORARY BLACK ATLANTIC WRITING

Müller, Timo

Universität Konstanz

FREE AIR? AUTOMOBILE AESTHETICS AND THE EXPOSED BODY IN THE MODERNIST NOVEL

Early motor cars did not have roofs. This enhanced drivers' awareness of the material qualities of the air to which they were exposed and of the relationship between the human body and its environment in general. While the impact of automobility on early twentieth-century thought has been studied from various angles, little attention has been paid to this environmental dimension. My paper draws on insights from material and elemental ecocriticism to inquire how American modernist novels processed the experience of automobile exposure. Reading canonic works by Sinclair Lewis and F. Scott Fitzgerald alongside marginalized and forgotten texts, the paper inquires into the connections these novels make between automobility and air, but also into the strategies of aesthetic representation they develop to make the experience of automobile exposure palpable to readers. The paper situates these thematic and aesthetic responses in two controversial discourses of the early twentieth century that linked the motif of air to notions of freedom. One was the discourse around access to fresh air, which was propelled by concerns around air pollution on the one hand and by research into the prevention of flu infections on the other. The second discourse revolved around the association of automobility with freedom, which was promoted by car enthusiasts but contested by those excluded from or disadvantaged by the new technology. The paper shows how frequently air was linked to freedom in both of these controversies and how important literature was in both perpetuating and exposing the political stakes of free air.

Timo Müller is Professor of American Studies at the University of Konstanz, Germany. His main research areas are modernism, Black literature, and the Environmental Humanities. His work has appeared in journals including *American Literature*, *Journal of Modern Literature*, and *Twentieth-Century Literature*. He has edited several textbooks and written two monographs, *The Self as Object in Modernist Fiction* (2010) and *The African American Sonnet: A Literary History* (2018), which is now available in paperback from the University of Mississippi Press. From 2023 to 2027 he is directing the ERC-funded research project "Off the Road: The Environmental Aesthetics of Early Automobility."

ROADS TO FREEDOM? CONTROVERSIAL AUTOMOBILITIES IN AMERICAN MODERNISM

Munro, Niall

Oxford Brookes University

‘HANGTHEMBRINGTHECAMERA’: HORRORISTIC VIOLENCE AND THE LIMITS TO FREEDOM ON THE US-MEXICO BORDER

In *Borderland Apocrypha* (2020), Anthony Cody documents the frequent instances of violence and white supremacy that have characterised the modern relationship between Mexicans and Americans. In particular, he considers how the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which brought to an end the Mexican-American War, was merely a ‘prelude’ to a period of lynchings and other extra-judicial killings of Mexicans in border states like California and Texas – a situation that Cody also recognises in cross-border relations today.

In this discussion I draw upon critics such as Gloria E. Anzaldúa and Adriana Cavarero to suggest that Cody’s work dramatises the distinct types of ‘horroristic’ violence (to use Cavarero’s term) that emerge at borders. In *Borderland Apocrypha* this violence is associated with racial subjection and enacted through the reduction of Mexican bodies to objects through dehumanisation and dismemberment, burning and drowning. Whilst the border can act as a conceptual framework, Cody’s book is simultaneously rooted in real places where these acts of violence take place, sites of memory where, despite the horror, it is possible and necessary ‘to monument/the eyes’; to reassess and reaffirm the value of the Mexican body undeterred by threats and intimidation.

In considering these spaces of torture and murder, I pay close attention to the poetic and typographical forms that Cody uses, including innovative approaches to lineation, found texts, the deployment of English and Spanish, and the deliberate obscuring of text. These strategies show how commemoration of people denied their freedom can act as a way of resisting their erasure from history. Through the annotation of historic texts as well as the selective erasure of legal and immigration documents, Cody not only encourages his readers to bear witness to these neglected or forgotten victims of American violence but also calls on them to adopt a radical new kind of active reading practice, a mode of disorientation that forces them to encounter stories of border terror in acutely spatial terms.

Niall Munro is a Senior Lecturer in American Literature at Oxford Brookes University where is also Director of the Oxford Brookes Poetry Centre and of the Centre’s award-winning poetry pamphlet press, ignitionpress. He is the author of *Hart Crane’s Queer Modernist Aesthetic* (2015), and co-editor of *On Commemoration: Global Perspectives upon Remembering War* (2020) and *Dambudzo Marechera at the Old Fire Station* (2024). His two current book projects focus on the way that modernist writers reflected on the American Civil War and how contemporary American poets commemorate people, places, and events.

COUNTER-VISIONS OF FREEDOM: CONTEMPORARY DOCUPOETIC INTERVENTIONS IN THE COLONIAL ARCHIVE

Murrell Taylor, Amy

University of Kentucky

ENVISIONING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN FREEDOM AFTER THE U.S. CIVIL WAR

Freedom for people newly emancipated from slavery in the United States meant much more than passing new laws and amending the Constitution in Washington, D.C. Across the rural South, it also meant reworking who would own and have access to land and to schools, churches, houses, barns, roads, and more. “So long as the Rebels hold the soil,” a sympathetic white teacher in Virginia observed, “they are masters of everything upon it – people, laws, custom, &c.” Freedom thus required the wholesale reconstruction of the built environment from one devoted to plantation slavery, to one that embodied and facilitated freedom for all. A new multiracial democracy would have to be built from the ground up—literally.

This paper will investigate African American struggles to envision and construct a new physical landscape of freedom in the post-Civil War South. It begins with the end of the war in 1865 and extends into the 1880s, examining the ways in which people newly freed from slavery seized the moment and began transforming rural plantation landscapes. Based on archival research and inspired by the material turn taken in humanities and social sciences over the last decade, it sheds new light on the material struggle that lay the heart of freedom-seeking after the American Civil War. Securing access to land, lumber, nails, tools, and other material resources, which ex-Confederates tightly controlled, consumed Black southerners as they set out to build their visions of freedom and thus “hold the soil.”

As architects, urban planners, and cultural geographers have long demonstrated, the built environment is, and always has been, deeply implicated in struggles for social and political power. This paper will explore this theme with several case studies from rural southern communities, using them to examine how Black people managed to finance, construct, and maintain control of new buildings in the postwar period. In each case, material structures are revealed to be the focal points of prolonged community conflict over possession and control—and thus, over power—with great repercussions for freedom and democracy.

Amy Murrell Taylor is the T. Marshall Hahn Jr. Professor of History at the University of Kentucky. She is the author of several books about the history of slavery and the Civil War era, including *Embattled Freedom: Journeys through the Civil War’s Slave Refugee Camps*, which won multiple national awards including the Frederick Douglass prize forbest book on the history of American slavery given by the Gilder Lehrman Center for theStudy of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition, as well as the Society of Civil War Historians’ Tom Watson Brown Book Award. She is one of the new co-authors of the long-running college textbook, *America: A Narrative History*, as well as the co-editor of the “UnCivil Wars” series at the University of Georgia Press. Taylor is currently the president-elect of the Society for Civil War Historians.

CONTESTED VISIONS OF AMERICAN FREEDOM IN THE CIVIL WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION ERA

Nardi, Paola

Università di Genova

SUBVERSION AND RESISTANCE: TONI MORRISON'S REINTERPRETATIONOF THE AMERICAN ROAD JOURNEY TRADITION IN PARADISE

An influential and courageous critic of contemporary American society and its racial tensions, Toni Morrison has repeatedly declared her intention to offer a new reading of United States history, adopting the perspective of silenced groups such as African Americans. While history is one of the most productive lenses through which to study Morrison's *oeuvre*, space can also serve as an interesting approach to explore how she carries out her revolutionary project of rewriting historiography.

The focus of my presentation is Toni Morrison's novel Paradise. In this work, space plays a crucial role, as the narrative is structured around a journey — the movement of an African American community into the heart of the country in the hope of founding an all-Black city where they could live free from segregation and oppression. This journey has been extensively studied, particularly as a re-reading of the original voyage of the Pilgrim Fathers, often regarded as the founding moment of the United States. My research, however, will focus on the mixed-race women living in a place called the Convent, located outside the all-Black city of Ruby—the second town they established after the first, tellingly named Haven, as they moved deeper into the heart of the United States in search of the most remote lands that might guarantee complete freedom and independence. Although still in its early stages, this study aims to investigate these women's movements to and from the Convent in order to understand how they navigate and inhabit space within the United States. I am interested in re-reading the iconic American road journey as a means by which the female characters challenge gender and racial barriers, appropriating an experience traditionally associated with white men. I will also interpret this journey, as undertaken by Morrison's female characters, as an act of both resistance and care — sometimes directed toward others, but most importantly toward themselves —, since their travels often stem from a desire for survival and self-preservation.

Paola Anna Nardi completed a Ph.D. in American Literature. She has published a book on Marianne Moore, *Marianne Moore. La poesia dello spazio*, and an anthology *American Literature and Culture. A Selection of Texts*. She has written essays on Thom Gunn, Edith Wharton, Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop, Toni Morrison, and the Irish Americans. In 2014, she received the National Scientific Qualification as an Associate Professor of Anglo-American Literature. She is currently an Associate Professor in Anglo-American literature and Culture at the Department of Modern Languages and Cultures of the University of Genova, Italy. Her research interests include American poetry, Marianne Moore, African-American Literature, Toni Morrison, Irish-Americans, ecocriticism, theory of space, representations of space/place in literature, African-American environmental history, and spatial justice.

In 2024, she received a grant from the U.S. Embassy for a project aimed at promoting the study of U.S. literature through the organization of courses for Italian high school teachers on the teaching of U.S. literature. She is actually working on research on Mobility, Journeys, and Black Women in Toni Morrison's Novels.

Naylor, Amanda

University of York

TEACHING GLOBAL IMMIGRATION; LUIS J. RODRÍGUEZ, NEMACHTILLI (THE SPIRIT OF LEARNING) AND THE GERMAN SCHOOL CURRICULUM

One of the important ways that Luis J. Rodríguez's work speaks to youth across borders is by his validation of students that already have worth and knowledge despite their general disempowerment in society. Writing for *The English Journal* in 2005, Rodríguez evokes the native American Nahuatl word *Nemachtilli*, which he translates into English as 'the spirit of learning'. This spirit, Rodríguez argues, though 'innate in every child', is discouraged and even repressed by a public education system in which 'most schools ... have become factories, preparing children to be consumers and "productive" citizens, not active and interested readers and creators'. Having conducted fascinating work in German High Schools in which they guided students in studying select Rodríguez poems, McGuinn and Naylor ascertain the relevance of Rodríguez's poetry in a German curriculum that has a section on US literature in relation to the 'ambiguity of belonging' that intersects with tense debates in German society about immigration and citizenship, thereby providing a case study on the global reach and resonance of Rodriguez's work. Their fieldwork was crucially supported by German head teacher, Steffen Brand, in order to probe how Rodríguez's poems can empower young people through illuminating the importance of language in developing identity.

Amanda Naylor is a Senior Lecturer in Education at the University of York. Her main academic interests are the teaching of literature and poetry, teacher training and creative pedagogies. Amanda has published widely in the field of teaching literature and pedagogical approaches to engaging learners in the classroom. Amanda is currently involved in two international areas of research; the reading experiences of undergraduate students in different national contexts and the ways in which Initial Teacher Trainees negotiate values within classrooms in the United Kingdom and Norway. Amanda is currently the Deputy Associate Dean for Students, Teaching and Learning in the Faculty of Social Science and Co-Director of the BA Education Pathway. Amanda was invited by the DAAD (Deutscher Akademisher Austauschdienst) to take up the Ottilie-Wildermuth-Chair in the Teaching of English Language and Literature at the University of Tübingen, Germany in 2019. Amanda has recently co-edited with Nicholas McGuinn *Engaging with Environmental Education through the Language Arts: Interdisciplinary and Creative Approaches to Fostering Ecoliteracy*.

Nesmelova, Olga

Kazanskii federalnyi Suniversitet

RETHINKING THE AMERICAN DREAM AND FREEDOM IN AMERICAN LITERARY NONFICTION IN THE LATE 20TH CENTURY

The paper addresses the critical perception of the phenomenon of the American dream in literary nonfiction by Norman Mailer, Gay Talese, Jimmy Breslin, and Ted Conover. The American Dream, a foundational concept shaping the identity of the United States, underwent significant evolution throughout US history. Encompassing ideals of freedom, success, upward mobility, and the pursuit of happiness, it reflected the dynamic societal, economic, and cultural changes. American literary nonfiction has had a long-lasting history of addressing the most topical phenomena and concepts, including those of the American dream and American freedom. In the late 20th century, N. Mailer, G. Talese, J. Breslin, and T. Conover continued their aesthetic experiments with documentary genres in order to raise a range of issues including the search for identity and liberation, racial and ethnic inequality, immigrants' standards of living, which led them to rethinking and re/demythologizing the dream of equal rights and freedom in the USA. Building upon this foundation, the paper delves into specific examples from the selected authors' literary nonfiction to illustrate the nuanced and often contradictory portrayals of the American dream. The authors argue that these writers, employing techniques such as immersion journalism, scene-by-scene plot structure, and status details, expose the American dream's inherent limitations and its uneven distribution across different segments of American society. Through their hybrid writing (factual basis presented through personal narratives), the writers reveal the stark realities faced by marginalized communities, challenging the idealized vision propagated by mainstream media and political rhetoric. The authors conclude that N. Mailer's and J. Breslin's literary nonfiction highlights the disillusionment experienced by those who strive for success within a flawed system, while G. Talese's meticulous observations of social dynamics and T. Conover's undercover explorations of marginalized subcultures provide further evidence of the widening gap between the promise of freedom and upward mobility and the lived experiences of many Americans. The recurring motif of freedom gets reinterpreted not as an abstract ideal, but as an achievable individual possibility in the context of the rigid social order.

Prof. Olga Nesmelova is the Head of the Department of World Literature at Kazan Federal University . She teaches World Literature at the Turn of the 19-20th Centuries, World Literature and Culture, History of English and American literatures, Multiculturalism in English and American Literature. Her research interests include American Studies, American Literature at the Turn of the 19-20th centuries, Literary nonfiction. The topic of her doctoral thesis was Russian Literary Criticism on the Development of US Fiction of the 20th Century. Among her books are The History within the Story, The Story within the History in Jhumpa Lahiri's "The Lowland" (2022), Own-Other Space: Play with the Concept in British and American Cross-Cultural Fiction (2019), Eastern Roots of the "Crime of the Century" (Based on Oswald's Tale by N. Mailer) (2008), Academic Perception of American Mass Literature in Russia (2007), American Studies in Russia (1998).

FREEDOM TO BE ME: STRUGGLES WITH STEREOTYPES, DISSENT, AND CELEBRATION OF DIFFERENCE IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN WRITING

Nidi, Emanuele

Università di Napoli Federico II

W.E.B. DU BOIS AND THE BLACK RECONSTRUCTION OF THE AFRICAN CONTINENT

The end of the First World War opened a season of deep instability in the global order, marked by the fall of empires, the rise of new powers, and waves of revolution and counterrevolution. To W.E.B. Du Bois, this incendiary period seemed full of opportunities for the advancement of Black people worldwide. He closely followed the debates in the newly created League of Nations over the administration of the former German colonies in Africa and organized his famous Pan-African Congresses with the explicit aim of influencing the League and promoting the creation of a new independent African state.

This project was described in the pages of *The Crisis*, the NAACP's mouthpiece edited by Du Bois, as "Reconstruction," a term inevitably reminiscent of the period after the U.S. Civil War, when African Americans experienced a brief season of (relative) democracy in the South. Later, Du Bois would write one of the most important historical reflections on that era, *Black Reconstruction in America*, focusing on the rise and fall of democratic rights for the recently freed slaves. Democracy was indeed one of the central concepts around which he built his political program for Africa after WWI. He repeatedly emphasized the importance of "native peoples" gaining a voice in their own government. Yet he also believed that, at the present stage, Africans were not fully prepared for complete democratic self-rule and required some form of tutelage from an enlightened elite. Differing from the colonial thinkers of his time, however, Du Bois argued that this duty belonged not to European powers but to a Black international intelligentsia, rooted in the African American community.
This paper examines the concept of African Reconstruction and analyzes its resonances in the political debates of the postwar period, relating Du Bois's elaborations to those of his contemporaries, from the British colonial administrator Harry Johnston to the missionary press. In doing so, it highlights the contradictory tension between Du Bois's vision of Reconstruction in Africa and the call for the selfdetermination of African peoples.

Emanuele Nidi is an adjunct professor of American History and Institutions at the University of Naples Federico II. He earned his Ph.D. at the University of Naples L'Orientale with a research project on W.E.B. Du Bois and the 1921 Second Pan-African Congress. His research has been supported by grants from institutions such as the Andrew Hook Center at the University of Glasgow and the Roosevelt Institute for American Studies in Middelburg. His articles have appeared in the *European Journal of American History*, *Contemporanea*, and *RSA Journal*. His doctoral dissertation culminated in the 2025 publication of his first book, *Du Bois e il Secondo congresso panafricano* (Carocci Editore, 2025). He has taught courses and conducted seminars on violent self-defense in the African American movement, and music as a historical source in U.S. history at the Centro Studi Movimenti of Parma and the University of Naples L'Orientale.

SAFE FOR DEMOCRACY? AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES AND THE (UN)MAKING OF THE GLOBAL ORDER

Nitz, Julia

Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg

MAKING AMERICAN WOMEN HEALTHY AGAIN: ANTEBELLUM FASHION BASHING AND ITS CONTRADICTORY IMPULSES

"Yes, idleness and fashion are doing more to corrupt morals and ruin souls than any other agencies of evil." This quotation on the evils of fashion is taken from Reverend Anson Smyth's 1858 introduction to the American edition of Dinah Maria Mulock Craik's influential conduct book *A Woman's Thoughts About Women*. He bemoans that a great number of well-to-do young American women ruin their health and thereby their morals and by implication American society because they sell their souls to fashion. He chides that so-called "ladies," "estimate health as something well enough in washerwomen and maids of the kitchen, but not quite genteel enough for them" (vii-viii). Seven years earlier, William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* published an article called "The New Costume," which in Declaration of Independence style called for "the women of one nation to break off the bonds which Fashion has thrown around them, and to assume [...] a separate and distinct dress, to which the laws of Nature and a regard for their health so fully entitle them" (124).
In my paper, I will examine these two antebellum texts that orbit around and interconnect issues of dress, health, morality, the nation, and woman's sphere. I shall showcase that while both texts aim at liberating women from the detrimental effects of fashion, however, the *Liberator*-article is a call for self-liberation from (male/social) norms, whereas Reverend Smyth calls on women to give up on what he considers a corruptive self-indulgence. In each, fashion is considered an evil and detrimental to women's and the nation's well-being but the authors are motivated by seemingly contradictory impulses that we would now consider respectively as progressive and conservative. Next to these differing visions of freedom from the yoke of fashion and ill health, I shall highlight the intersectional nature of fashion-and-health talk concerning notions of class, race, and nationality exemplified in these two case studies.

Julia Nitz is professor of Anglo-American Cultural Studies at Martin Luther University HalleWittenberg. She has served as Executive Director at the Center for American Studies and is cofounder of the Intercontinental Crosscurrents Network for the study of transatlantic women's networks in the long nineteenth century.
Her research focusses on the American Civil War, women's life writing, intertextual cultural studies, historiographic and museum narratology as well as Anglophone (Caribbean) film and adaptation studies. Her most recent monograph *Belles and Poets: Intertextuality in the Civil War Diaries of White Southern Women* (LSUP, 2020) establishes the extent to which literature offered a means of exploring ideas and convictions about class, gender, and racial hierarchies in the Civil War-era South.

AMERICAN STUDIES, PRESENT AND FUTURE: VISIONS FROM EUROPEAN JOURNAL EDITORS

A TENUOUS GRASP ON FREEDOM: COMPETING IDEAS FOR WOMEN'S SELF-DETERMINATION

Norman, Will

University of Kent

THE TEMPORALITIES OF AMERICAN STUDIES PUBLISHING AND SCHOLARSHIP

This paper will discuss the intersecting temporalities of American Studies as a discipline with those of its academic publishing infrastructure and the rapidly shifting political landscape in the United States during the second Trump administration. It will identify and address the challenges these intersections pose, using the *Journal of American Studies* as a case study, taking particular account of the transatlantic intellectual community that European American Studies journals constitute.

Will Norman is a Reader in American Literature and Culture at the University of Kent in the UK, and co editor-in-chief at the *Journal of American Studies*. He specializes in twentieth-century US literature and thought. His books include *Nabokov, History and the Texture of Time* (2012); *Transatlantic Aliens: Modernism, Exile and Culture in Midcentury America* (2016); and *Complicity in American Literature After 1945: Liberalism, Race, and Colonialism*.

Norrick-Rühl, Corinna

Universität Münster

WALKING THE TIGHTROPE: SCHOLASTIC, CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY, AND BANNED BOOKS

Scholastic, the world's largest children's book publisher (US publishers of blockbuster book series such as *Harry Potter*, *The Magic School Bus*, *Clifford the Big Red Dog*, etc.), has a multi-channel distribution strategy, selling books through its clubs and fairs (which take place directly in schools) and through traditional trade and educational publishing routes (contexts: Wojahn 2006). This puts Scholastic in a unique and multifaceted position in the market, making it a fascinating case study for the range of expectations children's media is met with. The strategic curation of 'appropriate' books for the book clubs/book fairs and for trade audiences can generate friction with schools, parents, and authors, especially in the current heated political environment. For instance, in 2023, Scholastic announced a curated collection of books "Share Every Story, Celebrate Every Voice," which was met with criticism when it became apparent that the motivation was not to showcase diverse books – but to make it easier for schools in book banning hotspots to opt out of presenting the collection to their school communities (Treisman 2023). After significant backlash, Scholastic apologized to authors and readers, taking the series out of its offerings as of January 2024. Nonetheless, the unique positioning of Scholastic in schools around the country through its clubs and fairs make it an ideal (albeit exceptional) case study for the changing norms and values in US corporate children's and YA publishing today.

Corinna Norrick-Rühl is Professor of Book Studies at the University of Münster, Germany. She holds a PhD in Book Studies (2013) from Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany. She has a particular research interest in book clubs (see e.g. *Book Clubs and Book Commerce*, 2020; "Genre, Diversity, and Metanarrative in Reese's Book Club", with Alexander Starre, 2025). She has published widely on the anglophone book industry as well as on children's publishing in historical and contemporary perspective.

UN | BANNING BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

Obenland, Frank

Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz

"REVOLUTION IS THE MAN IN THE MIRROR" - STAGING THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN AMERICAN DRAMA

Theatre has been an integral part of the Civil Rights and Black Arts Movements of the 1960s and 1970s. As Nilgün Anadolu-Okur and Julius B. Fleming, Jr. have shown, African American playwrights, actors, and theatre practitioners collaborated with activists and community organizers in their struggle to overcome racism, segregation, disenfranchisement, and racialized violence in the United States by bringing to the stage a multifaceted discourse of protest and an urgent political demand for freedom in the here and now. Less critical attention has been devoted, however, to the question of how contemporary African American plays respond to the historical legacy of the Civil Rights and Black Arts Movement as well as the social protest and revolutionary plays created during the 1960s and 1970s. More particularly, the question arises how African American playwrights reclaim a distinctively African American perspective on the history of the Civil Rights and Black Arts Movement at the beginning of the 21st century. Therefore, this paper will turn to two popular and critically acclaimed plays by female Black playwrights whose works criticize a seamless integration of this era into a national American cultural memory. It will discuss Katori Hall's *The Mountaintop* (2009) which complicates the public commemoration of a sanitized version of Martin Luther King, Jr who continues to epitomize the spirit and achievements of the Black freedom struggle of the 1960s. In a similar manner, Dominique Morisseau's *Sunset Baby* (2012) will be analyzed as an argument for the importance of preserving the memory of a radical political vision despite its recognizable failings. Taken together, both plays insist on commemorating the Black struggle for political freedom and social justice from a distinctively African American perspective. In doing so, these plays not only expose the constructedness of the United States' national cultural memory. They also draw attention to the production and circulation of material historical records from which the public memory of the Civil Rights and Black Arts Movement has been constructed in the first place. Thus, both plays can be understood as attempts to insulate the commemoration of the Civil Rights Movement against political efforts to use the memory of the Civil Rights Movement to discourage and suppress contemporary forms of activism and protest in the United States.

Frank Obenland is a senior lecturer in American literature and cultural history at the Obama Institute of Transnational American Studies at the University of Mainz. In 2009, he earned his Ph.D. with a dissertation on the novels and short fiction of Nathaniel Hawthorne. His post-doctoral research focuses on historical and contemporary African American theatre.

STAGING THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN AMERICAN DRAMA - A LONG QUEST FOR FREEDOM IN AFRICAN AMERICAN WRITING

O'Connell, Christian

University of Gloucestershire

BRINGING COLUMBUS HOME: BUFFALO SOLDIERS AND ASPIRATIONS OF FREEDOM IN ITALY AT THE END OF WORLD WAR II

Following victory in Europe in World War II in 1945, African American troops of the NinetySecond Infantry Division took part in a symbolic but relatively unknown ceremony returning the ashes of Christopher Columbus to the Italian city of Genoa. This paper discusses the way the ceremony was a localized diplomatic exercise reflective of emerging American policy in Italy. This approach was influenced by cultural ties and anticommunism in order to promote liberal pro-US reform. The symbol of Columbus provided historic and ideological links that allowed Americans and the Genoese to cement ties with one another. At the same time, the ceremony encapsulates the complicated experiences of the 'Buffalo' soldiers and their struggle for visibility during the conflict. In many ways, the event reflected various aspects of their experiences in Italy, in which many Black GIs forged bonds with Italian authorities and civilians, despite the presence of significant race prejudice from Nazi-Fascist propaganda as well as within the American military. While their role in the ceremony was camouflaged by the mainstream press, for African Americans it captivated the aspirations of 'racial uplift' that could come with the success of Black combat troops. Honouring Columbus was also a sign of African American patriotism fostered by the war period. The paper also suggests that Black patriotism was forged by the interweaving forces of contribution to victory, discrimination in the representation of their efforts, but also by positive encounters with Italians who welcomed them as liberators and Americans, including in commemorative return visits fifty years later.

Christian O'Connell is the Academic Course Leader in History, and Senior Lecturer in American History at the University of Gloucestershire. Christian's teaching and research examines the transatlantic diffusion of African American culture. He is the author of *Blues, How Do You Do? Paul Oliver and the Transatlantic Story of the Blues* (2015). Most recently he has been working on relations between African Americans and Italians during WWII, publishing two articles in recent years that form the basis of his talk for the conference. In addition to this, he is currently leading a collaborative project examining the legacies of transatlantic slavery in the city of Gloucester, which involves a public engagement initiative alongside heritage organizations and community groups.

Oliver, Maria Antonia

Universitat Pompeu Fabra

DEATH, HEALING, AND LIBERTY IN IRE'NE LARA SILVA'S 'FLESH TO BONE' AND 'HIBISCUS TACOS'

US national mythmaking as a land of liberty has its highest exponent in the New York bronze statue that Emma Lazarus called "the mother of exiles." Liberty looks out over the New York harbour as if guarding the promise of hospitality, shelter, and protection to immigrants and refugees declared in Lazarus's 1883 sonnet "The New Colossus." The experience of immigrants, refugees or exiles of colour has very often failed to meet the ideal. But in this Trumpian day and age of massive deportations and violence against undocumented migrants, the promise of liberty reveals itself to be not only racially biased but extremely fragile and shamelessly disputed. Whether addressed to popular audiences or more cultivated audiences, literature has echoed the transformation of the American ideal and "the shattering of any notion of 'shared' reality" (Resano 2022). However, as this panel seeks to demonstrate, at this critical time for political and cultural discourse, the literatures and art of Latinx and peoples of color deserve particular attention for their shift away from the divisiveness within the American nation and confronted notions of freedom towards individual and collective healing that emphasizes a relational, situated understanding of freedom. This understanding, in Western philosophy, is related to Simone de Beauvoir's existential idea that our capacity for agency and meaning making is constrained, though never determined, by our situation. In Latinx philosophy, Orlando Fals Borda, Eduardo Galeano and Laura Rendón have termed this understanding as a "*sentipensante* approach" (Rendón 2009).
Within today's "socially muddied" and confused understanding of freedom (lara silva 2013), the stories "Flesh to Bone" and "Hibiscus Tacos" use the genre of fantastic fiction to foreground the liberty of individual bodies, feelings, and thoughts within contexts of violence and vulnerability as intertwined with and dependent on collective bodies. "Flesh to Bone" is a fantasy that draws on the Mesoamerican myth of *La huesera* to mourn the victims of femicide at the border. "Hibiscus Tacos" envisions hospitable death inhabiting the body of a taco-seller who feeds and ushers struggling people to the end of their lives. However different in tone, both works foreground storytelling as a performative rite of inhabiting the broken bodies of others that brings healing and liberty. Putting flesh to bone, names to bodies, and food in the mouths of those who are to die calls attention to the material dimension of the lives that make the communal body and to the interdependence between self and other. Echoing Gloria Anzaldúa's Coyohxahqui Imperative (2015), the narrative gathering of the scattered limbs of bodies and the bringing together of fragile lives under death's caring spell leads to the re-piecing, empowerment, and freedom of a self who heals as it heals a lacerated collective.

Maria Antònia Oliver-Rotger is Associate Professor at the Humanities Department of Universitat Pompeu Fabra (Barcelona). Her most recent research focuses on the testimonial, documentary, and auto-ethnographic aspects of Chicanx and Latinx literature. She is the author of *Battlegrounds and Crossroads: Social and Imaginary Space in Writings by Chicanas* (Rodopi, 2003). She is also the editor of *Diaspora and Return in American Literature* (Routledge, 2015), a special issue devoted to *Rethinking Hospitality through the Culture, Literature, and Thought of Contemporary US Women of Color* for *Lectora: Revista de dones i textualitat* (2023), and co-editor of *(In)Hospitable Encounters in Chicanx and Latinx Literature, Culture and Thought* (Routledge, 2025). She has published essays in journals such as *Melus*, *Aztlán*, *Signs*, *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*, *Journal of American Studies*, and in edited volumes published by Routledge, Palgrave Macmillan, Brill, and Arizona University Press. She has been a member of the state-funded research project "A Critical History of Ethnic American Literature: An Intercultural Approach (I-V)" [MINECO (2003-2023) (Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (MCIN, AEI) (PID2019- 108754GBI00)] and is currently a member of the project "Alteridad y Acogida: Representaciones de la Hospitalidad en la Cultura Norteamericana" (2022-2025), both of which inquired into the ways in which American literature and culture engage with exclusion within inclusion in the US capitalist nation-state and propose alternative hospitable spaces.

Olsza, Małgorzata

Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu

DRAWING CHOICE: CONTEMPORARY COMICS AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS ACTIVISM

This presentation examines how the 2022 overruling of Roe v. Wade sparked a revival of reproductive rights activism in U.S. comics and how contemporary pro-choice creators redefine the concept of "choice." The second, updated edition of the anthology *Comics for Choice: Illustrated Abortion Stories, History, and Politics* (March 2023) revisits the many meanings of choice in a post-Roe v. Wade America. I focus on three stories in particular: "Jane" by Rachel Wilson (story) and Ally Schwed (art); "October" by Kris Louis Weaver; and "Encountering Abortion Restrictions, from Kenya to Texas" by M.J. Flores (story) and Kat Fajardo (art). These works are read as part of a broader narrative that links reproductive rights activism of the 1970s – documented in Wilson and Schwed's "Jane," which depicts the Jane Collective active in the U.S. before Roe v. Wade – to contemporary struggles over reproductive rights in an intersectional context. Weaver's "October" presents abortion from the perspective of a trans patient and Flores and Fajardo's comics demonstrates that the rollback of abortion rights in the U.S. reverberates across diverse communities and extends beyond national borders.
The visual-verbal form of comics allows creators to juxtapose personal testimony with historical and political commentary. By combining narrative intimacy with collective memory, these works highlight how reproductive rights are lived, contested, and narrated across different identities and geographies. This talk also situates Comics for Choice within the longer history of feminist print culture, from underground comix of the 1970s to today's digital platforms. Such a perspective underscores how comics function as both archive and intervention: they preserve marginalized voices while simultaneously mobilizing readers toward political engagement. Ultimately, the goal of this presentation is to reflect on how comics partake in the ongoing reproductive rights debate, whose history dates back to the early 1970s. While the 2022 Supreme Court ruling may appear to close a chapter, comics – as a form of activism – continue to document, problematize, and embody diverse experiences. In doing so, they remind us that the struggle for reproductive justice is continually reimagined through art, storytelling, and collective resistance.

Małgorzata Olsza (she/her) is Assistant Professor at the Faculty of English at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland. Her Ph.D. thesis was devoted to the poetics of the contemporary American graphic novel. She also holds an M.A. in Art History. Her research interests concentrate on American comics and graphic novels in feminist contexts. Her current research project, "The pregnant body and reproductive rights in American comics and graphic novels (1970-2022)", SONATA Grant 2022/47/D/HS2/00054 funded by National Science Center (Narodowe Centrum Nauki), focuses on the study of reproductive rights and freedoms in American graphic narratives. She has published on different aspects of Polish and American comics in *Polish Journal for American Studies*, *Image [&] Narrative*, *Studies in Comics*, and *Text Matters: A Journal of Literature, Theory, and Culture*.

Olsza, Małgorzata

Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu

VISIONS OF FREEDOM: REPRODUCTIVE BODIES IN REBECCA HALL'S WAKE: THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF WOMEN-LED SLAVE REVOLTS

This paper examines Rebecca Hall's graphic narrative *Wake: The Hidden History of WomenLed Slave Revolts* (2022, illustrated by Hugo Martínez and lettered by Sarula Bao), arguing that it not only recovers histories of Black women's resistance but also reframes them as radical acts of reproductive activism and visions of freedom. Wake chronicles Hall's archival and embodied journey to salvage the voices and experiences of Black women erased from history. Her methodological approach, which combines archival research, speculative reconstruction, personal narrative, and visual storytelling, challenges traditional historiography by foregrounding Black women as reproductive bodies, both materially and metaphorically. Drawing on Black feminist thought (Hartman 2008) and reproductive justice frameworks (Roberts 1997, Morgan 2004), this paper reads them within this double, interconnected framework. First, it situates them in the broader context of reproductive violence they were historically and systemically subjected to (forced breeding, sexual abuse, and destruction of families). Within this context, revolt stands for a radical assertion of bodily autonomy and refusal to reproduce the conditions of enslavement. Second, it interprets reproductive bodies as visually reproduced figures within the graphic narrative who "give birth" to counter-histories and resist the silencing mechanisms of the archive. In responding to the conference theme "Visions of Freedom," this paper argues that Wake offers a feminist (historio)graphic intervention that shows the reproductive labor and resistance of Black women as foundational to American freedom struggles. It reimagines the archive as a space where freedom can be
reborn.

Dr Małgorzata Olsza (she/ her) is Assistant Professor at the Faculty of English at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland. Her Ph.D. thesis was devoted to the poetics of the contemporary American graphic novel. She also holds an M.A. in Art History. Her research interests concentrate on American comics and graphic novels in feminist contexts. Her current research project, "The pregnant body and reproductive rights in American comics and graphic novels (1970-2022)", SONATA Grant 2022/47/D/HS2/00054 funded by National Science Center (Narodowe Centrum Nauki), focuses on the study of reproductive rights and freedoms in American graphic narratives. She has published on different aspects of Polish and American comics in *Polish Journal for American Studies*, *Image [&] Narrative*, *Studies in Comics*, and *Text Matters: A Journal of Literature, Theory, and Culture*. [ORCID 0000-0002-9171-0352]

Owen, David

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

DRIVERS, DETOURS, AND DETONATIONS: UNFREEDOM AND MASCULINITY IN "SOMEONE ELSE BESIDES YOU" (THE REFUGEES, 2017)

Viet Thanh Nguyen's "Someone Else Besides You" centres on Thomas, a thirty-threeyear-old Vietnamese American divorcé compelled by his ex-paratrooper father to undertake a punitive visit to Thomas's pregnant ex-wife. The encounter concludes with the father's silent act of vandalism, an assertion of authority that Thomas witnesses but declines to prevent. The following day, Thomas offers restitution and, somewhat uncertainly, proposes to "be the father." This gesture marks a tentative transition—from complicity, shame and inaction towards an incipient sense of responsibility. The narrative functions as an analysis both of domination and of limited resistance. The father enacts a recognisable patriarchal script: discipline, surveillance, decisive (and punitive) intervention that culminates in property destruction, and in reasserting control over a woman's future. Thomas's failure to intervene situates him within what Philip Pettit terms domination—a dependence upon another's arbitrary will, necessitating continual accommodation and anticipation. His subsequent moves toward repair and care do not erase his prior acquiescence, but they do reframe a sense of freedom, not construed as licence, but as non-domination: answerability and the equitable treatment of those subject to our own potential harm. Kermit Roosevelt's contention that American freedom is more productively narrated from Reconstruction than from the Founding offers a useful parallel here. Nguyen's story undertakes a similar process of "reconstruction" on the intimate scale of the family, within which refugee patriarchies, racialised mobility and gendered vulnerability persist. The spatial settings in the story militate against the American fantasy of unconstrained choice. Movement is possible, but it is unlinked from emancipation. Quinn Slobodian's critique of market-radical notions of "freedom" further illuminates Nguyen's concerns. The immigrant success narrative operates in this story as a veneer that conceals ongoing domination. Thomas's sharp new haircut and rented Ford signal a "cosmetic" self-fashioning. Beneath these surfaces, however, the father's unchallenged authority and the son's underlying apprehension remain. Stylistically, Nguyen's tight dialogue, compressed timeline and refusal of any full emotional release create an anti-Bildungsroman. Growth is not triumph but limitation: not repeating a harm; shouldering a duty rather than asserting a right. In Nguyen's world, small acts such as an apology, restitution or care—carry the weight of ethical transformation, however overdue they may be.

Dr David Owen is Associate Professor of English Literature at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. His research focuses on Jane Austen's early writings and on literary engagements with war and postmemory. He has published widely on Austen, including *Rethinking Jane Austen's Lady Susan* (2010); "Watching Literature Happen: Anna Maria Porter's *Walsh Colville* and Jane Austen's *Lady Susan*" (2016); "Conscripting Gentle Jane: Getting the 'Austen Treatment' in the Great War" (2016); and "The VisibleInvisible Good Man in Jane Austen's *The Watsons*" (2023). His recent work examines twentieth- and twenty-first-century literature in relation to conflict and its postmemory retellings, with co-edited publications including *The Spectre of Defeat: Experience, Memory and Post-Memory* (2021) and *Beyond Post-memory: (Re)Writing War in Contemporary Literature and Culture* (2024). He is a member and co-PI of the research group English Literary Perspectives on War & Memory in the (Post) Postmodern Era, and co-editor of the *Journal of Juvenilia Studies*.

Parisi, Arianna

London School of Economics and Political Science

ANTI-CARCERAL CRITIQUES IN ANGELA DAVIS'S AND ASSATA SHAKUR'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES, 1974-1987

Autobiographies are important sources in reclaiming the voices and perspectives of individuals or groups, such as Black women, who have long been silenced or overlooked especially in the fields of political and intellectual thought. The source has also served as counter-narrative device to contest misleading generalisations or universalist claims. Given the political importance of the autobiographical genre, this paper focuses on the autobiographies of Black radical women activists Angela Davis and Assata Shakur, respectively published in 1974 and 1987. The works of Davis and Shakur are a critical source as the only available memoirs written by radical women incarcerated during the Black Power era and illustrate the important role of this source for the development of Black feminism, anti-carceral theory and the wider prison abolition movement. The texts offer detailed insights into the women's activism and their articulation of anti-carceral theories and practices that developed out of the socio-political context of the US in the late twentieth century. The autobiographies challenged hegemonic ideas about the role of Black women in radical struggles and served to denounce the tactics adopted by the state to repress Black activism and particularly Black women activists. For this reason, these two texts are here considered a crucial starting point for analysing the early anti-carceral movement and the role of Black women within it. A close analysis of these texts reveals how both activists used their autobiographies to highlight the inseparability of personal and political struggles for justice. Through their accounts, Davis and Shakur spotlighted the distinct experiences of women within radical movements and reshaped traditional narratives surrounding race, gender, and class amid the Black Power era. The paper will explore the various themes in the women's autobiographies including state violence, incarceration, racism, and sexism, arguing that Davis's and Shakur's writings contributed to the development of Black abolition feminism while also representing different articulations of Black abolition feminism.

Arianna is originally from Catania, Sicily. She holds both a bachelor and a master degree in history from Alma Mater Studiorum - University of Bologna. Throughout her academic journey, her scholarly concerns were mostly focused on American History, History of Social Movements and History of Political Thought. In recent years her research interests widened to consider histories from a global perspective. This has led to her interest in the Black Radical Tradition, with a particular focus on African American women's anti-carceral activism. She has been awarded an AHRC/LAHP Studentship, and is now a full-time MPhil/PhD candidate in International History at the London School of Economics and Political Science under the supervision of Prof. Imaobong Umoren.

Park Sorensen, Eli

Chinese University of Hong Kong

PREDICTING THE FUTURE: BIOPOLITICS AND ALGORITHMIC GOVERNMENTALITY

In this paper, I will draw on inspiration from the historical dialogue presented by the antifascist intellectual manifestos of 1925 and 2025 to critically re-examine contemporary challenges to political freedom, especially within the context of emerging digital technologies. I argue that AI, particularly large language models (LLM) based on statistical prediction, functions as a new biopolitical dispositif that fundamentally reshapes power dynamics, sovereignty, the state-individual relationship, and life itself. A key mechanism driving this transformation, as noted by Russell (*Human Compatible*, 2019), is the amplification and promotion of radical or extreme content. It is easier for algorithms to predict what users will click on next if the content is radical or extreme in nature (whereas it is harder to guess if the user is in the middle of the political spectrum)—hence, the exploitation of human cognitive biases, and the dissemination and weaponization of fake news, extremist narratives, disinformation, conspiracy theories, and 'alternative' facts. Paradoxically, this pursuit of predictability has led to a profoundly unpredictable and unstable situation transforming the contemporary political landscape, almost to the extent that it has— from the perspective of traditional politics—become 'ungovernable'. Building on Foucault, Agamben, and Esposito's theoretical frameworks, I look at ways in which AI-driven technologies function as opaque machines of classification and normalization that enact new forms of social and behavioural regulation and thereby redraw the biopolitical relationship between sovereign power and individual and between the 'governable' and the 'disposable'. I argue that AI-driven content manufacturing algorithmically curated synthetic realities and hyper-personalized disinformation is a crucial component within the new biopolitical dispositif, which enables new levels of (state - as well as non-state) control over the individual, manipulation, delegitimization of dissent, and the creation of epistemic bubbles and echo chambers. It is in this light that the historical dialogue between the anti-fascist manifestos presents an important framework to rethink how these AI-facilitated processes echo and modernize the threats of fascism today.

Eli Park Sorensen is an associate professor in the English Department at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. He specializes in comparative literature, postcolonial thought, and critical theory. Sorensen received his PhD in Comparative Literature at UCL in 2007. He was a Junior Research Fellow at Clare Hall Cambridge (2009-2011) and a National Humanities Fellow at the National Humanities Center (2020-2021). Sorensen has taught courses on theories of fiction, censorship, human rights, and literary theory. He is the author of *Postcolonial Studies and the Literary* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), *Postcolonial Realism and the Concept of the Political* (Routledge, 2021), and *Science Fiction Film* (Edinburgh University Press, 2021), and has co-edited the collection *East-West Dialogues* (Peter Lang, 2020) and *World Literature* (Routledge, 2025). Sorensen has published articles in journals such as *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, *Journal of Narrative Theory*, *Paragraph*, *Modern Drama*, *Research in African Literatures*, *Partial Answers*, *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, *Studies in Canadian Literature*, and *Genealogy*.

1920S–2020S: VISIONS OF UNFREEDOM

Paryż, Marek

Uniwersytet Warszawski

THE PRICE OF FREEDOM: THEMES OF OPPRESSION AND VIOLENCE IN RECENT EUROPEAN FILM WESTERNS

The paper will discuss several contemporary European film Westerns that critically reassess the myth of the American West as a land of freedom by foregrounding motifs of oppression and violence. The films to be examined include: *Brimstone* (2016, dir. Martin Koolhoven), *The Salvation* (2014, dir. Kristian Levring), and *Never Grow Old* (2019, dir. Ivan Kavanagh). They all portray Europeans in the American West. They examine local hierarchies of power, which equate authority with brutal force, hence a clear division into oppressors and victims. Accordingly, they show freedom as a privilege of those who are in power; in a word, it means the freedom to oppress the weak. A multinational European coproduction with a Dutch director, *Brimstone* portrays a community of Dutch settlers in the American West, led by a tyrannical minister. Their physical isolation, which they see as a condition of religious freedom, creates a situation in which the minister's excesses, especially toward his wife and daughter, become a given. The Danish *The Salvation* employs the formula of the revenge Western in a story that revolves around the archetypal conflict between an immigrant farmer and a powerful landowner. It shows that even in small western communities status is a factor that creates clear hierarchies of power. The Irish *Never Grow Old* features a similar type of Western plot and depicts a reality in which the capacity for brutal violence determines larger social relations.

Marek Paryż is Associate Professor of American literature at the Institute of English Studies, University of Warsaw, the chief editor of the *Polish Journal for American Studies* and senior editor of the *European Journal of American Studies*. He serves as the main editor of the EAAS book series "European Perspectives on the United States," published by Brill. His current research focuses on the Western across narrative arts, and he takes special interest in transnational uses of the genre. His recent publications include co-edited collections of essays *The Western in the global Literary Imagination* (Brill, 2022) and *Transnational Film and the US Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan* (Routledge, 2025).

THE AMERICAN WEST - A LAND OF FREEDOM? REVISIONS OF THE MYTH

Patriarca, Silvana

Fordham University

THE END OF THE INTELLECTUAL AND THE RETURN OF ENGAGEMENT: SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE 'RENEWED OPEN LETTER AGAINST THE RETURN OF FASCISM' AND ITS ITALIAN PRECEDENT

For some time, many observers have agreed that the era of the intellectual is over, replaced by experts who perform their work in specific settings, but no longer engage critically in the public sphere. However, the rise of the far right to positions of power in the US and elsewhere has generated an intense scholarly debate on the issue of authoritarianism and the return of fascism and several historians have ceased being only analysts of the past to embrace a stance of critical engagement and activism not only in academia but in society at large. This is a positive development, which would seem to point to the return of the intellectual at a time when the liberal consensus has eroded and democratic government, freedom of speech, and antiracism are under the strongest attack since the end of WWII. The paper will reflect on academic activism in this historical moment (of which the 'Open Letter' is an example), its audiences, impact, and limitations, in light of the historical precedent of Italian antifascist intellectuals facing the rise of fascism in the early 1920s.

Bio:

Silvana Patriarca received her Ph.D. at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. She has taught at Columbia University and the University of Florida, and is currently a professor in the Department of History of Fordham University. She specializes in the history of modern Italy and her research has ranged from the social history of industrialization to the intellectual and political history of statistics to the cultural history of nationalism and the construction of national identities in their intersection with gender and "race." The author of the award-winning *Numbers and Nationhood: Writing Statistics in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge University Press) and of *Italian Vices: Nation and Character from the Risorgimento to the Republic* (Cambridge University Press), she has co-edited (with Lucy Riall) *The Risorgimento Revisited: Nationalism and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (Palgrave Macmillan). She has held fellowships at the National Humanities Center (North Carolina) and at the Collegio Carlo Alberto in Turin, and visiting appointments at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Science Sociales and at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (Sorbonne) in Paris.

1920S–2020S: VISIONS OF UNFREEDOM

Pesce, Sara

Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna

ONE BATTLE AFTER ANOTHER. LAYERED ARTICULATIONS OF AMERICAN FREEDOM THROUGH SPACE AND PERFORMANCE

To grasp how cinema encodes notions of freedom as those historically rooted in American ideals of individualism, social and geographic mobility, and moral agency, I suggest attending closely to the configurations of diegetic space (Elsaesser Hagener). In other words, beyond plot and characterization, an idea of freedom can be articulated through a film's *mise-en-scène*: setting, production design, and costume. Actors' performances and the constellation of cultural and biographical associations that stars bring to their roles (Dyer) are also integral to these expressive forces. Drawing on a tradition of film analysis that incorporates the human figure as part of the *mise-en-scène*, this paper conceptualises film space not only as the ensemble of objects and places encompassed in a scene/film, but also as the way actors inhabit diegetic space in ways that generate affective and symbolic meaning.

One Battle After Another (P. T. Anderson, 2025) is emblematic of contemporary explorations of freedom as both a social struggle and an existential condition. It constructs a layered intertextual fabric, deploying location and acting styles to convey a complex notion of the free spirit. It encompasses the legacy of civil rights and Thoreau's vision of the individual as the ultimate moral authority. The open spaces of California—marked as a contemporary borderland through highways, immigrant detention centers, and desert roads—evoke road movies, westerns, action cinema and more. Yet in this film, the national space no longer functions as a terrain of heroic sovereignty. The free spirit, instead, writhes in every direction. His body displays incongruities and awkwardness in a way that simultaneously evokes and mourns the integrity of the classic American hero, while reminding us of the hippie Big-Lebowsky-like independence through gestures, clothes, and off-thegrid domesticity.

The fact that it is Leonardo DiCaprio who enacts gestures and expressions conveying both disorientation and moral groundedness speaks to the star's claim of a primary position within the configuration of freedom as a national value. As per the requirements of the classical Hollywood star, DiCaprio proves capable of bringing to the screen a negotiation between dominant ideology and countercultures, revealing, without necessarily resolving, American society's crucial contradictions.

Sara Pesce is Associate Professor of Film and Performance Studies at the University of Bologna. Cofounder of INC – the Italian Research Network on Celebrity Culture – she promotes interdisciplinary approaches to celebrity studies. In this field, she recently published "Isabella Rossellini's Assertive Marginality: A Sustainable Paradigm in Contemporary Ageing Culture" (*Mediascapes*, 2025). Her research spans film history—from Hollywood's Jewish founders (*Dietro lo schermo*, 2005) to World War II in Italian cinema (*Memoria e immaginario*, 2008). Her work on acting and stardom appears in journals (e.g., *Film*, *Fashion & Consumption*) and edited collections, including a monograph on Laurence Olivier (*Laurence Olivier nei film*, 2012). She has also edited and authored volumes on film melodrama (*Imitazioni della vita*, 2007) and on time, memory, and paratextual media (*The Politics of Ephemeral Digital Media*, Routledge, 2015). She is currently completing a book on performance in audiovisual media.

PERFORMING FREEDOM IN SPACE FROM CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD TO CONTEMPORARY CINEMA

Petrelli, Marco

Università di Pisa

JAM IT! (JOURNAL OF AMERICAN STUDIES IN ITALY): STANDARDS, IMPROVISATION, AND THE EDITORIAL COMMONS

At the core of our project is an idea of academic publishing grounded in study as a shared, solidaristic practice. Our presentation will outline why JAm It! was launched at a moment when early-career scholars faced limited opportunities to publish and few routes into editorial work. We'll describe the journal's horizontal model that treats each issue as a site of training as well as publication, lowering barriers while maintaining rigor. We'll close with a candid look at what has worked, what hasn't, and our plans for the future.

Marco Petrelli is Associate Professor of American Literature at the University of Pisa. He is the author of Paradiso in nero: spazio e mito nella narrativa di *Cormac McCarthy* (2020), *Nick Cave. Preghiere di fuoco e ballate assassine* (2021), and several essays on African American literature, American Gothic fiction, the literature and culture of the U.S. South, geocriticism, and graphic narratives. He is co-founder and co-editor-in-chief of *Jam It!—Journal of American Studies* in Italy. His current research focuses on spectrality and the blues in African American literature.

AMERICAN STUDIES, PRESENT AND FUTURE: VISIONS FROM EUROPEAN JOURNAL EDITORS

Petrelli, Marco

Università di Pisa

DESCENT IN BLUE: JAZZ AND THE NARRATION OF BLACK LIBERATION IN RICHARD WRIGHT'S THE MAN WHO LIVED UNDERGROUND

Written in the early 1940s but published in full only in 2021, Richard Wright's *The Man Who Lived Underground* marks a decisive rupture from the author's best-selling *Native Son*. While retaining Wright's relentless depiction of anti-Black violence, the novel abandons the naturalist framework that had defined his earlier fiction in favor of a symbolic, almost surreal prose. In his essay "*Memories of My Grandmother*," Wright explicitly links this shift to the formal logic of blues and jazz, describing Fred Daniels's descent into the underground as structured around a "continuous beat in the bass" and "profuse improvisation of tense tonal-melody-rhythms." This musical principle becomes both a compositional method and an epistemological stance—a means of elevating the materials of everyday Black existence under segregation to "a plane of vividness that strikes one with wonderment."

Seen in this light, *The Man Who Lived Underground* is not merely a bleak allegory of racial oppression but an aesthetic and existentialist experiment: a blues narrative that seeks to transcend the representational limits of literary realism and the dehumanizing portrayals of Blackness it sustained. As Andrew Scheiber observes, the blues novel traces a path not of linear development but of knowledge, whose ultimate aim is to achieve "mastery of the basic terms and techniques of existence and resistance." Wright's work thus enacts a politics of survival—an art of living and resisting through the acknowledgment of hardship and pain. As Ralph Ellison's *invisible man* (a character clearly descended from Wright's Daniels) would later affirm, "life is to be lived, not controlled; and humanity is won by continuing to play in the face of certain defeat."

This paper reads Wright's *The Man Who Lived Underground* as a novel whose apparent nihilism conceals a radical pursuit of freedom. Through the lens of blues narratology, and against the gothicinflected imagery of entrapment and despair that shapes Fred Daniels's *katabasis*, the novel's descent into darkness reveals the limits of naturalistic representation while gesturing toward renewal. Daniels's underground exile transforms despair into the condition of rebirth, prefiguring a reconstituted sense of being—and a narrative arc that culminates in Black liberation.

Marco Petrelli is Associate Professor of American Literature at the University of Pisa. He is the author of *Paradiso in nero: spazio e mito nella narrativa di Cormac McCarthy* (2020), *Nick Cave. Preghiere di fuoco e ballate assassine* (2021), and several essays on African American literature, American Gothic fiction, the literature and culture of the U.S. South, geocriticism, and graphic narratives. He is co-founder and co-editor-in-chief of *Jam It!—Journal of American Studies in Italy*. His current research focuses on spectrality and the blues in African American literature.

THE AESTHETICS AND POLITICS OF FREEDOM IN THE ERA OF JIM CROW

Pignagnoli, Virginia

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

ON FREEDOM AND EXPERIMENT IN JULY'S, LACEY'S, AND MOSHFEGH'S SUBSTACK PROJECTS

In their Introduction to The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature, Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons, and Brian McHale state: "The one feature that all literary experiments share is their commitment to raising fundamental questions about the very nature and being of verbal art itself. What is literature, and what could it be? What are its functions, its limitations, its possibilities?" (2012, 1). Building on this premise, Virginia Pignagnoli's paper, "On Freedom and Experiment in July's, Lacey's, and Moshfegh's Substack Projects," analyzes three Substack publication projects—"Untitled Thought Project," "Miranda July," and "It's Ottessa, bitch" by Catherine Lacey, Miranda July, and Ottessa Moshfegh, respectively—to explore the possibilities they create for narrative discourse in the (post) digital age. In the last decade, the ideology of "radical freedom on the surface of the web" (Lanier 2010, 3) has largely disappeared, replaced by an algorithmically surveilled media ecology that leaves little space for post-postmodernist writers to experiment with digital paratextual material. Unlike other social media platforms, whose affordances and established practices do not encourage contemporary fiction writers to share their literary creations, Substack provides a space for fiction—mostly short stories—to coexist with various types of interactions and shared materials that, in turn, establish distinctive paratextual dynamics. Accordingly, this paper investigates these Substack projects as exemplary cases of how post-postmodernist writers engage with the aesthetics of postdigital fiction and its "DIY form of activist writing aiming to reclaim control over the creation, dissemination, and distribution of digital content" (cf. Ludovico 2013; Cramer 2016; Adema 2021, in Bell and Lutostański, in preparation), while reaffirming a commitment to experiment as a means for U.S. literature to reinvent itself.

Virginia Pignagnoli is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at the Universitat Autònoma of Barcelona in Spain, where she teaches U.S. Literature and Literary Theory. She is the author of Post-Postmodernist Fiction and the Rise of Digital Epitexts (Ohio State University Press, 2023), and her articles have appeared in journals including Narrative, Poetics Today, Neohelicon, the European Journal of English Studies (EJES), and Enthymema. She is a Ramón y Cajal fellow, currently working on a research project investigating the convergence of sincerity, intersubjectivity, political critique, and digital paratexts in contemporary literary narratives.

FREEDOM OF SPEECH ACROSS (POST) DIGITAL SPACES AND CONTEMPORARY US NARRATIVES

Piñero Gil, Eulalia

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

KATE CHOPIN'S "DÉSIRÉE'S BABY" AND THE EXPERIENCE OF IMMIGRATION AND TRANSRACIAL MOTHERHOOD IN THE ANTEBELLUM AMERICAN SOUTH

Most critics have claimed that in Chopin's "Désirée's Baby" (1892) the writer articulates the significant representation of mixed-race relationships in the Louisiana plantations. In my view, Chopin also depicts miscegenation in the context of motherhood and from the perspective of those women who had to live that experience in the Antebellum South. The protagonist of the story, Désirée Valmondé, is a child of adoption, her mother, Madame Valmondé, is a very supportive mother, and believes that her daughter is "a gift from God". In the same way, Désirée is a protective mother that defends her mixed-raced baby boy against Armand Aubigny's racist claims. Ironically, Armand Aubigny's racial origins are discovered through his French mother who, in a letter to her husband, writes of her gratitude to God for arranging their lives so that Armand never knew his mother belonged to that race "cursed with the brand of slavery". Therefore, the baby son and Armand have African origins that came by the way of France, not the United States. According to Koloski, some kinds or racially mixed alliances might have been socially possible in Paris when they were not in the U.S. In this paper, I would like to analyze how Chopin represents transracial motherhood, and the role of mothers in the (de)construction of the toxic effects of racism and slavery. At the same time, the writer articulates counternarratives of mothering which enable her protagonists to resist racism and the old ways of Antebellum South. Similarly, Chopin also explores the connections between immigration and transracial motherhood.

Eulalia Piñero Gil is Full Professor of American literature and gender studies of the Universidad Autónoma of Madrid, Spain. She has served as president of the Spanish Association for American Studies (SAAS) and has also been a member of the Board of the European Association for American Studies (EAAS). She has published extensively on the American Renaissance, women's literature, gender studies, Female Gothic, American and Canadian poetry, and comparative literature. She has published many books, chapters and peer-reviewed articles on Edith Wharton, Kate Chopin, Gertrude Stein and other writers. She has translated and edited works by American writers such as Kate Chopin, Gertrude Stein, Herman Melville, Edgar Allan Poe and John Dos Passos. In 2020, she co-edited the book *Live Deep and Suck all the Marrow of Life. H. D. Thoreau's Literary Legacy* (Vernon Press), and she also edited *Kate Chopin's Complete Short Stories/Cuentos Completos* (Páginas de Espuma). She has recently translated and edited a collection of unpublished stories in Spanish by Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

MOTHERING LIBERTY: MATERNAL VISIONS OF FREEDOM IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Pirgerou, Maria

The American College of Greece

OPEN CITY BY TEJU COLE: A PARALLAX VIEW OF TRANSCULTURAL IDENTITY WITHIN NEOLIBERALISM

Published in 2011, Teju Cole's *Open City* traces the steps of Julius, a resident psychiatrist of NigerianGerman descent, as he walks the streets of New York reflecting both on his past and present life and experiences. Being acutely conscious of his Nigerian roots and often feeling stifled by his highly demanding profession, Julius engages in an idiosyncratic type of 21st century flânerie which takes him not only across places but also across time, identities and socio-cultural interactions. This paper will argue that, through his long and highly self-reflective walks across Manhattan which bring him in contact with diverse characters in a constant socio-cultural exchange, Julius engages in a performative enactment of his transcultural identity and in doing so he exists in a parallactic gap with his perceived self as different to the one presented to the reader. At the same time, Julius's performative identity is precarious because it is constructed within the neoliberal agenda he feels compelled to fulfill by being eager to fit in the socio-cultural conditions that shape it. Furthermore, his professional capacity as a psychiatrist involves him in an exchange with his patients which he both relishes and pursues but in which he makes no affective investment. Theorizing on the (neo-)liberal utopia Slavoj Žizek notes that in the neo-liberal reality "the act of exchange does not lead to a permanent social bond but just to a momentary exchange between atomized individuals who, immediately afterwards, return to their solitude" ("The Violence of the Liberal Utopia" 21). Thus, Julius's constant engagement with other people either through his walks or in his professional capacity within neoliberalism actually affirms his distance and dis-engagement from them. Reading *Open City* from this perspective, this paper will claim that Julius's desire to transcend the limits of culture circumscribed by neo-liberal expectations by performing a transcultural identity responds, affirms and even gratifies these neoliberal scenarios. In this view, as Julius's acts and varied responses to the socio-cultural stimuli are narrated in the novel, they become mirrors which both reflect and deflect his subjectivity creating a parallactic view of a precarious transcultural identity Cole's protagonist is so eager to claim and secure.

Maria Pirgerou holds an M.A. and a Ph.D. degree in Anglophone Literature, Culture and Ideology from The National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece. Her research focuses on gender construction and representation during the Victorian Age and her theoretical background is J. Butler's gender theory and J. Lacan's psychoanalytic account of subjectivation. Dr. Pirgerou has published one book titled The Vicissitudes of Victorian Masculinity: The Case of the Bachelor (Lambert Academic Publishing, 2014). Her current research revolves around representations of femininity at the *fin-de-siècle* in the works of Vernon Lee and Oscar Wilde to be published by Routledge (Taylor and Francis Group) in 2026.

Pitozzi, Andrea

Università di Bergamo

THE FREEDOM OF UNCREATIVITY: CONSTRAINT, REPETITION, AND REUSE IN EXPERIMENTAL WRITING

The paper aims at critically engage with the idea of freedom of uncreativity, a paradoxical yet generative space in which the challenge of traditional notions of originality and newness opens up aesthetic and philosophical possibilities. Building on Marjorie PerloA's notion of "Unoriginal Genius" (2009) and Kenneth Goldsmith's practice of "uncreative writing" (2003-), involving retyping sessions, acts of appropriation, remixing and recontextualizing texts, the paper focuses on examples where creativity emerges through constraint, repetition, and a deliberate refusal to invent. Goldsmith's critical and scholarly position against "creative writing" and originality within the context of conceptual writing, alongside Jonathan Lethem's "defense" of plagiarism and influence (2012), help to frame a radical contestation of the ideology of creativity as well as of property and authority/authorship which spread across diAerent fields. While these provocative approaches seem to obliterate personal self-expressions—what Goldsmith himself contends as an impossible task—they also allow for a free use of extant materials that could revitalize texts and archival documents to re-signify them in the light of new debates, thus turning the text itself into a site where multiplicity, noise, and external voices can freely circulate. These notions are further contextualized within the framework of John Cage's idea of indeterminacy in/of composition, a leading concept in his *writing-through* experiments on works that contributed to shape notions of American liberty and democracy, such as Thoreau's *Journals*. Cage's belief that freedom can arise within constraints resonates with the principles of uncreative writing, making room for the world to enter the work, emphasizing process over product, and systems over inspiration or "confessionalism". Finally, the paper considers how these practices engage with legal and ethical aspects of appropriation and fair use, especially within the framework of contemporary digital ecosystem and "digital plenitude" (Bolter, 2019). By highlighting how extant materials can be repurposed, uncreative writing asserts a radical form of creative freedom, one that challenges models of authorship and suggests a liberation of creativity from the fetish of originality, positioning uncreativity not as a lack but as a diAerent kind of generative potential.

Andrea Pitozzi (PhD) is post-doc fellow at the University of Bergamo (Italy), where he teaches Anglo-American literature. He has been visiting scholar at Fairleigh Dickinson University (New Jersey) and has taught Textual and Comparative Studies at University of Verona. His research focuses contemporary literature and poetry from a comparative perspective, drawing on literary forms, aesthetics and theory. He is currently working on literary minimalism and the short story genre. His publications include the books *Conceptual writing* (Edizioni del Verri, 2018) and *Verbale di scomparsa. Paul Auster negli specchi della teoria* (La scuola di Pitagora, 2024), as well as numerous articles on authors such as Don DeLillo, Paul Auster, Jennifer Egan and Raymond Carver, published on national and international journals.

Pividori, Cristina

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

GHOSTS OF FREEDOM: JUST MEMORY IN VIET THANH NGUYEN'S "BLACK-EYED WOMAN" (THE REFUGEES, 2017)

Viet Thanh Nguyen's *Nothing Ever Dies* begins with the claim that "all wars are fought twice, the first time on the battlefield, the second time in memory," (4) revealing how states weaponize remembrance and forgetting to sustain myths of freedom. In "*BlackEyed Woman*" (from *The Refugees*, 2017), Nguyen rewrites some of these myths—the refugee's expected "indebtedness, gratitude and obligation" (*Nothing…* 294)—through the story of a Vietnamese ghostwriter living in California who is haunted by the brother who drowned during their escape from Vietnam. Her anonymity signals a fractured identity, while her profession, ghost-writing other people's stories while repressing her own, embodies both the commodified subject of neoliberal freedom—free to create, but alienated from meaning—and to what Phuong Tran Nguyen calls the politics of rescue: the demand that refugees prove worthy of American generosity by renouncing critique and memory.

The haunting overturns that condition: The brother's return compels the narrator to confront the past, including her rape, which she has buried in order to survive. Echoing Avery Gordon's claim that "the ghost is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure, […]where history and subjectivity make social life" (8), the story reveals that freedom lies not in forgetting but in the ethical act of remembering both self and other (*Nothing…* 12). The ghost becomes the agent of *just memory*, demanding truth-telling and recognition in place of marketable 'freedom.'

By tracing how Nguyen's narrator moves from repression to witnessing and, ultimately, to liberation, I draw on Dominick LaCapra's notion of "working through" trauma to read haunting as an ethical response to silenced histories. Through its use of voice, doubling, and spectral imagery, "Black Eyed Woman" dramatizes the narrator's passage from the "freedom to forget" (a form of assimilation) to the "freedom to remember" (the moral horizon of just memory).

Dr Cristina Pividori is Associate Professor of English Literature at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, where she also serves as Academic Coordinator of the MA in English Studies. Her research examines the intersections of war, (post)memory, and trauma in contemporary Anglophone literature, with a focus on the aesthetic and ethical challenges of representing conflict. She has published widely on the transmission of war trauma across generations, with articles appearing in *Atlantis*, *The Journal of War and Culture Studies*, *The Nordic Journal of English Studies*, *Text and Performance* and *First World War Studies* (in press), among others. Her recent work explores First and Second World War poetry, refugee narratives, and feminist theatre. She has co-edited *Writings of Persuasion and Dissonance in the Great War* (2016), *The Spectre of Defeat: Experience, Memory and Post-Memory* (2021) and *Beyond Postmemory: (Re)Writing War in Contemporary Literature and Culture* (2024).She is co-PI of the research group Beyond Postmemory, and former PI of the SGR Group for the representation of Conflict.

MINOR REVOLUTIONS: VIET THANH NGUYEN AND THE UNMAKING OF AMERICAN FREEDOM

Pochmara, Anna

Uniwersytet Warszawski

WALKING WHILE BLACK: THE URBAN PASTORAL AND RACIAL MOBILITY IN CONTEMPORARY NEW YORK WRITING

To an immigrant infatuated with New York, "the Park [is] his pastoral," writes Paul Laurence Dunbar in *The Sport of the Gods* (1902), evoking a vision of the city's green spaces as sites of renewal and self-possession. Yet Dunbar's novel ultimately reveals that for Black migrants, the allure of New York is tragic, its promise of freedom undermined by exclusion and precarity. This paper traces the practice of "walking while Black" in selected 21st-century works engaging with New York's geography to consider whether the meanings of racialized presence in pastoral spaces have shifted since Dunbar's naturalist narrative of decline. I begin with Ibi Zoboi and Yusef Salaam's *Punching the Air* (2020), which recalls the historical memory of the Central Park Five—the group of Black and Latino teenagers wrongfully convicted of assaulting a jogger in 1989. Co-authored by one of the wrongfully imprisoned men, the novel redefines the park not as a democratic or restorative space but as a site of profiling and brutal injustice. What should be a pastoral retreat becomes the terrain where carefree movement is halted and mobility criminalized. Next, I turn to Colson Whitehead's *The Colossus of New York* (2003) and Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011). Unlike Zoboi and Salaam, Whitehead and Cole do not foreground race in their depictions of urban walking or park spaces. Their meditative, flâneur-like narratives unwittingly echo Dunbar's early, almost naïve, vision of the park as an accessible urban pastoral. Drawing on Black geographies and affect theory, the paper explores how mobility through New York's public spaces becomes a measure of belonging, freedom, and constraint. Ultimately, I argue that these narratives reimagine the urban pastoral not as a retreat from history but as a contested site where beauty, alienation, and vulnerability coexist—and where walking itself becomes both a poetic and political act of endurance.

Anna Pochmara is an Associate Professor at the University of Warsaw. A former Fulbright scholar, she completed her doctoral research at Yale University under Hazel Carby. She has authored over fifty publications, including two monographs: *The Making of the New Negro: Black Authorship, Masculinity, and Sexuality* (AUP, 2011), which received the Minister of Science Award, and *The Nadir and the Zenith: Temperance and Excess in the Early African American Novel* (UGA Press, 2021), which earned an honorary mention from the American Studies Network. She also edited *James Baldwin* (UWP, 2021) and co-edited *Notes on Black Camp: A Special Issue of Open Cultural Studies* (2018), *New Cosmopolitanisms, Race, and Ethnicity* (De Gruyter, 2019), *The Boredoms of Late Modernity: A Special Issue of the EJAS* (2022), and *The African American Novel in the 21st Century* (Brill, 2025). Most recently, she joined Yasmin DeGout and Tyechia Thompson as co-editor of *The Routledge Companion to James Baldwin.*

MOBILITY IN CONTEMPORARY BLACK ATLANTIC WRITING

Poole, Ralph

Universität Salzburg

SOUNDING THE HOMELAND: MUSIC, MYTH, AND AFFECTIVE SPACE IN YELLOWSTONE AS AN AMERICAN HEIMATFILM

In my talk, I explore the role of music and sound in Yellowstone as a key mechanism for producing and sustaining the affective dimension of homeland. Drawing on the conceptual lens of the *Heimatfilm*, I examine how the series' soundscape – orchestral score, use of country tracks, ambient sounds, moments of silence – contributes to a narrative of belonging grounded in landscape and myth. I claim that the show mobilizes contemporary country and folk music to anchor its story in American cultural memory, intertwining national mythologies of the frontier with affective listening practices. At the same time, the soundscape evokes a pastoral sonic imaginary that aligns with the sentimental, nostalgic homeland aesthetics characteristic of the traditional *Heimatfilm*. I argue that sound functions not merely as background but as a cultural technology of place-making and identity construction, shaping viewers' emotional investment in contested landscapes. By reading *Yellowstone* as an American *Heimatfilm* through its musical strategies, the paper contributes to understanding American studies as an interdiscipline: the branding of the Western homeland as American sentimental genealogy aligns with cinematic conventions developed in the increasingly transformative transnational aesthetics of the *Heimatfilm*. A crucial question is how *Yellowstone*'s soundscape that adds to re-mythologizing the homeland correlates to recent *Heimatfilm* trends that envision home and belonging as inclusive and ecocritical, always transitory and open-ended.

Ralph Poole is an American-German researcher who teaches as Professor of American Studies at the University of Salzburg, Austria. Originally a trained literary and musicologist scholar, he has moved into the fields of gender and cultural studies. He taught at the University of Munich, Germany, at Fatih University in Istanbul, Turkey, and was a research scholar at CUNY's Center for Advanced Studies in Theater Arts in Manhattan. His book publications include a monograph on eating disorders in the work of Margaret Atwood, a study on performing bodies in the Avant-Garde theater tradition, a book on satirical and autoethnographical "cannibal" texts, a collection of essays on "dangerous masculinities", and another collection on "queer Turkey". Having wrapped up a project funded by the Austrian Science Fund on "Gender and Comedy in the Age of the American Revolution", he is currently researching the Austrian *Heimatfilm* from a gobal and queertrans* perspective.

RE/GENERATION, VIOLENCE, AND AMERICAN CULTURE WARS: SETTLER FREEDOMS IN YELLOWSTONE

Pospíšil, Tomáš

Masarykova univerzita

RESISTING THE VAEMPIRE: BLACK MUSIC, COLONIAL POWER, AND CULTURAL SURVIVAL IN RYAN COOGLER'S SINNERS

A key question of Ryan Coogler´s critically-acclaimed 2025 film *Sinners* is whether one of its principal characters, the young sharecropper and talented musician Sammie, who falls into the arms of his minister father and renounces his "sinful" dream of becoming a bluesman, will reverse his damaging decision. The camera focuses on the neck of his guitar that was lost in a bloody vampire attack on the black-owned, black-operated musical joint of the twin brothers Smoke and Stack. The logic of the narrative, showcasing the importance of Black music for the Black community, necessitates that Sammie not let go of the remnants of his instrument.

Coogler´s treatment of the role music plays in African American life is the powerful metaphorical vehicle for how the empire dominates, abuses, and erodes the culture of the colonized, at the same time exploiting it: while the turned black party members dance around the fire singing an Irish tune, the ultimate goal of their leader, a white vampire named Remmick, is to turn Sammie and gain mastery of his talents. When the sun appears and the vampire threat is over, local clan members arrive to put an end to the bold experiment of running a black-owned musical establishment. Yet Smoke, armed with machine guns and grenades, is ready to engage the members of "the invisible empire" with their own tools and methods.

Coogler is painfully aware that the colonized African Americans cannot be fully free of the Vaempire´s domination. They can only resist it. One can remain exiled on the margins (Sammie), one can become a vampire, and at the price of partially losing one´s identity, live a stylish life of eternal youth (Stack), or die a heroic death in the defense of one´s property and rights (Smoke). No matter which option one chooses, however, happiness in freedom is only available in fleeting moments and in one´s memories.

Tomáš Pospíšil (pospisil@phil.muni.cz) is an Associate Professor in the Department of English and American Studies, Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University in Brno. He teaches American literature, American and Canadian film, and American cultural studies. He was an ACLS visiting scholar at the University of California, Santa Cruz, in 1993/94 and a Fulbright fellow at the University of Southern California in 1999. More recently, he has been visiting Canadian universities on various short-term fellowships. His current research interests involve African American film representation, Canadian feature film, and the reception of American culture in the Czech lands.

VAEMPIRE: ANTI-COLONIALIST RHETORIC IN THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM

Power-Greene, Ousmane

Clark University

"THE LOVE OF LIBERTY BROUGHT US HERE": RECONSIDERING LIBERIA'S INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT IN THE SHADOW OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

While the American Revolution is often placed within the context of the French and Haitian Revolutions, scholars rarely consider the impact of the American Revolution on numerous blackled emigration movements in the Atlantic world. In fact, Black Americans who were born in the shadow of the American Revolution came to understand their own struggle to make real the freedom, liberty, and equality established in the Declaration of Independence as central to their eimgration movements. While many of the most prominent Black American abolitionists fought against the twin evils of slavery and race prejudice in the non-slaveholding states, others decided to leave the U.S. and establish an "asylum" in Africa where they could live and raise families "unmolested" by racial caste, and the periodic violence meted out to Black communities in the North. This paper examines the way the independence movement in Liberia between 1835 -1847 appropriated the language of the American Revolution and republican principles to establish a nation true to American founding ideals. Few scholars have explored the movement toward independence in Liberia, and instead, merely parrot the abolitionists' claim that Liberia had been forced to declare independence by the American Colonization Society. Unfortunately, this false claim has dominated Liberia's historiography. Yet, as this paper shows, this interpretation of the events leading to independence were as complex as the independence movement in the British North America colony that declared independence in 1776.

Ousmane Power-Greene is the E. Franklin Frazier Chair of Africana Studies and Professor of History at Clark University in Worcester, MA. His research focuses on African American internationalism and Black social and political movements. Professor Power-Greene's books include, *Against Wind and Tide: African American Struggle Against the Colonization Movement* (NYU, 2014); a co-edited volume, *In Search of Liberty: African American Internationalism in the Nineteenth Century Atlantic World* (University of Georgia Press, 2021), and a novel, *The Confessions of Matthew Strong* (Other Press/Random House, 2022). Professor Power-Greene has been recognized with various fellowships, such as the National Endowment for the Humanities' sponsored scholar-in-residency program at the Schomburg Center in New York.

Prieto, Sara

Universidad de Alicante

REIMAGINING FREEDOM: AMERICAN JOURNALISTS AND THE SOVIET REVOLUTION OF 1917

The First World War was a tumultuous period for the United States. Although President Wilson did not declare war on Germany until April 1917, American public opinion had to negotiate from the beginning its position in the conflict. In theory, as a neutral power, they had to refrain from interfering in the war; yet, as a country founded on the ideals of freedom and democracy, American powers felt an urge to intervene or at least to align with those countries who were defending their foundational principles, such as France or Britain.

The American press played a key role in shaping public perceptions of the war and in constructing the *casus belli* that ultimately accelerated the intervention of the United States. Reports from both the battlefield and the home front became rhetorical weapons in which the meaning of freedom, liberty, democracy, and moral duty were continuously debated and redefined in relation to national identity. However, beyond the better-known perspectives of war correspondents from the Western Front such as Richard Harding Davis or Mary Roberts Rinehart, a lesser-known group of American journalists turned their gaze eastward to explore alternative understandings of liberty.

In 1917, when the US had already entered the war, a group of American writers, including Louise Bryant, Rheta Childe Dorr, Bessie Beatty, Albert Rhys Williams, and John Reed, travelled to revolutionary Russia and reported from there. Their accounts, often sympathetic to socialist ideals, engaged directly with the social and political transformations that accompanied the Bolshevik Revolution. Thus, their accounts engage with a radically different conception of freedom to the one defended in official American discourses, incorporating aspects such as class struggle or collective emancipation to the debate.

Building on scholarship in war reportage, literary journalism and sentiment analysis, this paper examines how these correspondents represented the emerging Soviet notion of freedom and how they negotiated its tensions with American democratic ideals. Drawing on the texts extracted from the Russian accounts of the abovementioned authors, this paper aims to confirm that words such as "freedom," "revolution," and "democracy" are semantically and ideologically reconfigured in their writing, as opposed to the perspective presented by *mainstream* reporters. Therefore, they reveal early examples of the two competing models of freedom, liberal versus revolutionary, that would shape political and cultural debates in the aftermath of WWI and throughout the Cold War.

Sara Prieto is an Associate Professor in the English Department at the University ofAlicante. Since the beginning of her research career, Prieto has focused on the study ofwomen's writing in English, with particular attention to liminal genres such as warreporting and travel literature. Among her works, we highlight the monograph *Reporting the First World War in the Liminal Zone: British and American Eyewitness Accountsfrom the Western Front* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), as well as her publications on thewar-time travels by authors such as Mildred Aldrich (*Anuario IEHS*, 2018), Edith Wharton, and Mary Roberts Rinehart (*First World War Studies*, 2015; *Edith Wharton Review*, 2012), and on the experiences in Spain of authors such as Katharine Lee Bates (*Women's Writing*, 2023) or Maud Howe (University of Alcalá, 2025). Prieto cocoordinated the special issue of *Feminismo/s* titled *Departures and Arrivals: Women,Mobility and Travel Writing* (*Feminismo/s*, no. 36, 2020) and is currently working on theco-edition of *Edith Wharton and the Mediterranean* (University of Salamanca, 2026).

Puglisi, Floriana

Università di Catania

"BETWEEN ESCAPE AND ENCLOSURE": UNSETTLING THE TEXT(S) IN SUSAN HOWE'S WRITING

No other poet more than Susan Howe is simultaneously inscribed inside and outside American cultural and literary tradition; in search of origins and still ready to unsettle them; divided between "archival desire" (desire for remembrance and source) and "archival fever" (longing for erasure and repression); recovering the textual traces of the past and turning them against the grain. This ambivalence is reflected in the constant tension, on the page, between enclosure and escape: both as recurrent images (often in association with the primeval condition of the American wilderness) and on the level of form (rigidly codified – closed – systems are literally broken – opened from the inside – to promote indeterminacy and admit plural perspectives). In this way, her work can be properly placed in the tradition of North American literary expression that she herself describes as typically antinomian and "gendered feminine" (*The Birth-mark*, 1993: 4). Like Emily Dickinson's, it is in fact characterized by "formlessness", "wildness", and "absolute freedom . . . of expression" (*The Birth-mark*, 1-2). Her mosaic of citations – "somewhere between history, mystic speech, and poetry" – is not only a formal act but also a social and revolutionary act: "I have enclosed them in an organization although I know there are places no classificatory procedure can reach where connections between words and things we thought existed break off . . . . Every statement is a product of collective desires and divisibilities" (*The Birth-mark*, 178). Her overall poetic practice implies "a breaking of boundaries of all sorts . . . a fracturing of discourse, a stammering . . . Interruption and hesitation used as a force" (*The Birth-mark*, 192); by crossing multiple genres and types of discourse, it blurs the boundaries between poetry and prose, nonfiction and literary prose, literature and philosophy. Given these premises, this paper investigates the way Howe unsettles the conventions of the text – including the historical and literary sources she alludes to and/or collages into her work – in order unleash its radical potential. It examines the ways in which freedom from constraints – both linguistic (syntax) and graphic (the typographic grid) – achieves the double purpose of recovering and at the same time criticizing visions of American freedom.

Floriana Puglisi is Associate Professor of Anglo-American Literature at the University of Catania. Her research interests include women's poetry, experimental writing, interart relationships and collaborations, the performance(s) of the poetic text, poetry and/in the new media. She is the author of *Extremes of Otherness: Rosmarie Waldrop e l'incontro con il Nuovo Mondo* (2015), *Transgressing Boundaries: A Geography of Anne Sexton's Spirituality* (2006), and of several essays on Anne Bradstreet, William Carlos Williams, Rosmarie Waldrop, Susan Howe, Charles Bernstein, Johanna Drucker, and Harryette Mullen. More recently, she has edited the volumes *Performing/Transforming. Transgressions and Hybridizations Across Texts, Media, Bodies* (2021) and *Performare/Trasformare. Testo Immagine Azione* (2022).

AGAINST THE TYRANNY OF LANGUAGE. THREE (POST)MODERN QUESTS FOR LIFE, LIBERTY, AND HAPPINESS

Pyrka, Paweł

Uniwersytet SWPS

DISMANTLING AND DREAMING: TOWARD A MYTHOLOGY OF INDIGENOUS RENEWAL IN THE YELLOWSTONE UNIVERSE

Taylor Sheridan's *Yellowstone* universe (1883, 1923, and the present-day series) presents a neowestern landscape dominated by the settler-colonial legacy of the Dutton family. Through Audre Lorde's metaphor of the "master's house," this paper examines one of Yellowstone's final images, that of Indigenous characters dismantling the ranch, seen as attempting/enacting a dismantling of the settler-colonial order The paper argues that the franchise's primary "tool" is the Western itself - the very genre that mythologized settler colonialism through what Slotkin identifies as "the structuring metaphor of the American experience": the myth of "regeneration through violence." While Sheridan's work repeatedly critiques colonial history by depicting the horrors of Indigenous boarding schools and forced sterilizations, its narrative engine remains tethered to the master's framework. The story's sympathies are consistently aligned with the Duttons' violent struggle to defend a settler vision of freedom, defined by absolute property rights and patriarchal dominion. Rather than dismissing the franchise as a failed decolonial project, the paper situates the Yellowstone universe in dialogue with decolonization and Indigenous scholarship. It highlights the tension between symbolic imagery of return and the incomplete dismantling of colonial structure(s), arguing that this ambivalence is precisely where the series allows audiences to dream of a post-frontier world. This dream is one of renewal, where Indigenous survival and creativity, what Gerald Vizenor terms "survivance," an "active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion", may constitute the beginnings of new, generative mythologies. The franchise's ultimate symbolic act, the dismantling of the Dutton ranch and the return of the land to the Broken Rock tribe, serves as a central case study. This moment brings the saga's contradictory visions of freedom into (apparent) relief. It juxtaposes the romantic settler ideal of "free land" with the violent dispossession required to create it. As Elsa's voiceover in the Yellowstone finale clarifies, the settler concept of ownership is inherently a form of violation: "To own land you must… rape it to sell it." True possession is impossible, giving way instead to a different relationship: "Raw land. Wild land. Free land can never be owned. But some men pay dearly for the privilege of stewardship." By reading the series as a rehearsal for Indigenous renewal rather than a completed decolonial narrative, the paper illuminates the productive tension between narrative fantasy and political reality, retaining the power of myth while recognizing its limits.

Paweł Pyrka is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Humanities at SWPS University in Warsaw, Poland, where he lectures on American literature, film and critical theory. His primary research explores American popular culture, focusing on the generic conventions and cultural impact of the golden age of pulp fiction. He has authored articles on foundational figures of weird and horror fiction like E. A. Poe, H. P. Lovecraft, and Stefan Grabiński, and on Taylor Sheridan's neo-Western Yellowstone. His broader academic interests bridge computational literary studies, memory studies, and game studies. He analyzes interactive narratives and the mechanics of cooperative storytelling in roleplaying games, exploring them as platforms for negotiating complex cultural dialogues and contemporary anxieties.

RE/GENERATION, VIOLENCE, AND AMERICAN CULTURE WARS: SETTLER FREEDOMS IN YELLOWSTONE

Rabitsch, Stefan

Universitetet i Oslo

"STRETCHED TO THE POINT OF SNAPPING": LIBERATING COMPETING HISTORIOGRAPHIES OF THE AMERICAN WEST THROUGH VIDEO GAMES

The main title for this paper is lifted from a 1990 essay by Patricia Limerick, who sought to educate the wider public about the then-fresh labors of New Western historians. Borrowing from the Antebellum lifeworlds of Mountain Men, she outlines "the Rendezvous Model of Western History," which she uses to explain how the predominant Turner Frontier school of western history and its attendant national(ist) mythography are insufficient to engage with "the complex human reality of the American West." In an exercise in heavy-duty historiographic criticism and revision, she then illustrates this claim by way of an eclectic mix of historical documents and figures, popular culture references from the nineteenth and mid-twentieth century, and, crucially, autoethnographic anecdotes from a lifelong Westerner. Taking inspiration from Limerick, this paper will take the shape of both a video game Wests primer and pedagogical showcasing. Teaching histories and historiographies of the American West makes for an obvious model; after all, tending to the history of westward expansion, its settler colonial legacy in contemporary Western lifeworlds as well as popular storytelling has gained renewed urgency when considering the veritable renaissance of postwest(ern) content on television and the ideologically charged social media posts by the Department of Homeland Security. The pedagogical showcasing will then center on how to productively set historiographic criticism into dialogue with two video games, Rockstar's *Red Dead Redemption* (2010) and the most recent version of *The Oregon Trail* (2021). While the former lends itself well to discuss Turnerian echoes in postwestern texts, the latter remediates the work of New Western historians and postwestern scholars in a playable and easily accessible form. Having gone through several iterations since its release as an educational game in 1971, the latest version of *The Oregon Trail* was made with significant scholarly input by indigenous studies scholars and tribal members in an effort to excavate and purge Turnerian triumphalism from the game's ludic substrate. My paper will thus demonstrate how these games transform the frontier myth into a playable site of ideological negotiation, exposing how the promise of freedom is confronted with its historical realities and procedural limits.

Stefan "Steve" Rabitsch is an Associate Professor in American Studies with the Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages at the University of Oslo, Norway. His main areas of research and teaching straddle American cultural history and popular culture studies. A selfdeclared "Academic Trekkie," he is the author of *Star Trek and the British Age of Sail* (McFarland, 2019), co-editor of *Set Phasers to Teach! Star Trek in Research and Teaching* (Springer, 2018), coeditor of *The Routledge Handbook of Star Trek* (Routledge, 2022), and *Fantastic Cities: American Urban Spaces in Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror* (University Press of Mississippi, 2022). His current monograph project is a cultural history of cowboy hats (under contract with the University of Oklahoma Press). He is the official SFRA country representative for Austria as well as a co-founder of the brand-new "West of the Rest" network of the EAAS.

Rapatzikou, Tatiani

Aristotéleio Panepistḯmio Thessaloníkīs

DIGITAL NEGOTIATIONS OF FREEDOM: SAMANTHA GORMAN AND DANNY CANNIZZARO'S PRY (2014)

The proposed paper presentation focuses on Samantha Gorman and Danny Cannizzaro's *Pry* (2014), an interactive ipad novella, which explores the main character's gradual break down after his Gulf War participation and PTSD disorder. Being created for digital touch screens by the art studio Tender Claws, *Pry* serves as an innovative example of digital storytelling that not only resorts to multimodal practices in order to delve into the character's inner mind and traumatic experience but also it relies on how users tap or pinch and hold on the digital surface for an interactive engagement with the character's war-triggered turmoil. *Pry* constitutes an e-lit work that sheds light on how digital media enable the exploration of alternative paths of storytelling for the expression of individual experience at a time during which American literature is called to capture its "changing relations to digital technologies" (Thomas 182). The constraints and affordances of the specific work enable users/readers/viewers to move from the position of passive narrative consumption into the position of active involvement in their effort, via their interaction with the screen, to delve into the character's emotional PTSD upheaval. In this case, the title of the work – *Pry* – plays a metaphorical role, that of inviting users to pry into the character's life and personal he-story of specific political complexity, by performing an unconventional kind of reading through their different responses to the e-lit work interface. By resorting to the views expressed by different theoreticians (Jessica Pressman, N. Katherine Hayles, Scott Rettberg), the paper proposed will attempt to shed light on the ability of current e-lit works to tackle multifaceted personal/socio-political narratives, which advances the reading experience they provide. This constitutes in itself a gesture of artistic freedom as it widens the scope of digital creativity and boosts the multilayered construction of digital narratives. Whether human agency and freedom of artistic creation are facilitated, impeded or mediated by the digital medium used, this is something to be considered while examining *Pry*, but it is the path that such a digital work paves for complex questions to be articulated as this captures a turning point in how information technologies can now be used so that variable and diverse stories to be narrated.

Tatiani Rapatzikou, Ph.D., is Professor at the Department of American Literature and Culture, School of English, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTh), and currently the Vice President of the Hellenic Association for American Studies. She has been a Fulbright Visiting Scholar (at the M.I.T. Comparative Media Studies program), a British Library Eccles Centre for American Studies Visiting Fellow and a Visiting Research Scholar in Duke U, York U in Toronto, and the U of Alberta. She has written monographs, edited and co-edited various collections of essays and special journal issues on areas that deal with contemporary American fiction and poetry, born digital literature, and print/digital materialities. She is one of the founding members of the online peer/blind review journals *Ex-centric Narratives: Journal of Anglophone Literature, Culture and Media* and *AmLit: American Literatures*. She has served as the Director of the Digital Humanities Lab at the Faculty of Philosophy at AUTh. Currently, she works on a project on experimental book narratives and digitality.

Raphael-Hernandez, Heike

Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg

THE 2026 FIFA WORLD CUP, THE 2028 SUMMER OLYMPICS, AND THEIR CHALLENGES TO U.S. IMMIGRATION RHETORIC

In 2026, together with Mexico and Canada, the U.S. will be the host country for the 2026 FIFA World Cup. The three countries' proposal, also called "United 2026" or "North American 2026 bid" was accepted in 2018. While the concept of the three North American countries serving as united co-hosts was celebrated in 2018, it now faces a variety of obstacles caused by the current U.S. government's approach to immigration. The U.S. would like to present itself as a wonderful host that will warmly welcome the entire world, yet this image is challenged by several current and developing immigration policies such as a travel ban that was issued in June of 2025 regarding 12 countries. While exceptions seem to be granted to the teams of these countries, their national fans will not be allowed entrance to the US. Other restrictions are connected to individual national players and U.S. questions about their citizenships as well as to a fanbase moving freely between Mexico and the US. My paper will look at the development of these issues; I am especially interested in accompanying rhetorical maneuvers. In addition, I will ask to what extent they could serve as precursors to the 2028 Olympic Games, which will also be hosted by the US.

PD, Dr. Heike Raphael-Hernandezis Associate Professor of American Studies at the University of Würzburg, Germany, and Adjunct Professor of English at the University of Maryland Global Campus. Among her research interests are Black Atlantic Studies, past and present; Global South Diasporas; German Involvement in Transatlantic Slavery; Migration and Visual Culture. Among her publications as co-editor are *Migrating the Black Body: The African Diaspora and Visual Culture* (2017) and *German Entanglements in Transatlantic Slavery* (2018). For the forthcoming *Bloomsbury Encyclopedia of Visual Culture*, she is the volume editor for "Globalities and Diasporas." She is author of *Contemporary African American Women Writers and Ernst Bloch's Principle of Hope* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2008) and *Fear, Desire, and the Stranger Next Door: Global South Immigration in American Film* (U of Washington Press, forthcoming).

CONTESTED FREEDOM: RACE, SECURITY, AND THE CARCERAL BORDER

Rasmussen, Anders Bo

Syddansk Universitet

EMBATTLED MEANINGS OF FREEDOM AMONG IMMIGRANTS IN MISSOURI

For many European immigrants caught up in the American Civil War, the draft, enacted on July 17, 1862, was an imposition by "the state" that reminded them of the monarchical and authoritarian governments they had left behind. Draft resistance in areas like Wisconsin and New York at times turned violent, but also in slaveholding border-states such as Missouri, the rights and duties of citizens and – by extension – the individual's freedom was widely contested in the 1860s. Taking the newly discovered letter collection of Union sergeant, C. P. Andersen as a starting point, this paper will discuss the wartime draft, the freedom fought for by enslaved people, and the important connection between land and labor in Missouri during the 1860s. Taken together, the paper argues that draft resistance was more encompassing, geographically and politically, among immigrant groups than previously acknowledged; that support for slavery's abolition was tepid, even among those Union soldiers who had seen slavery's human cost up close (and also among those who had fled European unfreedom during the 1848 revolutions); and that the important rural roots of what became known as producerism – with its connection to laborers' conception of freedom – were easily identifiable stretching back to the 1860s Missouri. In conclusion, the paper lifts the gaze from Missouri to contextualize local draft resistance, anti-abolitionism, and labor struggles and connect them to national events in the Civil War era.

Anders Bo Rasmussen is Associate Professor and Head of Research at the University of Southern Denmark's Center for American Studies. He is a former Fulbright scholar at New York University and the author of *Civil War Settlers: Scandinavians, Citizenship, and American Empire, 1848-1870*, which is now available as Open Access. Currently, Rasmussen is the Principal Investigator of a research project focused on the transnational American labor movement between 1877 and 1894 titled "Transplanting Socialism."

CONTESTED VISIONS OF AMERICAN FREEDOM IN THE CIVIL WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION ERA

Rauscher, Judith

Universität zu Köln

FEMALE FUTURITY AND THE PITFALLS OF ECOFASCIST POST-PLANETARITY IN THE WORK OF KATHERINE V. FORREST

Set in the late 22nd and early 23rd century during a period of environmental and social collapse, Katherine V. Forrest's Daughters of a Coral Dawn trilogy focuses on the 'Unity,' a group of Earth women who are all descended from the same alien mother, a fact that has given them advanced intellectual and physical abilities as well as unusual health and longevity. In the first novel of the trilogy, *Daughters of a Coral Dawn* (1984), the Unity decides to withdraw from wider society to form two different single-sex societies: the majority of the women outfit a spaceship to seek a new home in a distant galaxy, while a smaller number of them stays behind on Earth, hiding from increasing political violence and persecution in an underground bunker in a remote desert. While the space travelling group ends up founding a utopian, all-female society on a planet they name Maternas, those women who remained on Earth become the target of a charismatic dictator who has begun to remodel planet Earth after his own design, a design that involves a totalitarian project of complete state control as well as the mass murder of all political opponents, dissidents, and everyone he does not consider fit for the future he is building. After the end of the second book, *Daughters of an Amber Noon* (2002), reveals that the aim of the dictator's genocidal policies has been to prepare Earth for a new era of female rule, the third book in the trilogy, *Daughters of an Emerald Dusk* (2005), ends with the failure of the utopian all-female society on Maternas and the return of the first and second generation of intergalactic migrants to Earth, where a peaceful and environmentally sustainable world society has emerged.

Reading Forrest's trilogy as part of a longer tradition of ecofeminist narratives featuring isolationist all-female societies and drawing on theories of (state) violence along with scholarship on the intersections of feminism, environmentalism, and the (new) Right, this presentation will discuss the limits of the ecofeminist imagination in Katherin V. Forrest's Daughters of a Choral Dawn trilogy. Analyzing selected scenes from the three novels, I will show how Forrest's separatist ecofeminist narratives reveal but also counter ecofascist tendencies, as they try to imagine alternative societies in which both women and the nonhuman world are free from patriarchal violence.

Judith Rauscher is Assistant Professor of American Literature and Culture at the University of Cologne. She is the author of *Ecopoetic Place-Making: Nature and Mobility in Contemporary American Poetry* (Transcript, 2023) and has published articles about North American ecopoetries, American women's poetry, contemporary climate fiction, and imperial(ist) feminism in *Star Trek: Discovery*. She has co-edited an issue of *Ecozon@* on ecopoetics, a special issue of the *Zeitschrift für Fantastikforschung* (ZfF) on "Spectulative Fiction and Ethics" as well as a two-part issue on "Gender, Violence, and the State in Contemporary Speculative Fiction" for *gender forum: An Internet Journal for Gender Studies*. Her current book project is tentatively entitled "Fantasies of a (Non-) Violent State: Single-Sex Societies in American Speculative Fiction."

"FREE FROM DEATH, FREE FROM EARTH": POST-PLANETARY FREEDOM IN THE AGE OF TECHNOCAPITALIST AUTHORITARIANISM

Razzi, Francesca

Università "G. d'Annunzio" Chieti-Pescara

TRANSMEDIA PATTERNS OF AGENCY: RED DEAD REDEMPTION 2, FREE CHOICE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINISM

Red Dead Redemption 2 continues offering new critical insights into the video game West, its configurations and re-configurations (see Wills and Wright 2023). The present paper intends to build on the reconfigurations of western tropes in *RDR2* by discussing the dynamics of agency that characterize the video game and the literary archetypes that constitute the basis of the cultural construction of the American West.

To be sure, agency represents a key gameplay mechanic and narrative feature of storytelling in video games (Domsch 2013). *RDR2* is no exception here, since some of the missions set in the urban spaces exploit the use of player actions in order to develop metatextual and transmedia strategies of social mimicry (Razzi 2025, forthcoming).

However, the question of agency in *RDR2* stretches beyond the spatial limits of the urban environment, and it dramatically involves the frontier as well. In fact, the player's interaction with the frontier resonates with its complex representation in nineteenth-century American literature, as Bret Harte's tales "The Luck of Roaring Camp" (1868) and "The Outcasts of Poker Flat" (1869) show.

An unexpected pioneer of late-century literary naturalism (e.g., Scharnhorst 2006), Harte depicts a nonhuman environment that questions the role of human agency and thus reframes the possibilities of individual freedom in these tales. This complex, dynamic pattern of choice and determinism founds its transmedia adaptation in *RDR2* and its characters, especially through the missions that take place in the video game exposition, featuring the harsh wintry environment of an abandoned mining camp. My close-reading of selected video game missions alongside Harte's works will suggest that notions of agency and free movement significantly affect the construction and enactment of textual structures—whether literary or ludic.

Francesca Razzi is currently an adjunct professor of American literature at "G. d'Annunzio" University of Chieti-Pescara. Her research areas include nineteenth-century American and comparative literature. She has published essays and articles on the transcultural functions of the literary and artistic tradition in American authors (such as Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Mark Twain, William Carlos Williams, Thomas Pynchon) and on the transmedia reconfigurations of the West between literature and visual arts. She has recently published a book-length study on the function of the Italian Renaissance in nineteenth-century American literature (*American Literature and Italian Renaissance: From Historical Myth to Literary Discourse, 1776-1862 / Letteratura americana e Rinascimento italiano: dal mito storico al discorso letterario 1776-1862*). In 2024, she authored the first Italian translation of Upton Sinclair's historical novel *In the Net of the Visconti* (*Nella tela di Visconti*).

WHEN THE WORLD CLOSES IN ON YOU: FREEDOM, GAMEPLAY, AND VIDEOGAMES

Rio Raigadas, David

Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea

SEARCHING FOR FREEDOM IN THE AMERICAN WEST THROUGH MOBILITY: WILLY VLAUTIN'S EARLY NEVADA FICTION

The present paper explores Willy Vlautin's early Nevada fiction, consisting of the novels *The Motel Life* (2006) and *Northline* (2008), as major examples of realistic writing on the myth of the American West as a class-free region. This myth derives from traditional frontier mythology and, in particular, from the glorification of the cowboy as a popular symbol of a free western society, unburdened by social barriers (Savage 79). It is argued that Vlautin's main characters in these two novels embrace classical American mobility in order to search for personal freedom and escape from their luckless existence in working-class neighborhoods. As Ann Brigham has remarked, "spatial mobility- the movement between places and across space-- has often been understood as a way to achieve a range of other mobilities, from the social and ecomomic to the psychological and sexual" (3). However, in Vlautin's novels both inner-city mobility and the mythic frontier space fail to provide his characters either with economic profit or spiritual fulfillment and they are unable to escape from a general atmosphere of failure and fatalism. These novels definitely call into question the traditional association in frontier mythology between geographical mobility and freedom. Vlautin's writing debunks the archetypal view of the American West as the land of boundless opportunity, freedom, and success. In fact, the main characters of these novels only find true freedom from adverse personal circumstances through imaginary places. Invented stories and daydreaming provide them with a successful replacement for geographical mobility and some sense of hope.

David Rio is Professor of American Literature at the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU) in Vitoria-Gasteiz (Spain). His research interests are located within the field of American Studies, with an emphasis on diaspora studies, regional literatures, and especially western American writing and Basque-American literature. He is the author of *El proceso de la violencia en la narrative de Robert Penn Warren* (1998), *Robert Laxalt: The Voice of the Basques in American Literature* (2007) and *New Literary Portraits of the American West: Contemporary Nevada Fiction* (2014). He has also co-edited the following volumes on the literature of the American West: *Aztlán: Ensayos sobre Literatura Chicana* (2001), *Exploring the American Literary West: International Perspectives* (2006), *Beyond the Myth: New Perspectives on the American Literary West* (2011), *The Neglected West: Contemporary Approaches to Western American Literature* (2012), *A Contested West: New Readings of Place in Western American Literature* (2013), and *The Western in the Global Literary Imagination* (2022),. He is also the co-editor of the special issue of the journal *Western American Literature* on "Writing the Global Western" (2019) and the editor of *La expansion y revision de un mito: el Oeste norteamericano en la literatura española* (2023). David Rio coordinates an international research group (REWEST) specialized in the literature and culture of the American West.

Rota, Emanuele

University of Illinois - Urbana-Champaign

IT *CAN* HAPPEN HERE: TRANSATLANTIC MANIFESTOS AND THE AMERICAN CRISIS OF FREEDOM

This paper examines how American writers have repeatedly revisited the specter of authoritarianism within democracy, from Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here* (1935) to the recent "Writers Against Trump" and "Freedom to Read" manifestos. Engaging the transatlantic dialogue between the antifascist manifestos of 1925 and 2025, I trace a genealogy of the literary response to democratic involution in the United States—an involution that mirrors, rather than opposes, the European experience of unfreedom. The paper argues that U.S. liberal democracy has long contained its own authoritarian potential, visible in its racialized exclusions, its culture of surveillance, and its conflation of liberty with productivity. From the antifascist warnings of the interwar period to contemporary appeals for intellectual autonomy against disinformation and censorship, the American literary imagination has functioned as both a site of resistance and a symptom of crisis. By reading these texts as a continuous morphology of dissent, the paper suggests that the American "defense of freedom" increasingly reproduces the very logics of control it claims to oppose. The comparison between the antifascist manifestos of 1925 and 2025 thus becomes a prism through which to understand the transformation of antifascism itself— from an oppositional ethics to a conflicted discourse within liberalism. In this sense, the American case both completes and destabilizes the European genealogy of unfreedom, revealing the transatlantic nature of the crisis of democracy.

Emanuel Rota is Professor of Italian and Director of the European Union Center at the University of Illinois Urbana–Champaign. His research focuses on fascist ideology, antifascist intellectual cultures, and the morphology of political concepts across transatlantic contexts. His recent work includes a book on fascist projects of European unity and the ideological persistence of fascism in postwar Europe.

Rowbottom, Frances

Heriot-Watt University

ASPIRATIONS OF AUTOMOBILITY IN WILLIAM FAULKNER'S SOUTH

William Faulkner's 1948 novel *Intruder in the Dust* declares that "the American really loves nothing but his automobile: not his wife his child nor his country nor even his bank-account first." 'Aspirations of Automobility in William Faulkner's South' will assess the controversial freedoms associated with aspiring automobility within class, race, and gender concerns. Faulkner's American South encompasses Yoknapatawpha County and Mississippi, as well as the promise of Memphis over the state border in Tennessee, and the South as a wider conceptual whole. Automobility plays a key role in Faulkner's portrayal of the South during the early twentieth century: few of Faulkner's characters are able to access the promising concept of the 'American Dream' and associated freedoms through progress, via acquiring automobility and therefore modernity. These characters are either permitted to escape Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha or are otherwise stymied by barriers limiting their physical mobility as well as upward development.

The South's geography is opened in turn by automobility; as *Light in August*'s Lena Grove announces during her transverse of the southern states, "my, my. A body does get around. Here we ain't been coming from Alabama but two months, and now it's already Tennessee." Early automobility is represented as a form of progress for a select few, where freedoms are created within specific spaces and times in Faulkner's South. Automobility is viewed as controversial, used as a vehicle for class expectations or actively shunned for a more rural code of modernity and progress. Faulkner's roads to freedom often lead to ruin within representations of (auto)mobility.

Frances Rowbottom's PhD is in American Literature from the University of Edinburgh. Her research focuses primarily on the author William Faulkner's use of myth, as well as racial and political aspects of the post-Civil War American South. Frances is currently examining legacies of history and public memory within literature during the period after the Civil War, reaching into the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries.

ROADS TO FREEDOM? CONTROVERSIAL AUTOMOBILITIES IN AMERICAN MODERNISM

Roy, Michaël

Université Paris-Cité

(RE)VISIONS OF THE SLAVE NARRATIVE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

This paper will examine recent trends in the study of the slave narrative. Autobiographical narratives of formerly enslaved people such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs were recovered in the 1970s and 1980s after a century of neglect, leading to the publication of foundational monographs by Marion Starling, William Andrews, and Frances Smith Foster among others, and the canonization of the African American slave narrative. It may seem like the recent explosion of work on African American *print culture*—as opposed to literature—has led to a marginalization of the slave narrative as a literary genre, in favor of other print forms such African American periodicals, pamphlets, and convention minutes. Rather, as I argue, the slave narrative has undergone a profound transformation as scholars such as Sophie White and Trevor Burnard, Zachary McLeod Hutchins, and Jonathan D. S. Schroeder have been looking in "unexpected places" (Eric Gardner) for testimonies of enslaved people and revising our understanding of the genre in the process. In this paper, I identify four parameters that have gained increasing attention in recent work on the slave narrative: geography, language, periodization, and materiality. Like other areas of Americanist scholarship, the slave narrative has been revisited in the light of the transnational turn, with books looking at slave testimony in French Louisiana, narratives whose publication was meant to promote commercial relations with Africa, and rediscovered texts published as far as Australia. Matters of language go hand in hand with this broadening of the slave narrative's geography: narratives of enslaved and formerly enslaved people, it appears, were delivered in Wolof or Arabic or translated into French or Welsh. The chronological bounds of the slave narrative have likewise been extended by scholars who have shed light on the "prehistory" of the North American slave narrative in the eighteenth century. Finally, the slave narrative has been studied as a material text, with the press being identified as an untapped repository for enslaved testimony. The turn from "black lit" to "black print," it turns out, has also impacted the study of the slave narrative.

Michaël Roy is Professor of US History at Université Paris Cité. His research focuses on early African American print culture and the history of US abolitionism. He is the author of *Fugitive Texts: Slave Narratives in Antebellum Print Culture* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2022) and *Young Abolitionists: Children of the Antislavery Movement* (NYU Press, 2024). He has also edited the autobiographical narrative of Léon Chautard, a French socialist and insurgent of the Revolution of 1848 who took refuge in the United States. The book was published as *Escapes from Cayenne: A Story of Socialism and Slavery in an Age of Revolution and Reaction* (University of Georgia Press, 2023).

STORIES OF UNFREEDOM: NEW APPROACHES TO THE AMERICAN SLAVE NARRATIVE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Salvi, Costanza

Independent Researcher

HUMPHREY BOGART AND RICK'S CAFÉ AMERICAIN: A PARADIGM TO READ AMERICAN FREEDOM IN CASABLANCA (MICHAEL CURTIZ 1942)

The historical significance of *Casablanca* has been widely analyzed. The film came to represent America itself through the character of Rick (Humphrey Bogart), as Robert Ray accurately describes in his seminal study (1985). In Dinerstein's view, Rick marks a "renewed search for individuality after the sacrifices of the Depression" (2017: 95). Less explored, however, is the space of the bar in contrast to Bogart's iconic individualism. The bar is an expression of Jim Crow America, as evidenced by the servile role of Sam, played by African American actor Dooley Wilson. Still, if we focus on Rick's interracial friendship with the latter, the place suggests increasing complexity. As its name indicates, *Café Americain* is a cosmopolitan canopy unattached to any specific country and extremely inclusive to political expatriates.
This proposal focuses on *mise-en-scène* and performance to bring the American relationship with freedom in 1942 under scrutiny. By surrounding the protagonist with a vast array of performances by various European expatriates, all considered conveyors of spatial meanings and incorporated as an organic part of the *mise-en-scéne*, *Casablanca* appears to prioritize spatial aspects over Rick's centrality, ultimately questioning the nation's founding ideals in light of international forces. This paper highlights sequences that showcase the character's vulnerability, focusing on the lively animated space that surrounds him and acts as a mellower of Rick's solipsistic concept of freedom.
Casablanca thus inverts the typical Hollywood treatment of the primacy of the individual over the environment (La Polla 2003), revealing a much more evident struggle between the two. The paper concludes by showing how the film encodes the national myth hailing the cause of liberty and democracy against dangerous forms of tyranny around the world, while simultaneously questioning the existential conditions of unlimited individual freedom. The film is a perfect snapshot of the US caught between 1941, when the word "multicultural" waslaunched in Edward Haskell's *Lance*, where the author describesthe pioneering life of those who transcend the confines of individual nation states (Sollors 2009) and 1944, when the Second Bill of Rights stressed a new basis of security and prosperity in the coming international order.

Costanza Salvi received her Ph.D. in English Studies (with a focus on the Space of the Border, Transnational Cinema and Cosmopolitanism) from the University of Zaragoza, and her M.A. is in American Cinema and Cultural Studies from the University of Bologna. She was a research fellow at the University of Bergamo on a project about Hollywood runaway productions in Italy. She researches Classical Hollywood and cross-cultural exchanges within the scope of American Studies. She has published on American films and society during the Great Depression, the sonic aspects of noir, John Ford's Cavalry Trilogy, and De Sica's *Stazione Termini*. She is currently working on the U.S.-Mexico Border in Classical Western.

PERFORMING FREEDOM IN SPACE FROM CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD TO CONTEMPORARY CINEMA

Sánchez González, Emilia

Université du Luxembourg

EXHIBITING FREEDOM: U.S. CULTURAL DIPLOMACY AND THE GLOBAL TOUR OF THE FAMILY OF MAN

The seminal photographic exhibition "The Family of Man" premiered at MoMA in 1955 as a "universal manifesto for peace," responding to the threat of nuclear war. However, its international approach quickly became layered with American Cold War ideology when it was sold to the United States Information Agency (USIA) and adopted into their cultural program of foreign policy. Through this sponsorship, the exhibition became a visual vehicle that reinforced several State-promoted visions of freedom through its diverse images, democratic installation design, and curatorial approach. The Americanization of "The Family of Man" presented the United States as the foremost protector of universal human rights, granting it moral superiority. It also aligned global concerns with Roosevelt's "Four Freedoms," particularly *Freedom from fear*. This justified American military interventionist policies as necessary to secure peace and build democratic societies in its image.
Furthermore, the exhibition's world tour (1955–1963) provided an ideal opportunity to counter Soviet narratives in areas at risk of communist influence, such as Southeast Asian countries like Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines, which had active communist movements and large ethnic Chinese populations. These audiences became active participants in shaping local interpretations of freedom in "The Family of Man," projecting their own meanings onto the photographs and sometimes creating a third layer on top of the MoMA and USIA interpretations. Examining the tensions between American and local exhibition framings of the mid-20th century, via case studies of *The Family of Man* in Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines, enables us to move beyond the notion of local audiences as passive recipients of U.S. propaganda. Engagement with oral testimonies and interviews from local participants will underline this analysis. This exploration also reveals the dynamic and pragmatic nature of *American freedom*, shaped by both domestic and international influences, thereby complicating the negotiations and actors involved in Cold War presentations of traveling exhibitions in the "Free World."

Emilia Sánchez González is a PhD Candidate in the research and transmedia project "The Legacy of *The Family of Man*," conducted between the Luxembourg's Centre for Contemporary and Digital History (C^2DH) and the Centre National de l'Audiovisuel. Her research combines approaches from visual studies, decolonial studies, public history, and transnational media history to investigate the itinerancy of the landmark photographic exhibition during its global tour (1955-1963).
She holds an M.A. from the UNESCO program in World Heritage Studies at BTUCottbus and is trained in social museology by the SAWA Museum Studies Program. She has worked internationally at universities, museums, and NGOs, notably at the Getty Museum and project-based for the U.S. National Committee of ICOMOS. Her research interests include photography and exhibition histories, postcolonialism and decoloniality, arts & culture for social impact, and heritage politics.

CONSTRUCTING NARRATIVES OF FREEDOM: AMERICAN EXHIBITS AT HOME AND ABROAD IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Sandy, Laura

University of Liverpool

OVERSEERS OF SLAVERY AND A "PREDATORY WAR": FREEDOM, CONFLICT, AND DIVIDED LOYALTIES DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

This paper places plantation overseers, free and enslaved, at the centre of the drama of the American Revolution and conflicts over freedom and slavery. Overseers and their families occupied a contested liminal space within colonial society, between rich and poor, enslaved and free. During the revolution, whether free or enslaved, they were also at the heart of new tensions that erupted in plantation communities. Charged with upholding slavery and racial hierarchies, and defending their employers' interests, this "Predatory War" fully tested their loyalties and sense of duty. The greatest challenge they faced was maintaining order on plantation itself, a challenge that reflected, in microcosm, the nascent republic's battle to preserve its system of race slavery while fighting for the cause of freedom. During the tumult of this civil conflict, some overseers left their posts to join the army that won their allegiance or advance the interests of their community. Others simply took advantage of the chaos of war and pillaged and plundered. Many, however, remained loyal to their employer, staying on the plantation to defend property and prevent enslaved people from escaping. Regardless, according to Loyalist and Patriot enslavers alike, the "Tyranny and Villainy of Overseers" plagued the southern colonies during the revolution. Overseers, indeed, proved to be useful scapegoats for any ill-tidings from the plantations. Yet, understanding their role in the conflict offers significant insight into the experience of a plantation society at war. It presents the opportunity to explore the part and perspectives of poorer whites and enslaved people, who have often been marginalized in the history of the American Revolution. Indeed, their actions and choices reflect much about their "visions of freedom," their divided loyalties, and their response to slavery in this era.

UNEXPECTED BATTLES FOR LIBERTY: THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOMS DURING WARTIME

Sannio, Simone

Freie Universität Berlin / Independent Researcher

FREE AT LAST? NOTES ON THE AMERICAN UNFINISHED IN THE FICTION OF THE 1990S

For as long as the United States has existed, one of the most enduring myths Americans have had about themselves is that of inhabiting an "unfinished" country. Of course, the idea was already embedded in the founding documents of the nation and reiterated in many of the "sacred" texts of America's civil religion. In most cases, the label "unfinished" could be taken as a metaphor to indicate that the country had yet to fulfill its promises—whether the question was about the American dream, the success of the democratic project, or the struggle for social and racial equality. Depending on the historical period as well as one's background and personal beliefs, however, the term could also be used with a negative connotation, thus raising the possibility that the United States may have irretrievably walked away from its core principles at some point. Notions of the United States as "unfinished" have continued to resonate across different audiences, encompassing political, artistic, and historical discourses alike. Indeed, a dialectic between a positive notion of the "unfinished," intended as a forward-looking, optimistic principle that is essential to the "American spirit," and a fundamentally negative view of the "finished," seen instead as all but alien to the national needs and character, seems to have played a crucial role in shaping the narratives America has told about itself.
My paper intends to address the continued relevance of this myth in contemporary US fiction. I will do so by considering a selection of novels from the 1990s that include within their plots fictitious unfinished texts, or other unfinished works of art, as media of textual self-reflection. Notable examples include Colson Whitehead's *The Intuitionist* (1998), Michael Chabon's *Wonder Boys* (1995), and Don DeLillo's *Mao II* (1991)—three novels that testify to a rather peculiar reprise of the "Literary Unfinished," insofar as established tropes and strategies of incompletion interact with mutated cultural-historical conditions, thereby updating and reinforcing their formal significance. As is well known, the 1990s were constituted by an impressive set of fictional conclusions, ranging from historical caesuras such as the end of the Cold War and that of the millennium to more questionable transitions like the "end of postmodernism" and the so-called "end of history." Against the grain of this "age of endings," these "novels *about unfinishedness*" provide a fresh perspective on the never-ending renegotiations of US national identity while making a statement on the cultural-historical situation at the close of the 20th century. As I argue, they do so precisely by way of their insistence on unfinished texts-within-the-text. Deep down at the formal level, that is, these novels speak to the unfinishedness of America. As we shall see, theirs remains essentially a vision of America as a work-in-progress, albeit an ambivalent one, rooted in a conception of the 1990s as a "moment of possibility" and an era of transition—of "new beginnings" as much as endings.

Simone Sannio is a PhD Candidate in American Literature at the Graduate School of North American Studies, Freie Universität Berlin. He was a Visiting Student Research Collaborator at Princeton University in the Academic Year 2022/23 and a Visiting Scholar at Columbia University in the Spring 2022. He has an MA in Modern, Post-Colonial, and Comparative Literatures from the University of Bologna and a BA in Languages, Literatures, and Intercultural Studies from the University of Florence. His research interests include unfinished creative works, 20th and 21st century US literature, its ties with film/popular music, and questions of ethnicity, migration, and marginality. His most recent articles appear in a special issue of *Philip Roth Studies* on the Roth Personal Library and in a volume on narrative continuation in De Gruyter's *Anglia Book Series*. His dissertation is titled *An End in Itself? Unfinishedness and Self-Reflexivity in the American Novel of the* 1990s.

Sarnelli, Fulvia

Università di Napoli "L'Orientale"

I am Associate Professor of American Literature and Culture at the University of Naples L'Orientale and the mother of a two-year-old. I became pregnant while holding a temporary position as a junior assistant professor at an institution nearly 500 km from home. The academic responses I received—symbolic at best, hostile at worst—revealed how institutions make parenting difficult, especially for those at the intersection of gender, precarity, and territorial marginality. Working from and in the Italian South—a space long shaped by internal colonial logics and uneven development—amplifies these tensions. These experiences led me to see academic parenting through the lens of Reproductive Justice, as developed by the SisterSong collective. This framework highlights how demands for mobility, productivity, and subordinated labor are built into the neoliberal university. RJ also reframes parenting not as a personal burden but as a collective, political struggle over who gets to belong, to care, and to remain in academic space.

Fulvia Sarnelli is Associate Professor of Anglo-American Literature and Culture at the University of Naples L'Orientale (Italy). Her main research interests focus on the literature and culture of racialized and ethnic communities in the United States, particularly within the fields of Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies and Indigenous Studies. She explores these topics at the intersection of biopolitics and theories of governmentality, feminisms and reproductive justice, theories of the imagination, and pop culture. On these subjects, she has published the monograph Panda in the Promised Land: Chinese American Subjectivity between Liberal Multiculturalism and New Alliances (2019), along with several articles in top-tier journals (2015, 2016, 2020, 2020, 2022) and international edited volumes (2017, 2024, 2025). She co-edited (with C. Di Maio and D. Giovannone) What's Popping?, a collection of essays on American pop culture (2022). She recently co-edited, with Cristina Di Maio (University of Turin), the special section "Reproductive Justice and Its Discontents: Recent Representations in American Popular Culture" (2025) for RSAJournal – Rivista di Studi Americani (a Class A journal and official publication of the Italian Association for North American Studies). In dialogue with U.S. and European scholars, this section contributes to the international debate on US cultural representations of reproduction, human rights and social justice.

Sawallisch, Nele

Universität Trier

FROM "WASHINGTON'S DREAM TO "SLAVERY, WE'RE SORRY": COMEDIC NEGOTIATIONS OF THE AMERICAN PARADOX

This talk presents visions of un/freedom in various comedic formats. It is based on the understanding of comedy and humor as social commentary and as vehicles for critique that can bridge the gap between the funny and the serious. Drawing on various examples of sketch comedy shows that boast a long and successful tradition in the United States, I will demonstrate that humor has been a viable and meaningful way to approach the US's central paradox between democratic ambitions and the realities of slavery (and its aftermaths). For instance, *Saturday Night Live* recently presented a version of "Washington's Dream" (2023) that put the finger on the glaring absence of (enslaved) African Americans in the conceptions of a free country, and hip-hop improv *extravaganza Wild'n'Out* has repeatedly addressed the legacies of slavery for young African Americans and race relations today. Approaching slavery and unfreedom in irreverent ways that yet never make light of this history, comedians have thus probed taboos, challenged audiences, and amended national narratives from the American Revolution to today. In so doing, they have used comedic formats and exposure to situate these debates in the public sphere.

Nele Sawallisch is Assistant Professor of American Literature at Trier University in the Southwest of Germany and the current director of the Trier Center for American Studies. She earned her PhD from the Obama Institute of Transnational American Studies (JGU Mainz, Germany) in 2017 with a dissertation on Black autobiographical life writing in and beyond the slave narrative in the border region between the US and Canada. Her first monograph, entitled *Fugitive Borders: Black Canadian Cross-Border Literature at Mid-Nineteenth Century*, appeared with transcript in 2018 https://www.degruyterbrill.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783839445020/html . She has published on Black transnational literature(s), Black women's resistance, and Black print cultures, among other topics.

Schniedermann, Wibke

Universiteit Gent

THE GANGSTER AS INTERFACE BETWEEN LAW AND JUSTICE

Francis Ford Coppola's genre-defining gangster film *The Godfather* opens with a lesson in justice. In the opening scene, its main character, Vito Corleone (Marlon Brando), establishes his definition of the elusive concept and the forms and practices through which it is to be expressed. His very first line in the film positions justice in opposition to the law: "Why did you go to the police?" The first scene of *The Godfather* serves to drive home the naivety in seeking justice from the law and to introduce justice as Vito's guiding principle. The film is not subtle about this but spells it out for the audience: "For justice, we must go to Don Corleone."

Few figures in the cultural imaginary embody the separation between law and justice as straightforwardly as the American gangster. The gangster longs for justice and, seeing how the legal system proves incapable of delivering it, takes it upon himself (rarely, herself) to ensure it. In this endeavor, the law is an obstacle to justice, not its servant. Scholars in the interdiscipline of Law and Literature have long pondered the cultural and legal relationship between law and justice. Frans Willem Korsten considers them as belonging to two different spheres of human practice and experience that operate according to two incompatible forms of logic. Greta Olson unites the affective dimension of justice with the notion of "felt law" ("*Rechtsgefühle*") to explore the expressions of how audiences approach the legal system. Operating outside of the law while self-styling as an agent of justice, the American gangster thrives precisely on the contradictions between the two spheres.

This paper reads the gangster as an "interface between law and justice" in Korsten's sense. It takes the traditional Italian American mobster character as a point of departure to explore how more recent screen productions inscribe themselves into the masculinized calls for justice that pervade the genre. How do texts such as Andrés Baiz's Netflix show *Griselda* (2024) and Jacques Audiard's musical thriller *Emilia Pérez* (2024) facilitate the communication between law and justice that is made possible through art and storytelling? Do their aesthetic and formal updates evolve the genre's potential to function as an interface or are they mere decoration confirming conventional gangster attitudes?

Wibke Schniedermann is Guest Professor of English and American Literature at Ghent University. She is the author of *Masculine Domination in Henry James's Novels* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020) and co-editor of *Time Loops, Temporal Uncertainty, and Problem-Solving in Narrative* (Poetics Today, 2025) and *Towards Affect and Legality* (*Law, Culture, and the Humanities*, 2024). Her upcoming monograph explores places of homelessness in American culture. She has published on superhero comics, many world narratives, class and poverty in American television, film adaptation, the media representation of Black heavyweight boxers, surveillance culture, and the American Western.

CONSTRAINTS OF FREEDOM IN AMERICAN CINEMA: GANGSTERS, SOLDIERS, INSTITUTIONS

Schreier, Benjamin

Pennsylvania State University

SPECTERS OF LITERARY HISTORICAL DENATIONALIZATION IN JOSHUA COHEN'S THE NETANYAHUS

Joshua Cohen's *The Netanyahus* uses a fictionalization of Ben-Zion Netanyahu's itinerant professoring in the US during the late 1950s—in the form of a job interview at a small upstate college—to cross hagiography, received wisdom, and clichés about the golden age of mid-twentieth-century Jewish American culture with current arguments, criticisms, and anxieties about Zionism and Israel. The book's counterfactual premise is a question: what if the pre-'67 American Jewish literary intellectual had to really confront Revisionist Zionism and the baldly expansionist blood-and-soil maximalist ethnonationalism that Israel would come to manifest in the twenty-first century?

Ruben Blum, the novel's narrator, anchors an Americanization plot that will be seductively recognizable to scholars of Jewish American literature: a generation removed from his parents' working-class Yiddish immigrant culture, Blum faces in Netanyahu's visit the return of the unassimilated repressed, a threat to his acculturated beachhead in the overwhelmingly gentile small college town where his family lives. In a 21st-century turn of the necropolitical screw, Netanyahu's Zionism represents in this establishmentarian narrative the Jewish authenticity Blum finds distasteful but inescapable. And yet the novel's explicit references to Jewish American literature and specifically to Malamud, Bellow, and Roth—the triumvirate whom Bellow himself once joked were the "Hart, Schaffner, and Marx of writing," representing the achievement, and also the cliché, of the Jewish American literary breakthrough—suggest that the novel is interested less in reproducing this literary historical trope than in critically investigating it as a trope.

The disruptive appearance of Netanyahu with his loud family and ineluctable ideology into the fragile order Blum has established functions to destabilize the national teleology of the breakthrough narrative. Threading its way between the nationalist Scylla and Charybdis of Americanism and Zionism, *The Netanyahus* brings the disruptive figure of the unassimilable migrant/refugee to bear on literary history's national teleology.

Benjamin Schreier is Mitrani Family Professor of English and Jewish Studies at the Pennsylvania State University. His books include *The Rise and Fall of Jewish American Literature: Ethnic Studies and the Challenge of Identity* (Penn Press, 2020); *The Impossible Jew: Identity and the Reconstruction of Jewish American Literature* (NYU Press, 2015); and *The Power of Negative Thinking: Cynicism and the History of Modern American Literature* (UVA Press, 2009). He is also the editor of *Studies in Irreversibility: Texts and Contexts* (2007) and the co-editor of *The Year's Work in Nerds, Wonks, and Neocons* (2017). He is currently finishing up a book on Palestinian American literature and the overdetermination of Palestinian identity in Americanist discourses. Since 2012 he has been the editor of the journal *Studies in American Jewish Literature*.

JEWISH AMERICAN WRITING AND THE UNITED STATES' REGIMES OF MIGRATION: REIMAGINING NARRATIVES OF IMMIGRATION

Scott, Amy

Bradley University

QUEER MOBILITY AND THE TRANSNATIONAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE GAY GAMES: URBAN ORIGINS OF LGBTQ FREEDOM IN THE AMERICAN WEST, 1982-1998

The Gay Games were a crucial but underexamined site where LGBTQ communities in the American West generated new forms of transnational political organizing through the strategic migration of people, practices, and organizing knowledge across urban networks. Drawing on research in Federation of Gay Games Records and the Tom Waddell Papers, I argue that the Gay Games movement reveals how marginalized groups reappropriated American ideals of freedom by constructing alternative geographies of political power rooted in cities rather than nation-states. Founded in San Francisco in 1982, the Gay Games exemplify how the American West served as an incubator for LGBTQ activism that reshaped international organizing. Waddell's vision deliberately privileged urban over national identity: athletes competed as representatives of cities, reflecting his understanding that neighborhoods—the Castro, the Mission, the Tenderloin—provided spatial foundations where LGBTQ people developed community, built local movements for equality, and projected political power internationally. The inaugural torch run symbolically connected gay bars from the East Coast through the Midwest and Intermountain West to San Francisco, creating a network that reinforced city-centered approaches to transnational organizing. The geographic expansion from San Francisco to Vancouver (1990), New York (1994), and Amsterdam (1998) depended on the deliberate migration of organizing knowledge through city-to-city mentorship networks. San Francisco organizers provided after-action reports, maintained relationships with international host committees, and contributed the largest contingent of participants to subsequent Games, establishing what Waddell called an "obligation to use their political power and visibility to push the movement forward." This model of transnational solidarity operated through horizontal urban networks rather than vertical national structures, offering an alternative vision of freedom and democracy beyond nation-state boundaries. However, this paper also examines how the Games' evolution from grassroots San Francisco events to corporate-sponsored international productions reveals tensions inherent in scaling queer organizing transnationally. The shift from community-based fundraising to corporate sponsorship by 1994, combined with the breakdown of mentorship networks during Amsterdam's troubled 1998 Games, illuminates the challenges marginalized communities face when mobilizing American ideals of freedom across increasingly complex international landscapes during the AIDS crisis and intensifying backlash against LGBTQ rights.

Amy L. Scott is Associate Professor and Oglesby Chair of History and Director of Women's & Gender Studies at Bradley University. She earned her Ph.D. in History from the University of New Mexico and specializes in twentieth-century U.S. urban history, social movements, LGBTQ history, and the American West. Dr. Scott co-edited *City Dreams, Country Schemes: Community and Identity in the American West* (2011) and serves as editor of the Urban West Series at the University of Nevada Press. Her scholarship examines how cities have served as incubators for political organizing and identity formation, with publications appearing in journals and edited collections on topics ranging from urban environmentalism to gender and activism. Her current manuscript, *25 Square Miles Surrounded by Reality*, examines Boulder's transformation into a progressive urban model through "lifestyle liberalism"—analyzing how environmental activists, countercultural migrants, and human rights advocates built durable political coalitions after 1971.

Scroop, Daniel

University of Glasgow

WILLIAM E. LEUCHTENBURG, HISTORY AS NATIONAL SYNTHESIS, AND THE TRANSNATIONAL PROJECTION OF US POWER

This paper explores the life, letters, and writings of a major US historian, William E. Leuchtenburg (1922-2025), to illuminate the role history and historians played in the projection of US power abroad in the decades following the end of the Second World War. Using the archive of 30,000 letters Leuchtenburg deposited at UNC Chapel Hill in 2003, it investigates the intense commitment of elite postwar universities, publishers, and historians to producing synthetic history in a national frame. I examine how historians invested in this enterprise—Leuchtenburg prominent among them—projected their nationally-oriented vision outward. In doing so, paradoxically, they made a peculiarly bounded, and in some ways inward-looking, version of America's national story a weapon in the global cold war.

Leuchtenburg's was not necessarily a textbook case: the range and depth of his liberal activism set him apart from many contemporaries. As a young man in the forties and fifties, he immersed himself in interracial civil rights campaigns and in Democratic party politics. Later, horrified by US policy in Vietnam, he refused to help the Johnson administration refine its Great Society programs. Even so, I argue, his career shows how the mission of writing synthetic histories of the United States—propelled in the immediate postwar era by unparallelled global hegemony and by cold war imperatives— promoted a particular version of the past which spread globally, proliferated across borders, and profoundly shaped how American and non-American readers alike understood US history.

Leuchtenburg's outstanding synthetic works—*Perils of Prosperity, 1920-1932* (1958) and *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940* (1963)—exemplify this complex mission. These studies, which remained in print throughout the twentieth century, formed part of a broader exercise of US power projection in which intellectuals and institutions, especially America's powerhouse research universities, played a prominent role. As I show using Leuchtenburg's correspondence, this exercise was bolstered not only by publications but also by travel and by dense networks of academic collaboration and exchange. From Salzburg to Sydney and from Moscow to Bologna, Leuchtenburg, and other elite representatives of the American historical profession, took America's national story on the road.

Daniel Scroop works on the history and historiography of twentieth-century US liberalism. His early publications focused on the New Deal-era Democratic Party, on opposition to chain stores in the 1920s and 1930s, and on how ideas about size and scale shape American political life. Now, he is pursuing two major projects, the first a monograph on antimonopoly and antipathy to concentrated power in US democratic culture since the 1890s, the second a study of the life and letters of historian William E. Leuchtenburg. A former winner of the Constance Rourke prize of the American Studies Association, he spent the 2015-16 academic year as the Walter Hines Page Fellow at the National Humanities Center in North Carolina. He will be back in the US in 2026 as a Fulbright Scholar, teaching and writing at Emory and Henry University in southwest Virginia.

Segarra Montero, Rosa

Universitat de València

READING BODY DYSMORPHIC DISORDER: A THEORETICAL APPROACH TO COGNITIVE VULNERABILITY AND EMBODIED SIMULATION IN INDIGENOUS NON-FICTION

In the midst of a media storm over Ozempic, the endless female quest for the so-called "perfect body", and the alarming normalisation of plastic surgery, Cowlitz tribe member Elissa Washuta's memoir *My Body Is a Book of Rules* (2014) resonates more urgently than ever. Shaped by anorexia and body dysmorphic disorder (BDD), the memoir reveals how cognitive vulnerabilities intersect with structural forces like colonialism and patriarchy to intensify self-objectification and a pervasive sense of defectiveness. By reworking the "blood quantum" Momadayan concept, Washuta exposes how the Native American female body becomes a contested terrain where cultural scripts and distorted self-perceptions collide, thereby complicating and destabilising the pursuit of identity. Within this struggle over bodily perception lies a deeper tension around Indigenous sovereignty: Washuta's narrative positions the body as a site of colonisation and resistance, revealing how settler colonial ideologies not only regulate land and kinship but also infiltrate the psychic and corporeal autonomy of Indigenous women. This paper adopts a cognitive literary studies framework to explore how *My Body Is a Book of Rules* engages readers through mechanisms of embodied simulation and cognitive empathy. The integrated cognitive-behavioural theory of eating disorders (EDs) and other body image disorders identifies a feedback loop in which exposure to body-related stimuli activates and reinforces excessive concern about one's own body, which in turn reactivates attentional biases toward stimuli related to physical appearance. Drawing on psychological research that identifies selective attention and interpretative biases as key deficits in BDD, I argue that the memoir's fragmented narrative and visceral depictions of self-image perception can inadvertently activate these same biases in vulnerable readers. Through this lens, the paper examines the iatrogenic potential of life-writing about BDD: how its salient textual features may elicit distress and anxiety, induce neutralising or corrective behaviour (e.g. safety body-positions, mirror avoidance), or reinforce maladaptive cognitive patterns. Ultimately, this study contributes to vulnerability studies by foregrounding the ethical and affective stakes of representing cognitive disorders in Indigenous non-fiction, where the intimate politics of self-perception cannot be disentangled from ongoing struggles for Indigenous SELF-DETERMINATION and sovereignty.

Rosa Segarra-Montero is a doctoral researcher at the University of Valencia and a member of the research group LENA (North American Ethnic Minority Literatures in a Global Context). Her doctoral project explores vulnerability studies, examining how embodied, cognitive, and systemic vulnerability are narrated in contemporary Indigenous fiction and non-fiction written by women. Her research pays particular attention to literary representations of obstetric violence (OV), child sexual abuse (CSA), and mental illness, foregrounding the intersections between trauma, colonialism, and narrative form. Alongside her academic work, she teaches creative writing at ASIEM (Asociación para la Salud Integral del Enfermo Mental), where she explores narrative as a tool for expression, resilience, and mental health advocacy.

Sell, Zach

University of Notre Dame

SLAVERY'S FACTORY: TEXTILE MANUFACTURING AND SLAVERY EXPANSION IN THE MIDWESTERN UNITED STATES

This paper examines the knotted relationships between slaveholders, merchants, and textile manufacturers in the mid-nineteenth century American Midwest. In this era, a group of southern slaveholders looked to reinvest profits from plantation production in the expansion of manufacturing power including in the American Midwest where they sought to build socalled "log cabin textile mills." These textile mills were seen as key to the growth of slavery's imperial power through the development of industrial manufacturing based upon "free" immigrant labor while proximate to the slaveholding South. Through new manufacturing technologies and perceived advantages made possible by shifting to coalbased power, U.S. slaveholders partnered with New England investors and engineers to build U.S. textile manufacturing power. As this paper examines, slaveholders' investment in midwestern manufacturing in the free states paradoxically sought to entrench slavery's centrality within the United States as an expanding settler empire. In the process, this investment joined together industrial, commercial, and financial capital across the United States in an era of ever widening fissures.

Zach Sell is an assistant professor in the history of slavery in the department of Africana Studies at the University of Notre Dame. His book, *Trouble of the World: Slavery and Empire in the Age of Capital*, was published by the University of North Carolina Press. He was previously Ruth J. Simmons Postdoctoral Fellow at Brown University's Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice. He is currently working on a book entitled *Free States: Slavery in the American Heartland*.

Şen, Seda

Başkent Üniversitesi

A PAIR OF WINGS AND A HEART FILLED WITH HOPE: REIMAGINING FREEDOM IN THE REPRESENTATIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN FOLKTALES IN POETRY

The Flying African myth is a powerful symbol of freedom in African American cultural history, dating back to the Central and West African folktales, and later developed during the enslaved past in the plantations. Due to its supernatural narrative of African Americans transgressing the limitations of the body and the plantations that confined them by flying, and reaching immediate liberation, this myth has incited hope and resilience for enslaved African Americans. Even after emancipation, the myth continued its significance in the cultural and literary history of African Americans. Though the physical boundaries of the plantation had been removed, other literal and metaphorical boundaries limited the full and immediate access to freedom in their daily lives. The forms of confinement systematically changed in a way that the myth of the Flying African signified a hope for freedom socially, politically, and artistically in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty first centuries that are manifest in African American poetic tradition. The Flying African myth also continued its existence well into its contemporary representations to highlight injustices mentioned under Black Lives Matter. The aim of this paper will be to trace the Flying African myth in selected poems and explore how they conceptualize the myth to address social and political concerns of their period. The paper will further explore contemporary poetic representations through a selection of poems and song lyrics written in the twenty first century to talk about their significant role in understanding social uprising and liberation within the framework of Black Lives Matter.

Seda Şen (She/her) currently works as an Assistant Prof. at Başkent University Department of American Culture and Literature. She completed her PhD in 2018 entitled “Constructing Modernist Poetics: Transnational Representations of London in the Poetry of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot,” focusing on transnational modernist American poetry and spatial literary studies. Her teaching and research interests include contemporary and twentieth century American poetry, African American poetry, African American vernacular dances and music, urban studies, graphic narratives. She has presented papers on representations of Billie Holiday in film and performativity, Signifyin’ in African American culture and its relationship to Blues lyrics, spatial significance and transgressing racial borders in the Savoy Ballroom during the swing era. Being a social dancer and organizer in the Lindy Hop and Blues dance scenes, she is currently focusing on the interdisciplinary relationship between African American literature, performative arts, and vernacular cultures.

Sezer, Burak

Technische Universität Dortmund

THE PLAGUE OF CATTLE: A VEGAN READING OF JOHN EDGAR WIDEMAN’S THE CATTLE KILLING

Set in a 1790’s Philadelphia where the Yellow Fever epidemic runs rampant, John Edgar Wideman’s novel *The Cattle Killing* (1996) follows an unnamed preacher’s wanderings through which the reader becomes privy to a lingering racism against *de jure* freed Blacks as they are being blamed, ostracized, and violently attacked for allegedly transmitting the plague. Wideman superimposes this narrative with the 1856-57 Xhosa cattle killing incident in South Africa, when the Xhosa, after a prophecy, killed—to no avail—their own cattle to cure themselves of a ravaging disease brought to them by the cattle of the Dutch colonizers. The novel spells out the many parallels between “cattle” and “chattel slavery” beyond their etymological kinship (Yingling/Keppler 2025), given that the Yellow Fever epidemic was brought to the USA by the paradoxically sounding “colonial refugees,” who were French slaveholders fleeing the Haitian Revolution with their slaves.

In what I propose to be a vegan reading of Wideman’s novel, I emphasize the role of “cattle” as the point of convergence between the Xhosa prophecy and the Yellow Fever crisis in Philadelphia. Not only are both epidemics brought about as a direct consequence of cattle/chattel slavery, but the unnamed preacher also experiences a similar prophecy, with the twist that the voice commands him to, contrary to the Xhosa prophecy, *not* kill the cattle, because that would mean to “speak with your enemy’s tongue” (147), which is redolent of the vegan mode of refraining from the continuation or the reproduction of institutional violence and killing. With recourse to the Xhosa incident, a vegan reading diagnoses the root cause of the Yellow Fever epidemic in the very act of maintaining cattle and chattel slavery, with the only path of progression being the radical abstaining from and boycotting of practices of colonial forms of animal husbandry and transportation. Wideman envisions a type of veganism as only viable option to fully break what the novel refers to as the “[c]ircles within circles,” reinforcing “an unbroken chain of sausages fed in one end and pulled out the other” (149). In a more ecological reading, Wideman’s novel, and the interpolation of cattle and chattel slavery at large, further allows us to re-assess the origins of other current day
zoogenetic pandemics, most notably COVID-19, that had also in many ways emerged due to unsustainable and colonial practices of animal husbandry, and as anthropologist Eben Kirksey reminds us, this demands nothing less than a “transform[ation of] the industrial food system” (2020, 15).

Sirbu, Vlad

University of California, Riverside

THE WESTERN TEMPEST: FROM PLAYGROUND TO THE PASSPORT OFFICE

When Michael Jackson burst onto the Bucharest stage in 1992, just two years after the fall of communism, Romanians felt the magnitude of a new era. Local humor echoed in crowded streets: "America is not about jeans; Michael Jackson doesn't wear that!" The world-famous concert, soon joined by international tours like Scorpions in 1993 with "Winds of Change," marked Romania's entry into Western pop culture. Soon, McDonald's, MTV, Lego sets, and neon sneaker ads ended the daily monotony left by decades of state control.

For children, the playground hierarchy changed overnight. Owning Western garments conferred instant status, and the Adidas Torsion sneaker became shorthand for authority and coolness. "Torsion" itself was a mystery, but its meaning was clear: whoever wore it solved every problem, at least until recess ended. This new freedom, however, brought its paradox. Childhood creativity, once the result of scarcity, was quickly redefined as the freedom to acquire. Keeping up with trends replaced making do, and the "boss" of the playground was the one who displayed the latest Western brand.

Behind this rush of products was a deeper change. The evolution of playground hierarchies foretold a growing desire for mobility and opportunity beyond Romania's borders. That same longing for toys translated into one of the largest waves of emigration in modern history. By 2024, 24% of Romanians, nearly 4.6 million people, had moved abroad, many chasing the promise they first glimpsed in the form of toys, shoes, and music. The playground dreams of the 1990s prepared a generation for the passport office, and the encounter with Western abundance made migration seem as natural as play.

Vlad Sirbu, Ph.D. (Continuing Lecturer, University of California, Riverside) is an interdisciplinary scholar specializing in English, German, and East Asian studies. Before moving to California and earning his PhD in Comparative Literatures, he lived in China, Spain, Germany and Romania. These experiences continue to enrich his interdisciplinary approach. His scholarly contributions include the first quantitative study on East Asian horror films (2015), a survey of UFOs and dissidence in the Soviet era (2022), explorations of Western toys in post-communist contexts (2025), and intertextualities in neo-Victorian media (2026). Vlad's work shares diverse media and cultural landscapes, and his current interests lie in what makes narratives work

FREEDOM OF CHOICE? AMERICAN CHILDREN'S CONSUMER CULTURE AND THE CONTRADICTIONS OF LIBERTY

Smith Cox, Shae

Texas A&M University

"AN EMBLEM OF LIBERTY": THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN CIVIL WAR SOLDIERS AND VETERANS

During the United States Civil War and its aftermath, badges, flags, and uniforms served as poignant markers of political identity and material culture. For African American soldiers turned veterans, these emblems were far more than decorative—they became essential symbols of loyalty, legitimacy, and belonging. This project argues that these items carried a deep social, emotional, and political weight, functioning as visual declarations of citizenship and elevated status in a society still grappling with the consequences of emancipation.

For formerly enslaved men, the military uniform was a transformative garment. It transitioned them from property to personhood, from laborer to legitimate soldier, which came with its own set of challenges. Wearing the Union blue not only marked their service but also conferred a sense of authority and identity, which became both a physical symbol of freedom and a target.

After the war, these symbols retained their power as African American veterans joined the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), the largest and most influential Union veterans' organization. Black veterans carefully adhered to the rules and rituals of the GAR, demonstrating their place in the narrative of sacrifice and victory. They wore their badges and carried the nation's flag with pride, understanding the political importance of being seen, recognized, and remembered. These physical representations of service helped Black veterans contest erasure and marginalization, making their contributions to the Union cause visible in parades, memorials, and public commemorations.

Over time, these uniforms, badges, and flags became central to the memory work of Black veterans and their communities. They were tools of resistance and remembrance, shaping how freedom was envisioned and claimed in the postwar era. This paper explores how African American veterans used these symbols to broadcast freedom, affiliation, and legitimacy to allies and adversaries alike, and how these material artifacts continued to shape the landscape of racial politics and collective memory well into the twentieth century.

Shae Smith Cox (she/her) is an Assistant Professor of History in the War and Society Program and a core member of the Public History faculty at Texas A&M University. Her research focuses on the U.S. Civil War, Reconstruction, and the memory of the war through the lens of objects, emotions, and senses. LSU Press published her first book, *The Fabric of Civil War Society, Uniforms, Badges, and Flags, 1859-1939* (2024). Her next book examines the auditory experience of surgeons and hospital staff who cared for the wounded and dying United States and Confederate troops in Civil War hospitals and on the battlefield, emphasizing their diaries and letters. It explores the recollections of hospital staff, hearing the sounds of war, the noises made by the men in their care, the boom of distant cannons, or the peaceful sounds of final words that are all intimately described and recorded in letters, diaries, and memoirs.

UNEXPECTED BATTLES FOR LIBERTY: THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOMS DURING WARTIME

Sorin-Delpuech, Claire

Aix-Marseille Université

ANTIFEMINIST WOMEN'S VISIONS OF FREEDOM, THEN AND NOW

This paper proposes to explore women's antifeminist discourses, their evolution and invariance since the 19th century. In the early phase of the women's rights movement, freedom had a particular ring, although it was not as explicit a goal as equality was. Freedom primarily meant the abolition of the coverture system which greatly restricted married women's rights, and the possibility to access higher education and the professions. These demands were met with hostility coming not only from misogynist men but also from women who staunchly defended the Home as a protected female sphere conducive to happiness and freedom. It is mainly in the name of the theory of separate spheres that these early critics of sex equality opposed women's suffrage and access to public positions. First, the paper will examine how the notion of freedom shaped early anti suffrage arguments used by isolated and little-known voices such as Eliza Farnham's in the 1840s and then by collective movements such as the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage in the early 20th century. Then it will show that, in an evolving feminist landscape, the defense of separate spheres enduringly played a role and impacted the ERA debate. Finally, it will adopt a more contemporary perspective, enhancing female antifeminist voices on and offline that deny women's lack of freedom and instead present feminists as intolerant and/or the Home as a liberating place. The discourses of tradwives, conservative women and women in the manosphere will be analyzed to show that although they are grounded in different paradigms, they are paradoxically shaped by the fruits of a movement they criticize and present freedom as both a central and outdated issue.

Claire Sorin-Delpuech is assistant professor at the English and American Studies Department, Aix-Marseille University, France. She is a specialist in 19th century American women's social history and teaches courses in US history, history of the female body and feminisms in the US. She has written numerous articles on these subjects and is a member of the LERMA (Laboratoire d'Etudes et de Recherche sur le Monde Anglophone). For the past years, in collaboration with the LERMA team "Women and the F word" she has studied women's resistance to feminisms; she published "L'antiféminisme des femmes aux États-Unis, symptôme d'une Amerique illibérale? Le cas de womenagasintfeminism.com" in *Revue d'Histoire* 2022/1, and edited *Women's Resistance to Feminisms in the US 19th-21st centuries*, published in *WiN*, the EAAS women's network journal. She also participates in a citizen science project seeking to create a map of the sites of feminist memories across the world.

FEMINIST FREEDOMS AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY FASCISM

Spengler, Nicholas

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

SYMPATHY FOR "NOTHING": DOUBLENESS AND FREEDOM IN VIET THANH NGUYEN'S THE SYMPATHIZER (2015)

In the opening lines of Nguyen's debut novel, *The Sympathizer* (2015), the unnamed first-person narrator identifies himself as "a man of two faces" and "also a man of two minds", "able to see any issue from both sides" (1). Nguyen thus establishes doubleness as an essential feature of his narrator-protagonist: not only because he is a Vietnam War double agent, working in the US-backed South Vietnamese Army while secretly allied with the North Vietnamese communist forces; but also because he is possessed of, and by, a version of what W. E. B. Du Bois famously termed "double consciousness"—"two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body" (5). The "dark body" that DuBois had in mind is that of the Black American, but Nguyen's protagonist experiences this doubling within his own body: as the child of a Vietnamese mother and a French father and as an agent and migrant caught between Vietnam and the United States.

This paper considers how this double consciousness functions not only at the level of plot and character but also at the level of language, through double entendre. In the novel's concluding chapters, the narrator inverts the meaning of Ho Chi Minh's revolutionary slogan "nothing is more precious than independence and freedom": "only a man of two minds could get this joke, about how a revolution fought for independence and freedom could make those things *worth less than nothing*" (487). This "joke" carries the force of revelation for the narrator, leading him to accept "nothing" as a more valuable (because more real and true) concept than freedom.

As I will argue, however, the novel's conclusion also suggests the possible salvaging of freedom through its reimagination by those for whom "nothing" becomes an experiential and existential force around which they can organize and sympathize with each other. As the narrator puts it in the final chapter, "Our life and our death have taught us always to sympathize with the undesirables among the undesirables. Thus magnetized by experience, our compass continually points toward those who suffer." Drawing on recent debates in Affect Theory and American Studies around the ethical and political expediency of sympathy, I focus on the novel's other central pun—between sympathizing and being a "sympathizer"—to show how sympathy for "nothing" offers a way forward for the protagonist and his fellow migrants in the novel's final scene.

Dr Nicholas Spengler is a Serra Húnter Fellow and Lecturer in the Department of English and German Studies at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, where he primarily teaches courses on the literature and culture of the United States. His research focuses on transnational and transcultural approaches to US literature, including settler colonial studies, Black Atlantic and oceanic studies, migration studies, and ecocriticism. Most of his research to date concerns the work of Herman Melville and his 19th-century contemporaries (including Frederick Douglass, Martin Delany, Harriet Jacobs, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Henry David Thoreau), but more recently he has begun research on James Baldwin and on 21st-century Vietnamese-American writers Viet Thanh Nguyen and Ocean Vuong. He has published articles in *Textual Practice* and *Leviathan: A Journal of Melville Studies* and contributed a chapter to the *Oxford Handbook of Herman Melville* (2025). His first book, *Melville's Americas: Hemispheric Sympathies, Transatlantic Contagion*, is forthcoming from Edinburgh University Press.

MINOR REVOLUTIONS: VIET THANH NGUYEN AND THE UNMAKING OF AMERICAN FREEDOM

Spill, Frédérique

Université de Picardie Jules Verne

OVERPOWERING WHITENESS, RESISTING BLACKNESS: JESMYN WARD'S APPROPRIATION OF THE NEO-SLAVE NARRATIVE IN LET US DESCEND

In her fourth novel, *Let Us Descend* (2023), African American writer Jesmyn Ward further demonstrates her ability to address the historical and current traumas of the Black community. But this time she does so through the genre of the neo-slave narrative. The novel tells the story of a fall into the abjection of the slave experience. But it is also, and above all, a tale narrated by a voice invested with a singular poetic power: each new ordeal leads the young first-person narrator, Annis, to test her determination to survive; her voice thus draws on unthinkable resources that contribute to its singularity. This paper will contend that it is through the adoption of lyrical writing that Ward in turn appropriates the codes of the neo-slave narrative. On the one hand, this format allows her, as she looks back into the past of the Black slave experience, to explore the inhuman condition of slaves under the yoke of an arbitrary White supremacist system that exercises its authority through violence and reduces human lives to the status of interchangeable and expendable commodities, fully justifying the label of proto-fascism. On the other hand, neo-slave narration allows her to look into the present and to comment on "the afterlife of slavery," to use Sadiya Hartman's phrase, which encompasses the "skewed life chances" that Black people still face, and the furious desire for freedom that comes with them. This paper will therefore examine how Ward's incursion into the neo-slave narrative allows her to "trouble the line between history and imagination" and to comment on the way the past still haunts our time.

Frédérique Spill is Professor of American literature at the University of Picardy–Jules Verne in Amiens, France. She is the author of *Inventing Benjy: William Faulkner's Most Splendid Creative Leap* (UP of Mississippi, 2024). She contributed to *Critical Insights: The Sound and the Fury* (2014) and to *Faulkner at Fifty: Tutors and Tyros* (2014). She codirected *The Wagon Moves: New Essays on As I Lay Dying* (2018), as well as the spring 2018 issue of *The Faulkner Journal*. She has also published articles in French and in English on a variety of contemporary, mostly southern, American authors, including Cormac McCarthy, Jesmyn Ward, and William Gay. *The Radiance of Small Things in Ron Rash's Writing* was published by South Carolina Press in 2019. In 2021 she codirected a special issue of *The Journal of the Short Stories in English* devoted to Ron Rash's short fiction. She is working on two monographs, one on Faulkner's early work and one on Jesmyn Ward. She is the current President of the William Faulkner Society.

CONFRONTING THE FOURTH GHOST: VISIONS AND CRITIQUES OF TOTALITARIANISM IN SOUTHERN FICTION

Stanley, Matthew

University of Arkansas

"VOLUNTARY SLAVES": CONTRACT, COMPETITION, COERCION, AND THE MEANING OF "FREE LABOR" IN THE ILLINOIS COAL FIELDS

In the summer of 1895, a reported three hundred union coal miners in Spring Valley, Illinois, responded to a wage reduction by openly offering themselves to the Spring Valley Coal Company as "voluntary slaves." In exchange for comfortable homes, food, fuel, and serviceable clothing, the "starving" workers declared their desire to commit themselves into "slavery" through "ironclad contracts" with mine operators—to, in their words, "become serfs" and labor "without a cent of wages." Whatever their intended strategic effect, these desperate minds of miners presented legal unfreedom and wagelessness as preferable to the whims of the market, the insufficiency of wages to provide for them, and the inability of the union to protect them in the face of bad faith management and relentless counterattack on the part of mine operators. Contemporary observers, shocked that ostensibly "free men" were "crying to their masters to make actual serfs of them and their children," noted that the miners' offer to "enslave" themselves threw into question the legacy the Civil War, the veracity of Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, and the very meaning of "freedom."
This paper explores the request of Spring Valley miners to "enslave" themselves in the context of both the community's various labor inheritances and broader debates about "freedom" within the early United Mine Workers of America. Not only did the miners' demand constitute a blurring of the distinction between freedom and unfreedom; it was the result of a myriad of labor systems, arrangements, and traditions across races and ethnicities, as well as sections and even continents. And in addition to being a damning indictment of socalled "free labor" and rejection of a Whiggish postwar history, which presented the U.S. Civil War as a progressive arc from slavery to (some kind of) freedom, the miners' request was notable for several interlocking reasons. First, it is striking in its location and timing, coming one month before a massive "race riot" (a euphemism for collective anti-Black violence) rocked Spring Valley. Second, it raises critical questions about the relationship between language and condition as it relates to coercion. Finally, it illustrates the importance of demographics—racial, ethnic, native-born, migrant, and local—not in and of themselves, but as windows into the traditions, expectations of freedom, and experiences in unfreedom that various sets of workers brought with them to Spring Valley.

Matthew E. Stanley is Associate Professor of History at the University of Arkansas. His books include, *The Ragged Edge of Freedom: Race, Capitalism, and Class Struggle in Slavery's Borderland* (Monthly Review, forthcoming), *Grand Army of Labor: Workers, Veterans and the Meaning of the Civil War* (Illinois, 2021) and *The Loyal West: War and Reunion in Middle America* (Illinois, 2016). Stanley has contributed articles or essays to *Reviews in American History*, *The Public Historian*, *Civil War History*, *The Civil War Monitor*, *Ohio Valley History*, *Middle West Review*, *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, and *The Journal of Labor and Society*, among others. He has also written for *Slate*, *Dissent*, *The Socialist Worker*, *Counterpunch*, *Jacobin*, *The Huffington Post*, and *International Socialist Review*.

ALTERNATIVE FUTURES: VISIONS OF FREEDOM IN THE AMERICAN LEFT

Stirrup, David

University of York

PROTOCOL. PLAYERS ARE EXPECTED TO RESPECT THE INTEGRITY OF THE CIRCLE": DECOLONIAL BOARD GAMES AND SOVEREIGN AESTHETICS IN BETH PIATOTE'S WINDIN!

Embedded in a simple tale of unrequited love between a young Native woman and her best friend Trevor, a gay Yakama man in his twenties, Beth Piatote's *wIndin!* explores the sovereign aesthetics of decolonial game design. Iris, the protagonist and game designer, taps out the game's schematics as the subject of a conceptual art piece intended for the annual Indian Art Northwest show in Portland. Reflecting on Iris's beading of the circular game board—and her love of Marcus Amerman's beadwork—this paper argues that this *aesthetic* framing (literally and figuratively) is as important to understanding the way the story's satirising of Federal Indian policy rearticulates Indigenous sovereignty as its critique of capitalist accumulation in the game's mechanics. While the story writes Indigenous value systems large in the game's centring of kinship, reciprocity, and redistribution, producing a counter-economy to colonial logics of possession and control, it more subtly pushes its readers towards the significance of material and aesthetic practices to framing and reinscribing that value system. That in turn reminds us that Iris is as much artist as game designer – that the game is a work of installation art designed to provoke and produce the above counternarrative conceptually rather than, as is the case in advanced decolonial game design, through the mechanics of gameplay, although it of course evokes the latter. It is, then, in the interweaving of that conceptual aspect—the strategic game designed to satirise settler logics and the Indigenous leaders that choose to profit from them—and the praxis of beadingas-resistance that the story's message is fully delivered. This paper will draw on decolonial game design theory, the ironic rhetorics of survivance, and the scholarship on contemporary beading practices in its delivery.

David Stirrup is Professor of American Literature and Indigenous Studies at the University of York, and founder and director of the Centre for Indigenous and Settler Colonial Studies. He is author of *Louise Erdrich* (Manchester UP, 2010) and *Picturing Worlds: Visuality and Visual Sovereignty in Contemporary Anishinaabe Writing* (Michigan State UP, 2020), and co-editor of eight volumes of essays and special issues of journals. He is a founding co-editor of the online journal, *Transmotion*.

RELATIONAL SOVEREIGNTIES: INDIGENOUS (RE)VISIONS OF FREEDOM ACROSS LAND, BODY AND IMAGINATION

Swinth, Kirsten

Fordham University

"LOVE MAKES A FAMILY": FREEDOM AND CONSTRAINT IN QUEER FAMILIES' QUEST FOR INCLUSION

"Love makes a family—nothing more, nothing less," read a sign at the 1987 Gay and Lesbian March on Washington, DC, demanding recognition for queer parents and children. This paper examines the queer families' movement in the US from the 1980s to the 2010s. Facing legal vulnerability and a painful push-pull between public hostility and invisibility, LGBTQ family activists fought back against their marginalization. They pursued acceptance by placing their families within US hegemonic norms – as devoted couples, in marriages (or at least marital-like relationships), with intensive parenting central to their identities. In the first part of the paper, I analyze the efforts of two groups: Rainbow Families, which focused on social connections among queer families and acceptance for their children in school; and the Family Equality Council, whose organizers fought to extend workplace benefits to queer partners and their children. The paper's second half turns to popular culture, which was instrumental in furthering acceptance for some queer families. The television sitcom *Modern Family*, which debuted in 2009, for example, featured the gay, parenting couple of Cam, a stay-at-home father, and Mitchell, an environmental-lawyer breadwinner, who bickered incessantly over balancing their work and their family. I consider why a white, gay couple was a more successful and popularly accepted representation of a normative working queer family than lesbian parents (who are more numerous) or queer families of color by comparing *Modern Family* to the far less popular series, *The Fosters* (2013-2018), a show about an interracial working-class lesbian couple who parent biological, adopted, and foster children. I conclude by arguing that popular culture images in combination with the accomplishments of LGBTQ families' activists generated a measure of inclusion for married queer households with children, but that it came at some cost. An alternative strand of queer activism focused on "chosen" families, built not out of marriage and children, but other intimate bonds. The "chosen" family tradition makes clear the question at the heart of queer families' quest for acceptance: Is recognition a form of freedom, providing safety and inclusion, or does it represent constraint through acquiescence to a largely heteronormative norm?

Kirsten Swinth is a scholar of women, gender, labor, and culture in post-World War II United States. She is the author of *Feminism's Forgotten Fight: The Unfinished Struggle for Work and Family* (Harvard, 2018) and *Painting Professionals: Women Artists and the Development of Modern American Art: 1870- 1930* (UNC Press, 2001). A co-edited collection, *Care and Capitalism in the Twentieth Century* (Duke University Press, 2026) is forthcoming, including a co-written contribution on "Theorizing and Historicizing Care and Capitalism" and an essay on 1980s and 1990s US labor feminists. Her book in progress is *Inventing the Working Family: A Story of Promise, Peril, and Working Mothers at the Breaking Point, 1970-2020*. She has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities Fellow, the Russell Sage Foundation, the American Council of Learned Societies, the John Paul Getty Foundation, and the Mellon Foundation. Prof. Swinth's work has been featured in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *New Yorker*, and on CNN and public radio, among other venues.

CONTESTED FREEDOM: REPRODUCTION, FAMILY, AND BODILY AUTONOMY IN U.S. HISTORY

Szymaniak, Joanna

Uniwersytet Warszawski

"YES. NO. MAYBE. I DON'T KNOW. CAN YOU REPEAT THE QUESTION?": RETHINKING AMERICAN NOTION OF SEXUAL FREEDOM IN THE POST-METOO THEORIES OF CONSENT

Consent became one of the central notions in contemporary discussions on sexual freedom in the United States and currently undergoes a significant theoretical reconsideration. While the MeToo movement positioned consent at the center of debates about the ethics of heterosexual sex, it engaged only minimally with its longstanding feminist critiques. Since the 1980s, theorists such as Catherine MacKinnon have highlighted the limits of consent, both within legal frameworks and in broader cultural contexts, arguing that consent alone cannot ensure safety, morality, or mutual desire (Pateman 1988, MacKinnon 1989). Recent feminist scholarship has expanded on those criticisms and argued that consent oversimplifies power dynamics, social inequality, and the embodied complexity of desire (Fishel 2019; Srinivasan 2021, Angel 2021, Garcia 2023; Laurie James-Hawkins and Róisín Ryan-Flood 2024). Emerging theories instead conceptualize consent as a fluid, relational practice shaped by cultural scripts, emotional labor, and structural constraints.
In this paper, I analyze texts published in the aftermaths of the transnational debates about MeToo that both complicate and expand the concept of consent in the US discourses on sexual freedom. These theoretical works intersect cultural studies, historical research, and media analysis (e.g. *The Right to Sex: Feminism in the Twenty-First Century in the United States* 2021, *Screw Consent: A Better Politics of Sexual Justice* 2019, *The Joy of Consent: A Philosophy of Good Sex* 2024) and, on the one hand acknowledge the relevance of consent in criminal law (Fishel 2019), and on the other emphasize its rootedness and attachments to liberalism (Garcia 2024). I argue that the selected sources present a tension existing at the center of feminist discourse on consent: it functions as a widely accepted and seemingly unavoidable legal safeguard, and simultaneously, it is evaluated in a market-based binary framework of "wanted versus unwanted sex" (Srinivasan 2019). I claim that consent constitutes a marker of liberalization of feminist discourse around sexuality in the US, and recent theoretical interventions on consent call for articulating a new understanding of sexual freedom separate from the logic of capitalist exchange.

Joanna Szymaniak is a PhD student at the Doctoral School of Humanities at the University of Warsaw. Currently, she is preparing a doctoral dissertation titled "Beyond Consent: Contemporary Literary Narratives of Sexual Violence and Consent." Her research explores gender theory, the dynamics of consent, and sexual violence, as she analyzes how these issues are portrayed in popular culture and literature in the aftermaths of the #MeToo Movement. Joanna is part of an international research team led by Prof. Tomasz Basiuk and Prof. Eveline Kilian (Queer Theory in Transit: Reception, Translation, and Production of Queer Theory in Polish and German Contexts; 2023-2026, National Science Center), and a member of the Queer Studies Student Collective, which was recently awarded a grant aimed at establishing an international student working group focused on queer theory

Tabas, Brad

ÉNSTA / Institute Polytechnique de Paris

ON MAKING A VIOLENT AND REPULSIVE PLANET: MARS, ASTROCOLONIALISM, AND FRONTIER MYTH

Why do astrocolonialists want us to flee Earth? Such a proposition can sound crazy in our Planetary Age—after all—is not Earth, as the American astronaut James Lovell put it, "heaven"? At least compared to the Mars which we know thanks to space exploration, a planet which is—in its "reality"—a "cold, hard, desolate world"(Johnson 2020, 19)? The answer developed in this contribution does not on any particular attractiveness of Mars as a "planet B," but rather focuses on the changing ways in which, over the same time period in which the real Mars has progressively been discovered by science, American history, particularly the conquest of the West, has been transformed into a myth which makes the Earth into Mars—a red planet of blood, fear, violence, and endless war. A repulsive planet, one which it would only be logical to flee at all costs. The worst of all actual worlds, even as compared to the real red planet. A planet which can only be redeemed, hence rendered worthy of our care, through the astrocolonial conquest of other worlds.
Nevertheless, and reversing the stance of pleas for astrocolonial expansion, the thrust of this archaological intervention is not to show that planetary biogeography teaches us that Earth is abhorrent, but rather to shed light on how planet Earth has been made into a planet of war by recent discourse on the lessons of American history, with a specific focus on how its violent colonial past and its fracturing present have been employed to fuel the emergent promise of speculative extraterrestrial futures. This intervention, then, will adress the complex temporalities and spatialities involved in the making of Earth into Mars, while laying bear how all of this works in the service of the astrocolonial imagination. It will use a range of ideologically, culturally, and generically diverse sources unified by the themes of history, geography, anthropology, and violence. Key references include Edgar Rice Burroughs' *The Princess of Mars*, Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*, Stephen Graham Jones' *The Fast Red Road*, Tracy Smith's *Life on Mars*, and recent westerns such as *Hostiles and Surrounded*. This literary and cultural foundation will be complemented and placed in dialogue with works of political philosophy exploring the connections between geography and human violence, including classical works on natural law, writings on the place of the frontier within American history and culture, and contemporary theoretical writings on planetary, extraplanetary, and POST-PLANETARY politics.

Brad Tabas is a philosopher. He is a member of the Department of Social and Human Sciences at the ENSTA/Institute Polytechnique de Paris. He has a B.A. from the University of Pennsylvania and an M.A. and Ph.D. from New York University. His recent work has been published, among other places, in *Terrain*, *Society + Space*, and the *L'espace politique*. He works on big picture questions such as the history of sovereignty, with a particular interest in the deformations of language in extraordinary situations. Most of his publications explore the intersections between art and technoscience, space history and environmental philosophy, astropolitics and cultural poetics.

Talabi, Oluwadunni

Universität Bremen

COLONIAL NECROPOLITICS AND LIQUID POTENTIALITIES IN 19TH CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE

In situating Melville's transatlantic narratives within the Romantic period, characterized by symbolic and poetic imaginaries, one encounters a method of reading that often overlooks the sociopolitical thrust of his oceanic writing. American studies scholar Gesa Mackenthun argues that a critical and/or postcolonial reading of Melville reveals a writer who "does anything but flee from reality" (18). Building on Mackenthun's postcolonial reading of Melville, my presentation examines how Cartesian modern discourse is both staged and contested in Melville's short stories. I argue that Melville participates in the 18th and 19th -century Western intellectual tradition of writing the modern subject, narratively staging the Atlantic as material site for the implosion of Enlightenment discourse. In particular, I use desire as an analytic lens to examine how the European worldview – marked by the drive for masculinist economic extraction and psychosexual delirium of conquest and domination – is disoriented by the materiality of the ocean and the fluid, kaleidoscopic cultural exchanges of the Atlantic. This disorientation destabilizes the logic of mastery and disembodiment at the core of Western Enlightenment thought and its imperial enterprises, effectively engendering contradictions in the very formation of America as an imperial project.

Oluwadunni Talabi (she/her) is a postdoctoral researcher at the Chair of North American and Postcolonial Studies, and the executive director of the Bremen Institute of Canadian and Québec Studies at the University of Bremen, Germany. She holds a PhD from the University of Bremen and a Master's degree in National and Transnational Studies from the University of Münster. Her research and teaching span the fields of Black, queer, critical future, and environmental studies. Her first monograph *Woman, African, Other: Black Feminism and Intersectionality in the Contemporary Works of African Diasporic Women* was published by transcript in June.

ATLANTICS: FREEDOM NARRATIVES IN ENTANGLED WATERS

Tausel, Sandra

Leopold-Franzens-Universität Innsbruck

POLITICS OF ERASURE: THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S ATTACK ON REMEMBERING, TEACHING, AND CRITICAL THINKING

The Trump administration's systematic control over history, education, and intellectual inquiry extends beyond partisan politics. It aims to reshape American democracy and, more specifically, what Americans can remember, teach, learn, and think. Targeted policies and funding regulations influence what cultural institutions, schools, and universities can teach, indicating that the administration is engaged in a project of epistemological containment that undermines critical thinking, academic freedom, and the democratic imagination itself. My paper situates these strategies of knowledge control – from efforts to alter federal museum exhibitions and censor narratives of race and slavery, to the suppressive effects of political interventions in university curricula and research funding – within a larger struggle to control memory and how knowledge is produced. Erasing critical understandings of the past and replacing them with state-approved narratives can be seen as a characteristic of "new competitive authoritarianism" (Levitsky and Way 51) and a way to reinforce whiteness, patriarchy, and nationalism as the defining elements of "authentic" American identity. My analysis will rely on relevant examples, including the Kennedy Center, the Smithsonian, several Ivy League universities, and K-12 schools in Florida, to argue that the current administration is intentionally reengineering cultural memory to change how the nation narrates itself and what (academic) freedom means (Norris 2). I will demonstrate that by diminishing the independence of educational and cultural institutions, or "the last remaining segment[s] of 'WOKE'" (Tsioulcas) as Donald Trump views them, the administration seeks to produce citizens less capable of critical reflection and more vulnerable to the spectacle and affective politics of authoritarian populism. This challenge is particularly daunting with the country's semiquincentennial approaching and the debate over what and how to remember U.S. history and legacy. In the end, I argue that the attack on remembering, teaching, learning, and critical thinking is not just an aberration but a form of twenty-first-century governance where controlling knowledge production serves to consolidate political power. Recognizing this epistemic struggle is key to understanding how the U.S., like other democracies under pressure, might shift toward authoritarianism through cultural and intellectual repression.

Sandra Tausel (she/her) is a PhD candidate in American Studies at the University of Innsbruck and was the 2024/25 recipient of the Marietta Blau-Grant at the University of Alberta, where she was a Doctoral Research Fellow at the Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies. Her dissertation, *Reproductive Ageism: Narratives of Age-Based Reproductive Control*, examines age-based, controlling narratives that affect women, trans, and nonbinary characters' reproductive experiences differently depending on their life phase in contemporary US-American fiction. Her research focuses on literary and cultural representations that contribute to a critical examination of feminist causes, gender, race, social and reproductive justice issues. Tausel previously served as a Fulbright Teaching Assistant (US) and an OeAD Lecturer (Hungary). Her work has appeared in *libri liberorum*, *WiN: The EAAS Women's Network Journal*, the *Journal of the Austrian Association for American Studies* (JAAAS), *Off Campus: Seggau School of Thought*, and anthologies published by *Routledge* and the University of Nebraska Press.

FREEDOM, UNIVERSITY AND CRITICAL THINKING

Teodorescu-Stadler, Otilia

Universität Konstanz

"IN PASSING WITH MY MIND": AUTOMOBILITY AND DESIRE IN W. C. WILLIAMS' EARLY POETRY

At the beginnings of automobility, the motorcar was generally perceived as an epitome of freedom and as an object of desire. Motorists were often free to move as they pleased, and were able to evade many of the temporal and spatial constraints previously imposed by other modes of transportation. The automobile generated not only an unprecedented promise of spatial and temporal freedom, but also a whole new "affective regime" (Merriman 2012) of forces, feelings, and emotions shaping the relationship between new technologies and the modern individual. This paper shows how William Carlos Williams' early poetry engages with the motif of the motorcar to inquire into new facets of desire prompted by the technologies of modernity. I argue that in pursuing the double goal of establishing broader patterns of artistic vision in an American context and of analyzing the impact of automobility on the modern soul, Williams inaugurates a poetics of desire in which the automobile becomes both an important trope of modernist innovation and a controversial site of poetic freedom. In my analysis, I rely on studies that situate the motorcar at the core of the modern "technological sublime" of unlimited mobility and freedom (Jordan 2023), and that recognize its privileged status in the excessive cultivation of aesthetic pleasure and visual consumption characteristic of the first decades of the twentieth century (De Lauretis and Heath 1980; McCabe 2005; Zeller 2022). In collections such as *Sour Grapes* (1921) and *Spring and All* (1923), Williams navigates modern dimensions of desire from the unique perspective of the male motorist passing in his car and observing the surrounding environment through the windshield, in a controversial blend of innocence and intent, voyeurism and mystery, romantic passion and the death drive. Formally and thematically, Williams' automobile poetry follows a logics of desire that favors discontinuity and denies completion, whereby the motorcar transgresses its pragmatic function of bringing the motorist to his destination and becomes a vehicle of incisive visual perception, philosophical reflection, and sensorial surprise.

Otilia Teodorescu-Stadler is Assistant Professor of American Studies at the University of Konstanz. Her main fields of research are contemporary North American poetry and poetics, American modernist literature, African American Studies, and the Environmental Humanities. She holds a PhD in American Studies from the University of Konstanz and is the author of *Re-writing Love: North American Love Poetry of the Twentieth Century* (2010). Since 2023, she has been an affiliated researcher with the ERC-funded project "Off the Road: The Environmental Aesthetics of Early Automobility" (University of Konstanz, 2023-2027).

Thozer, Samson

University of Manchester

AUTOMOBILITY AND SOCIAL DIVISION IN THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

As both consumer products and aesthetic signifiers, cars were central to the development of modern urban life in the New Negro era. The growth of automobility among Southern and Caribbean migrants had a democratizing influence on the development of segregated enclaves in New York, Philadelphia, and other cities in which the Black population was rapidly expanding. Automobility provided access to new opportunities in work, housing, and leisure for tens of thousands of migrants who aspired to a middle-class lifestyle previously inaccessible to them. Cars were the most significant purchases that many New Negroes would ever make, and as historian Davarian Baldwin has suggested, such consumer activity 'converted acts of desire into a political and intellectual life of distinction and defiance against traditional ways of life'.1 But as the decade progressed, attitudes towards cars and their drivers would begin to reveal new contours of social division among urban Black populations. Through a targeted analysis of Harlem Renaissance novels by Jessie Redmon Fauset and Wallace Thurman, I argue that the private dream of freedom that the car once represented had become a public and controversial spectacle of identity by the end of the 1920s. I will show that the new social hierarchy of Harlem was mapped onto a fast-changing automobile market, such that discrimination on the basis of skin tone or class could be communicated simply by an allusion to the car one drove, whether Ford or Packard, struggle-buggy or limousine. These shifting attitudes towards automobility, I suggest, signal the significant potential for scholars prepared to place consumerism at the centre of New Negro Studies.

Samson Thozer teaches at the University of Manchester. His PhD thesis proposes that Black autoworkers, artists, and entrepreneurs in the city of Detroit generated their own distinct and vibrant New Negro culture in the interwar years. His recent publications include a chapter on the work of poets francine j. harris and Jamaal May in *Detroit: A Literary and Cultural Response* (forthcoming, Michigan State University Press). His current research focuses on automobility and presentations of the Midwest in twentieth century African American literature.

Tobia, Simona

Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour (UPPA)

"I WAS SCARED AS HELL, YOU KNOW…": AFRICAN AMERICAN POWS AND THE SHAPING AND RESHAPING OF WORLD WAR II MEMORIES OF INCARCERATION AND FREEDOM

Historians estimate that roughly 35 million combatants – almost half of the fighting forces – have been, for a period of time, prisoners of war. There are differences in the ways POWs experienced detention based on their status, particularly in the post-war era when collective memories of the war were established through various narratives over the years. Being a prisoner of war was often experienced as a "melancholy state," and captivity in wartime is frequently represented as conflicting with the exalted model of masculinity that war demands of men of fighting age, a model of the 'soldier hero' which pervades the collective memories of the Second World War. In this context captivity brings the men in touch with notions of emasculation, shame, honour and silence, and it represents a metaphorical transition from the masculine world of action to the more feminine world of passivity and containment. The research finds that this diversity (for example being part of a minority, a culturally, ethnically or racially distinct group) plays a key role in the way POWs experienced incarceration in war and conflict. Identity plays a crucial role in the construction of communities and, in turn, public and shared accounts affect the shaping and re-shaping of memories relating to the war experience. Drawing on oral history interviews with veterans who were part of segregated units and who were captured and imprisoned as POWs, the paper demonstrates the depth of the impact of this heterogeneity on "memory composure." Some of these veterans were part of a group which has become symbolic in the public memory of the Second World War: the Tuskegee Airmen. Others were part of segregated units which did not develop such a public account of their wartime experience. Joining the wider debate on the struggle for racial justice, the paper considers the influence of these public accounts on the way these informants compose narratives of community, shaping and reshaping narratives in the post-war era. The paper concludes that both racial identity and the availability of public and shared accounts can profoundly affect the way narratives about experiences of captivity are shaped.

Simona Tobia is an Associate Professor in American Studies at the Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour (UPPA). After obtaining her PhD (Università degli Studi di Milano, Italy), she worked at the University of Reading and University College-UCL, London, UK. She was at the Library of Congress, Washington D.C. as a Kluge Fellow, and taught at Université Jean-Jaurès in Toulouse, France before joining UPPA and the research group ALTER in 2019. She has authored the monographs *Advertising America. The United States Information Service in Italy*, 1945-1956; *Ascoltatori italiani buonasera. Voice of America e l'Italia*, 1942-1957 and *WarTalk*. The role of foreign languages in World War II, with Hilary Footitt. Simona is currently preparing the monograph *Name, Rank and Number. Interrogation, Interviewing and Questioning in the Second World War and Its Aftermath* (1939-1949). She is one of co-founders and co-editors of the *Close Encounters in War Journal*.

Toennessen, Alf Tomas

Universitetet i Agder

THE REPUBLICAN PARTY AND RHETORIC OF FREEDOM

To Make Men Free is the title of the historian Heather Cox Richardson's book about the Republican Party. That title encapsulates the significance of freedom for the GOP. Freedom is an essential dimension of modern American conservatism, illustrated by the Freedom Caucus in the House of Representatives. This paper will explore how Republican politicians in recent decades have employed the concept of freedom in political rhetoric, both in foreign and domestic policy. It will focus on the rhetoric of Presidents Ronald Reagan, George W. Bush, and Donald Trump to examine similarities and differences in their messages on freedom. The paper will analyze President Reagan's message of the importance of freedom in his speech on June 6, 1984, on the 40th anniversary of D-Day. It will also address his use of freedom as a way of framing political positions that reduce welfare spending in order to finance tax cuts.

The paper will discuss the message by Bush in his speech to Congress on September 20, 2001, a few days after the 9/11 attacks. Bush proclaimed: "Tonight we are a nation awakened to danger and called to defend freedom." He called the terrorists "enemies of freedom."

Moreover, the paper will explore how Republicans have cleverly connected freedom and patriotism. For many years Donald Trump opened his campaign rallies with a song "God Bless the U.S" with the chorus line "I'm proud to be an American where at least I know I'm free." For Republicans, this partly means freedom to start your own business and freedom from oppressive government regulations and excessive taxation.

Finally, the paper will examine some controversial aspects of the current Trump Administration's policies on freedom. Trump and FCC Chairman Brendan Carr have led an effort to limit free speech that criticize the Administration, exemplified with the pressure to pause the show by Jimmy Kimmel. Efforts to limit free speech violate the virtue of freedom.

The paper will argue that the Republican Party's rhetoric of freedom on domestic policy has been more polarizing than its rhetoric on foreign policy. This has serious consequences.

Toliou, Foteini

Aristotéleio Panepistī́mio Thessaloníkīs

SEXUAL FREEDOM AND AFFECTIVE CITIZENSHIP FOR JAMAICAN IMMIGRANT MOTHERS IN NEW YORK CITY IN NICOLE DENNIS-BENN'S NOVEL PATSY (2019)

This paper discusses how sexuality, motherhood and affective belonging are renegotiated in Nicole Dennis-Benn's novel *Patsy* (2019). Exploring the transgressive mobilities performed by the Jamaican immigrant female protagonist, Patsy, I argue that Dennis-Benn's text claims sexual freedom and affective belonging for Jamaican immigrant mothers in NYC. Patsy, migrates to NYC a few years before the turn of the twenty-first century, since she feels that her bi-sexual identity and independent selfidentification are suppressed due to the heteropatriarchy and the gendered violence that transpire in her impoverished community in Kingston, Jamaica. Pasty has been sexually abused as a child and she is now a single mother as she has had a daughter with a married man. Due to this multilayered, gendered trauma the protagonist suffers from depression and feels emotionally detached from her daughter. She, thus, migrates to NYC in an attempt to reconnect with her first lover and childhood friend, Cicely, and to freely navigate her lesbian sexuality. Patsy leaves her six-year-old daughter behind, to be brought up in her father's wealthy family. I suggest that the novel re-maps NYC both as a space that offers possibilities for personal and sexual freedom and for new affective connections as well as an unjust and alienating urban context. Dennis-Benn exposes the gendered and racialized inequalities that Jamaican women grapple with in NYC and addresses the difficulties of securing legal and affective citizenship in the N. American metropolis, pointing towards a disillusionment with the American Dream. When Patsy overstays her visa, she can only take up low-income jobs as a daycare woman so as to economically survive in NYC. Nevertheless, Patsy rethinks her conception of motherhood and renegotiates her troubled relationship with her daughter through her engagement in childcare work, while NYC enables the character to embrace her lesbian sexuality and form new affective relationships. The novel depicts how different generations of women–Patsy and her daughter, Tru–contest limiting, heteropatriarchal understandings of sexuality and womanhood and re-imagine flexible, transformative notions of gender identity, motherhood and affect that can be liberating for Jamaican women both in the US diaspora and at home.

Foteini Toliou (https://orcid.org/0009-0003-5654-2941) is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of American Literature and Culture at the School of English, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. She received her B.A. in English Language and Literature (AUTh) in 2019 and completed her M.A. in English and American Studies (AUTh) in 2021. Her Master's thesis focused on Chicana/o literature and borderlands theory. Her research interests include diasporic and migrant literature, Caribbean women's writing, transcultural criticism, and feminist theory. Her research also focuses on feminist urban studies. She has delivered conference presentations and workshops on diasporic literatures in Greek, British, and US universities and her work has been published in the journal *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*. Foteini was awarded a semester-long Erasmus+ scholarship to conduct part of her doctoral research at Stockton University, US. She also carried out independent Ph.D.-related research at Princeton University and the University of Pennsylvania during her US research stay.

Toscano, Bruno Walter Renato

Università Ca' Foscari Venezia

"WE MUST HAVE POPULATION CONTROL AT HOME": FREEDOM AND COERCION IN THE U.S. (AND THE WORLD) POPULATION DEBATE (1960S-1970S)

In the post-World War II era, the United States emerged as the primary voice for global anxieties surrounding rapid population growth. While much of this concern was outwardly directed toward the Global South, a significant internal debate took root among American sociologists, demographers, and family planning advocates. These voices argued for limiting family size domestically, often advocating for a model of one to three children. This public discourse, particularly during the turbulent 1960s and 1970s, became a flashpoint where two powerful but contradictory ideologies clashed. On one side, the push for birth control was framed as a matter of women's liberation—a way to grant individuals, especially women, control over their bodies and destinies. Conversely, a more coercive and utilitarian view gained traction. This viewpoint, fueled by environmental and Malthusian fears, posited that individual freedom was a secondary concern when faced with the existential threat of overpopulation. Proponents, such as biologist Paul R. Ehrlich and others in the emerging Zero Population Growth movement, argued that limiting personal liberties was a necessary evil for the collective good. This perspective often overlapped with neo-eugenicist ideas, framing family planning as a tool for societal management rather than personal empowerment. Through an analysis of essays and archival collections, this paper investigates how these two visions—one emphasizing personal freedom and the other advocating societal control—coexisted and conflicted within the American public sphere. It examines how this internal struggle was also reflected in U.S. foreign policy and international aid, with the underlying belief that the United States itself would serve as the model for a successful, long-term population control revolution. The presentation will highlight how the debate over freedom and coercion in reproduction was inextricably linked to issues of race, class, gender, and ableism. These intersections were often at the core of decisions about who could and could not reproduce, revealing a darker, more discriminatory undercurrent to the overpopulation anxiety. This study demonstrates how the 1960s and 1970s were pivotal decades in affecting domestic fears about overpopulation, driving the discourse for decades to come.

Bruno Walter Renato Toscano is a Postdoctoral Researcher in U.S. History at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. He is the author of Pantere nere, America bianca. Storia e politica del Black Panther Party (Ombre Corte, 2023). A scholar of Black Studies, Gender History, and the History of the Cold War, he is currently writing his first English-language book on the history of the Third World Women's Alliance, a major Black feminist organization of the 21st century. His research also focuses on the global history of U.S. non-state foundations involved in the Population Control Movement, which he examines through an intersectional lens. His work has been supported by several international grants, including the 2025/2026 Schlesinger Library grant at Harvard and the European Association of American Scholars grant for postdoctoral researchers. His Ph.D. thesis won the Anna Maria Martellone Prize from the Italian Association of American Studies (AISNA).

Trendel, Aristi

Le Mans Université

THE PROMISE AND PERIL OF TRANSCULTURALITY IN CLAIRE MESSUD'S THE EMPEROR'S CHILDREN

Claire Messud's *The Emperor's Children* (2006) offers a sharp portrait of cosmopolitan privilege that unravels under the pressures of neoliberal ideology. Set in New York City, the novel follows three friends navigating the intersecting spheres of media, ambition, and inherited capital, while chronicling the disillusionment of the outsider figure, Frederick "Bootie" Tubb. This paper explores the novel's treatment of transculturality as both a horizon of liberal aspiration and a mechanism of neoliberal capture, staging the contradictions between cosmopolitan freedom and the marketized forms of belonging that reinforce it.

Drawing on Wolfgang Welsch's theorization of transculturality, it considers how Messud's characters embody cultural interconnectedness and hybrid fluency not as emancipatory practices but as modes of distinction that sustain elite privilege. Transculturality, in Welsch's account, dissolves rigid cultural boundaries; in Messud's narrative, however, such boundarycrossing is circumscribed by class and capital, turning cultural fluidity into a rarefied commodity. Pierre Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital helps clarify how cosmopolitan savoirfaire—refined tastes, liberal posturing, and global literacy—functions as a form of symbolic power that reinforces exclusionary structures rather than dismantling them.

Likewise, Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity illuminates the ambivalence of such transcultural performances: while ostensibly destabilizing national and cultural fixities, they are redeployed within neoliberal circuits that valorize adaptability, reinvention, and perpetual self-fashioning. Lauren Berlant's account of "cruel optimism" further clarifies the novel's affective dimension: the characters' attachment to cosmopolitan ideals of freedom, openness, and mobility sustains desires that ultimately foreclose genuine transformation.

Bootie's failed rebellion and eventual disappearance crystallize these dynamics. His attempt to expose hypocrisy is absorbed and neutralized by the very system he seeks to critique, dramatizing the commodification of dissent under neoliberalism. The novel thereby reveals how transcultural capital can be both a survival strategy and a disciplinary mechanism, promising liberation while deepening capture. By situating *The Emperor's Children* within discourses of transculturality, neoliberal governance, and affect, this paper argues that Messud's narrative exemplifies the tensions of 21st-century American literature: it exposes the seductions of cosmopolitan life while revealing its structural contradictions and affective costs.

Aristi Trendel is associate professor (HDR) at Le Mans University, France. She has published book chapters and articles on American writers in American and European journals (*The John Updike Review*, *Philip Roth Studies*, *The Psychoanalytic Review*). She is the author of five books of fiction, a study, *Pedagogic Encounters: Master and Disciple in the American Novel After the* 1980s (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2021) and co-editor of *Transculturality in Language, Literature and Politics*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2025). Her research interests currently revolve around transculturality

Tsimpouki, Theodora

Ethnikó kai Kapodistriakó Panepistímio Athinón

"THERE IS NO VIEW FROM NOWHERE:" TEJU COLE'S TREMOR AND TRANSCULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE GLOBAL NEOLIBERAL ERA

This paper argues that Teju Cole's *Tremor* (2023) navigates the complexities of transcultural identity in the global neoliberal era. The journey is fraught with challenges and risks, but, Tunde, the Nigerian American protagonist, seems compelled to constantly reconsider and renegotiate the structures that shape his life in a world increasingly defined by neoliberal globalization. Throughout the novel, Tunde is aware of his privileged subject position, the fact that he has attained a relative socioeconomic status and to a large extent, has escaped the bounds of race. His transcultural formation combined with his class status provide him the material privileges that enable and enhance the ability to travel or appreciate both white-based Euro-American art and music and indigenous cultural artistic and musical practices. At the same time, however, unconstrained by "monocultural" viewpoints (Welsch 1999), he possesses informed agency capable of embracing a transcultural being-in-the-world, a kind of attitude or a state of mind that has an openness to the world by acknowledging the sociocultural and representational subordination of minorities, the racial injustices and systemic inequalities operating in global markets following neoliberal strictures. Even though he knows full well that "there is no view from nowhere" (218), and that he is himself implicated in shaping worldviews, since "the narration is never neutral" (9), as he admits, he seems ethically committed to addressing the failures of neoliberalism by raising awareness and bearing witness to its discontents.

Tremor, however, negotiates the dynamics of transcultural freedom under neoliberalism not just on the level of characterization, through Tunde's subjectivity, but also through the novel's aesthetic form, that is its "pastiche form—non-linear narrative, shifting points of view including second, various stylistic registers, associative connections" (LeClair). Through its hybrid poetics and plural aesthetics which challenge long-standing genre conventions, Cole exercises his artistic freedom as a transcultural writer without conceding to the neoliberal mass audience preferences that turn the novel into commodity.

Theodora Tsimpouki is Professor of American Literature and Culture at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. She is the author of many articles and book chapters on American literature and its correlation with psychoanalysis, feminism and literary theory. She has recently co-edited *American Studies after Postmodernism* (Palgrave/macmillan 2023). Dr Tsimpouki is also one of the chief editors of *Ex-Centric Narratives: Journal of Literature, Culture, and Media*, an open access journal of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (https://ejournals.lib.auth.gr/ExCentric/). She was the Book Reviews editor of the European Journal of American Studies from 2001 to 2021.

Turner, Nicolas

Universiteit Leiden

THE UNIVERSITY AND REGIMES OF MIGRATION IN GARY SHTEYNGART'S ABSURDISTAN (2006): ACADEMICS, BORDERS, AND REFUGEES

The academic and the refugee can initially appear as almost opposites: one housed in the privileged site of academia, one shaped by homelessness and marginality; one defined by institutional affiliation, one lacking the securities of citizenship; one embedded in global networks of research, one excluded by the global framework of borders and the violence that enforces them. Beneath these apparent binaries, however, the two categories are entangled. On an institutional level, the university, as has been seen in the recent 'campus panic,' operates as a synecdoche of the nation state, policing its borders and distinguishing sharply between members and outsiders. At a discursive level, the figure of the 'refugee' has taken on a crucial role within several fields, including postcolonial studies, Asian American studies, and Jewish Studies, generating a call for 'Critical Refugee Studies.' These theorizations of the refugee have been shaped by the relations between racialization, academia, and US global power, from Hannah Arendt's 1943 essay "We Refugees," through to Edward Said's "Reflections on Exile," and Viet Thanh Nguyen's recent argument that the category of the migrant be replaced with that of the refugee. Crucially, while all three of these writers were refugees and exiles, all three also worked – or are still working – as academics in US universities. This paper will explore these varied interrelations between the figures of the academic and the refugee, the institutions of the university and the nation, and the legal regimes and theoretical discourses of migration, through an examination of Gary Shteyngart's 2006 novel *Absurdistan*. It will argue that Shteyngart's novel facilitates an examination of various relations between migration and the university in the post-Cold War period between 1989 and 2008, during which the university faced the increasing threat of neoliberal defunding in parallel with the rising violence of US immigration and border policy more broadly. This will provide insights on the genealogy of the intertwined campus panic and anti-immigrant authoritarian crackdown which defines our own moment.

Nicolas Turner is a PhD candidate at Leiden University, where his project examines post-45 Jewish American literature as a lens on the shifting relations between ideas of racial, sexual, and gender identity and the institutional formations and critical approaches of academic literary studies between the 1950s and the present. He holds an MA in North American Studies from Leiden University, an MPhil in Political Thought and Intellectual History from the University of Cambridge, and a BA in History and Politics from the University of Oxford.

JEWISH AMERICAN WRITING AND THE UNITED STATES' REGIMES OF MIGRATION: REIMAGINING NARRATIVES OF IMMIGRATION

Tutan, Defne

Başkent Üniversitesi

FREEDOM FROM THE "ORIENTAL": CHINESE AMERICAN REPRESENTATIONS IN AMERICAN FILMS OF THE 21ST CENTURY

An investigation into Asian American representations in American film reveals years of bigotry, from the practice of "yellowface" and othering to reduction into "Oriental" stock characters. This treatment did not distinguish among the many different communities of Asian Americans, either, as "American film reduced the complexity of actual nations, cultures, and characters to simplified stereotypes" (Benshoff and Griffin 123). Characters such as the inscrutable Oriental, Dr. Fu Manchu, and Dragon Lady are only a few of such clichés that have been employed in depicting Chinese Americans, thereby engraving them as such in the viewers' minds. Nevertheless, these representations seem to have taken a promising turn since the beginning of the present century by not only providing fully-developed characters but also depicting career-oriented, successful business people who are Americans rather than marginalized others. Namely, *Saving Face* (Dir. Alice Wu, 2004), *Red Doors* (Dir. Georgia Lee, 2005), *Almost Perfect* (Dir. Bertha Bay-Sa Pan, 2011), and *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (Dirs. Daniel Scheinert and Daniel Kwan, 2022) are distinct in their presumably-positive portrayals. While struggling to overturn the previously-established stereotypes, however, these portrayals may have inadvertently given way to a new set of formulas through which Chinese Americans are defined by dysfunctional families and homosexual individuals. In this framework, this paper examines these films to argue that, in both Hollywood and independent American film productions, the yearning for freedom has resulted in a new form of confinement, thereby providing only quasi-freedom

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RECLAIMING FREEDOM BEYOND BORDERS: ETHNICITY, GENDER, AND ECONOMY IN ASIAN AMERICAN CULTURAL PRODUCTION

Ulmanova, Hana

Univerzita Karlova

BEYOND THE DICHOTOMIES: RE-READING KATE CHOPIN'S "THE STORM"

There is a general agreement that Kate Chopin's short stories—on the basis of intimate fates and of the internal dilemmas of the characters—both describe and question the social norms, but none of them defies the cold, Anglo-Saxon protestant culture and the puritan logic of sin, quilt, punishment and/or atonement that much as "The Storm." While the actual storm in the text is at the same time beautiful and terrifying and can be interpreted as either the cause (by naturalists) or an excuse (by radical feminists), the female protagonist is by no means a pseudo-romantic heroine; rather, through the lens of gender and postcolonial theories, she is the marginalized, Hispanic other, and as such, approached by the majority with a mixture of fear and desire. At the age of reconstruction and progress, she is neither a picture of a true womanhood, nor a new woman; neither—given the overused dichotomy—a virgin, nor a whore.
In "The Storm," Kate Chopin clearly oversteps the conventional, sentimental local color aesthetics, and breaks quite a few taboos: Calixta for sure enjoys both food and sex, and it is precisely because of her "Spanish blood" that her body is not, as Patricia Yaeger argued in *Dirt and Desire: Reconstructing Southern Women's Writing, 1930-1990*, grotesque, torn, or tortured because she does not experience the so-called crisis of whiteness. Yet, references to the color white are numerous, probably forming part of the dramatic irony. And, similarly, the presumed happy end may not be as happy as it seems. By analyzing Kate Chopin's emancipation strategies, the aim of this paper is to go beyond the dichotomy of the Old South v. the New South and examine the Southern narrative in transition. It means to understand how the regional view on identity, class, race and gender may be re-contextualized and become part of global literature.
Note: Since I translated "The Storm" into my mother tongue, I might add a few comments about the difficulties of this task, as well as about the reception of Kate Chopin's works in the Czech cultural context.

Hana Ulmanová holds a M.A. in American Civilization from George Washington University, Washington, DC, and a PhD in Anglophone Literatures from Charles University, Prague. She is a senior lecturer at Charles University (Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures, Faculty of Arts), focusing on American literature, namely modern American prose, literature of the U.S. South and Jewish American literature. A former Fulbright scholar at NYU and an active member of the Southern Studies Forum, she teaches at both BA and MA levels and supervizes doctoral dissertations. She is a reviewer and literary critic widely contributing to daily, cultural and academic press (such as the highly respected weekly Respekt or Jewish Yearbook) and regularly appears on Czech national radio. She has conducted and published interviews with leading American literary figures (e.g. Arthur Miller, Edward Albee, William Styron, Amiri Baraka, Michael Cunningham, Colson Whitehead, and Nicole Krauss). She is also a literary translator, dealing mainly (though not exclusively) with prose from the American South (Truman Capote, Tennessee Williams, Alice Walker, Kate Chopin, etc).

van Gaalen, Thomas

Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen

CORPUS ANALYSIS FROM BELOW? CHARTING SOLIDARITY DISCOURSE IN THE INTERWAR CARIBBEAN

In the early 1900s, leftist and liberatory discourse on solidarity spread rapidly through the Caribbean region as anticolonial, labor and socialist currents emerging across the Americas intersected and connected there. In recent years, historians have noted that solidarity discourse often had a practical and strategic function to on-the-ground movements: by invoking solidarities rooted in categories of labor, race or nationality, local movements could make great "gains," to speak with Charlotte Alston, and lay claim on political backing and material support. Over the past decade, digital corpus analysis methods have proven helpful in rendering visible the diverse, ever-shifting uses and conceptions of solidarity within Caribbean radical discourse. Nevertheless, without embedding transnationally circulating solidarity discourse, as accessed through digitized archives emerging across the world, in the local, on-the-ground and day-to-day experiences which gave solidarity discourse its meaning and strategic significance—that is, its "gains"—digital corpus analyses of solidarity discourse risk neglecting the popular social base on which the interwar spread of solidarity discourse was predicated. This presentation uses the case of interwar solidarity discourse in the Caribbean to ask: how and to what extent could we practice digital corpus analyses, which generally represent a birds' eye view on historical discourse, *from below*? Building on the field of history from below—an area of social history that asks how the experiences, activities and perspectives of non-elite people shaped history—I propose and critically discuss three potential ways to practice digital corpus analyses without omitting the experiences and perspectives from below that underpinned past liberatory struggles. Doing so, the presentation invites reflections on the power researchers (inadvertently) impose as they structure information via digital methods, and provides starting points for countering the top-down biases present in some methods of corpus analysis.

Thomas van Gaalen is a PhD candidate at Radboud University. His work revolves around (global) labor history, social movements, and intersections of capitalism and empire. His PhD project studies how practices of solidarity provided an on-the-ground response to the economic transformations that marked the Americas of the early twentieth century. Taking three particular collective labor actions on the Caribbean island of Curaçao as its core focus, the project integrates archival and digital methods to shed light on the ways in which people negotiated and contested the expansion of early twentieth-century global capitalism 'from below.' Thomas also works as a freelance illustrator, and is the artistic director of political magazine *Jacobin Nederland*.

Vara, Maria

Anōtátī Scholḯ Kalőn Technőn

GOTHIC AESTHETICS AND THE FALL OF THE VAEMPIRE IN THE HUNGER (1983)

Tony Scott's 1983 debut film *The Hunger* (based on Whitley Strieber's 1981 novel of the same name), has been critically acclaimed for its visually and culturally significant reimagining of the vampire myth, centered on Miriam Blaylock, an ageless vampire who seduces her lovers by promising immortality. Set in the heart of New York City, the film relocates the vampire from the Gothic periphery to the very center of modern identity: the Western metropolis. This paper will reintroduce the film through the concept of the "vaempire", which signifies the corrosive, parasitic, assimilative, undead force of imperial domination.
Through its striking Gothic visual language and post-punk aesthetic –when Bauhaus's haunting "Bela Lugosi's Dead" foregrounds the film's self-awareness of its lace within the vampire canon –*The Hunger* emerges as a meditation on the collapse of vaempiric power from within, suggesting that even the seemingly invincible imperial structures are vulnerable to decay and revolt. By reframing *The Hunger* as a narrative of vaempiric demise, this paper will highlight the film's vision of liberation not as a return to some imagined cultural "purity", but as a haunted, hybrid form of survival marked by irreversible mutation. The horror of the vaempire lies in the unsettling realization that its undoing may require the appropriation of its own mechanisms. This reading situates *The Hunger* as a cinematic allegory of survival, offering both a critique of imperial seduction and a reflection on how to reclaim agency within the ruins of cultural assimilation.

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Varlı Karaarslan, Gül

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ARCHIVING FREEDOM: THE PERFORMATIVE SELF AND GENDERED RESISTANCE ASSATA SHAKUR'S ASSATA: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Born as JoAnne Deborah Byron, Assata Shakur (1947-2025) was an American political activist and revolutionary who was a member of the Black Panther Party. During the 1970s, Shakur faced multiple charges and was sentenced to life in prison. After escaping from prison, she gained political asylum in Cuba in 1984. Shakur published *Assata: An Autobiography* (1988), which is regarded as an example of a freedom narrative that merges black autobiographical tradition with the prison narratives. Drawing on Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's theories, this paper examines how Shakur transforms "the autobiographical I" into a "performative I," blending the personal and the political, to expose the systematic violence faced by Black bodies under state power. Assata's autobiography functions not only as a political statement rooted in her personal experience of incarceration. It differs from the black male prison narratives that center on individual awakening by focalizing the gendered and racial suppression faced by Black female bodies. Thus, the "performative I" that sets the political agenda of the narrative transforms into a "collective we" that comprises black female experience. Through stories of medical neglect, bodily control, and reproductive control, Shakur exposes how the black female body is treated as a political site and a site of violation within the U.S. justice system. This paper claims that *Assata: An Autobiography* functions as an archive of freedom, where Shakur fights against the political erasure of her identity by the state and reclaims personal autonomy over her body and Black history through autobiographical writing.

Veselá, Pavla

Univerzita Karlova

REVOLUTION IN EXILE

Intrinsic to boastful discourses on American freedom and peacefulness, there are discourses on oppression and violence in other parts of the world, at their most ridiculous represented by certain right-wing presidential statements, such as Ronald Reagan's 1984 "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union." "We are first; we are the best; and we are so because we're free," Reagan stated at that time and vowed to extend the "greatness of America," "in the crimson light of a rising sun fresh from the burning, creative hand of God" into the future, the space and beyond: "We will carry on the tradition of a good and worthy people who have brought light where there was darkness, warmth where there was cold, medicine where there was disease, food where there was hunger, and peace where there was only bloodshed." This rhetoric of peaceful expansion of freedom, democratic spirit of commerce, and stable bedrock of faith and patriarchal family obliterates realities of exploitation, oppression and violence committed in the name of freedom and nonviolence. Creating spaces of resistance in such conditions becomes all the more difficult and urgent. My presentation will focus on the first two decades that immediately followed the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, when various artists, writers and critics, from diverse cultural, social and political backgrounds, migrated around Europe and the United States. On the background of histories such as Brigitte Struder's *Travellers of the World Revolution: A Global History of the Communist International*, I will discuss selected works of authors who worked within American contexts and who, despite interwar rise of nationalism, Stalinism and fascism contributed to deepening the October revolution's internationalism and shaping its positive memory while at the same time critiquing its failures. The focus will be on the problem of violence and nonviolence, but I will also consider how these writers and critics conceptualized the notion of freedom.

Pavla Veselá teaches in the Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures, Faculty of Arts, Charles University Prague. Her research focuses on modern Anglophone and Slavic (Russian, Czech) literature and her publications include articles in the journals *Utopian Studies*, *Extrapolation*, *The Journal of William Morris Studies*, *AUC Philologica*, and *Science Fiction Studies*. She also contributed to the collections *Comunidades intencionales: utopías concretas en la Historia*, edited by Juan Pro and Elisabetta Di Minico, and *Utopian Possibilities: Models, Theories, Critiques*, edited by Liam Benison. Her monograph *The Polyphony of Utopia: Critical Negativities Across Cultures from Bellamy and Bogdanov to Yefremov, Piercy and Butler* analyses contradictions in selected Russian and American utopias and dystopias.

Vigil, Ariana

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES AND THE CURRENT REGIME

This paper will reflect on the current position of Women's and Gender Studies within U.S. academia and seek to answer the question, *how did we get here?* I begin with a brief overview of the institutionalization of WGST as traced through the establishment of departments and undergraduate and graduate degree programs over the last 50 years. I then offer a snapshot of the current status of departments and programs, focusing on recent closures and mergers. The bulk of the paper seeks to theorize the movement from increasing institutionalization to closures by examining four inter-related phenomena: 1. The dismantling of DEI-related programs and initiatives under the Trump administration; 2. The rise of a "clientfocused" approach to higher education and subsequent undervaluing of humanities and social sciences programs; 3. The attacks on individual faculty members, threats to academic freedom, and capitulation to fascism on the part of universities; and 4. The untethering of WGST as a discipline from the social movement of feminism. The paper ends with a consideration of WGST within and *without* U.S. academia and an argument for the necessity of re-situating WGST as a firmly transnational field.

Ariana E. Vigil is the Druscilla French Distinguished Professor of Women's and Gender Studies at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Her research and teaching focus on contemporary U.S. Latinx literature and culture, feminist theory, and activism. She has served as the Chair of the Department of Women's and Gender Studies for over five years and was PI on a grant-funded initiative to reflect on 50 Years of Women's and Gender Studies in North Carolina.

Vysotska, Natalia

Kyivskyi natsionalnyi linhvistychnyi universytet

"AGAINST THE SEA OF TROUBLE": BLACK HAMLET'S QUEST FOR INNER FREEDOM IN JAMES IJAMES' PLAY FAT HAM

The "global Shakespeare" is explored today not solely as an artist of international acclaim, but also as the founder of many modern discursuve and cultural practices. The distinctive feature of "American Shakespeare" is, probably, the exceptional role he had played in shaping the national world picture in the course of the US short history. Due to a variety of different factors, from the young nation's first steps Shakespeare "had been regarded as a central part of American identity since the Founding Fathers at least" (Andrew Dickson), never losing this status with the flow of time. Over the years, Shakespeare's presence in America had acquired all sorts of forms "capable of meeting the nation's cultural needs" (Georgianna Ziegler). Shakespeare still provides the 21st century Americans with a common imaginative language in which to discuss relevant social issues, such as inequality, identity, race, and gender.

The paper explores a contemporary version of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* by the Pulitzer Prize-winning African American playwright James Ijames (2022). It argues that the adaptation entitled *Fat Ham* aims at celebrating the viability of African American community under the pressure of tectonic shifts in the traditional set of values resulting in the collapse of patriarchal system and remodeling of new generation's identities. The tragicomic mode of the dramatic presentation is in line with the age-old tradition of Shakespearean parodies, travesties, and burlesques blossoming in (African) American popular culture since its origins in the 18th century.

Loosely following the main story line of the original, the adaptation has an ideological and aesthetic agenda of its own. Younger characters' refusal to comply with the existing norms in bodily standards and/or sexual behaviors signals their departure from prescribed gender roles and determination to pursue the path of self-fulfillment and achievement of inner freedom. The play abounds in Shakespearean quotes and allusions. The carnivalesque motives are instrumental in enhancing its message – the triumph of ever mutable life over the motionless stagnation of death – transposed to present-day African American setting.

Natalia Vysotska's current position is Full Professor, Theory and History of World Literature, Kyiv National Linguistics University. Academic interests encompass contemporary literatures in English; multi/transculturalism; theatre and drama in the USA; Shakesperean adaptations and appropriations. Major publications include four books ("*Set all Hearts in the State to What Tune Pleased His Ear…*": *Shakespearean Discourse in Contemporary American Drama* (KNLU Publishers, 2025 (in Ukrainian); *The Concept of Multiculturalism as a Factor in US Recent Literary History*, Kyiv, KNLU Publishers, 2012 (in Ukrainian); *The Unity of the Plural. Late 20th – early 21st cc. American Literature in the Context of Cultural Pluralism*, Kyiv, KNLU Publishers, 2010 (in Ukrainian); *At the Crossroads of Civilizations: African American Drama as a Multicultural Phenomenon*, Kyiv, KNLU Publishers, 1997 (in Ukrainian)); – and over 250 essays, articles, book sections, and dictionary entries addressing various issues of British and American fiction and drama published in Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Greece, Germany, Poland, Great Britain, Spain, Romania and the USA. Member of the European Association of American Studies, European Collegium for African American Research. Fulbright Program Alumna, Resident Scholar at the Kennan Institute (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, D.C., 2002). Salzburg Global Seminar in American Studies Fellow (2000, 2009, 2022).

FREEDOM TO BE ME: STRUGGLES WITH STEREOTYPES, DISSENT, AND CELEBRATION OF DIFFERENCE IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN WRITING

Wainwright, Darius

University of Bristol

EXHIBITING FREEDOM? THE UNITED STATES INFORMATION SERVICE AND IRAN, 1953-68

This paper proposes to reflect on how United States Information Service (USIS) exhibits in Iran displayed and peddled concepts of freedom. It examines the motives underlying this approach, scrutinises major displays, and illustrates how this campaign undermined American attempts to engage with Iranian audiences.

The analysis highlights the extent the USIS relied on exhibits as a fundamental tenet of their public diplomacy campaign to promote American norms, values, and ideas in Iran. Following the example set by Institut Français, officials initially used exhibits to showcase American high culture. Yet Cold War concerns quickly persuaded USIS to change their approach. They instead used their displays to dissuade Iranians from supporting the Soviet Union by peddling notions of what they termed 'freedom.' This strategy entailed the showcasing of the liberative potential of American-led socio-economic development projects. Exhibits demonstrated how these initiatives empowered rural populations and fostered greater individual autonomy. As the US government had invested in many of these projects in the Iranian countryside, USIS used exhibits to persuade and attract urban, middle-class Iranians of the benefits of these endeavours, and the apparent value of Iran's membership of what they termed the 'free world.'

The analysis provides a useful lens through which to explore the Cold War's impact on exhibits governments, or affiliated organizations, curated. Since the nineteenth century, policymakers used these displays to shape popular, international perceptions of their country's culture and thereby boost their cultural cache. While an extant body of literature examines this topic in considerable depth, these typically examine government-curated exhibits at international expositions. In, accordingly, examining smaller displays in a country like Iran, policymakers deemed geostrategically vital to US Cold War interests, the paper provides a lens through which to both critique American notions of freedom, as well as the issues which blighted USIS cultural diplomacy more broadly. Most exhibits concentrated on promoting American Cold War superiority, failed to appeal to ordinary Iranians, and only sought to engage with the upper echelons of Iran's society. Outside of the Shah of Iran's inner circle, these exhibits had a negligible impact on the wider population.

Dr Darius Wainwright is a Lecturer in Post-1945 United States History at the University of Bristol in the United Kingdom. He has previously held roles at the University of Reading and the London School of Economics and Political Science. Darius' research interests focus on the transnational spread and exchange of norms, values, and ideas between the United States, Britain, Iran, and the Middle East. His first book - *A Special Relationship? American and British Soft Power in Iran, 1953-1960* – was released in 2022. Darius is currently working towards his second book project, *New York City, Cultural Diplomacy, and the Cold War*. The monograph will explore how New York City independently fostered cultural relations with overseas audiences and actors.

CONSTRUCTING NARRATIVES OF FREEDOM: AMERICAN EXHIBITS AT HOME AND ABROAD IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Waldron, Caroline

University of Dayton

FIGHT SONGS AND FREEDOM: MUSIC AND MEMORY OF ANTIFASCIST RESISTANCE IN THE MID-20TH CENTURY

This paper explores how songs and their singers performed, vocalized, and – at times – even chose to remain silent as political and social acts of protest during the 1920s-WWII. In 1984, 4 Studs Terkel, the legendary progressive journalist and broadcast host, got into an argument on air with his radio show guest, Lisa Sergio, over the provenance and place of the Italian folk song and resistance anthem, "Bella Ciao." Terkel and Sergio had a few things in common, including knowing the lyrics and the tune to this "fight song." They also each built their careers in radio. Born five years apart, Terkel and Sergio were the same generation. As teenagers they witnessed the horrors of World War I and the traumatic impacts of the global Great Depression. In the 1930s, both were immersed in the national politics of their respective homelands – the US for Terkel, Italy for Sergio. When Terkel was in his early twenties, he got a job with the Works' Projects Administration (WPA) which was about the same time that Sergio signed a contract with *Ente Italiano Audizioni Radiofoniche* (EIAR). The WPA was part of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal created to rescue the economy and expand the democratic promise through cultural productions, including on radio. EIAR was the new radio corporation created by Benito Mussolini to broadcast messages about Fascism and to build up Italian nationalist sentiment. They both were labelled suspect characters and surveilled by their governments. Terkel was blacklisted in the 1950s during McCarthy's Red Scare and Sergio was targeted by both Organizzazione per la Vigilanza e la Repressione dell' Antifascismo (Organisation for Vigilance and Suppression of Anti-Fascism) Sergio and Terkel both had the technical and oral skills for radio and could ease guests into sharing stories, often weaving them into dramatic, compelling and relatable narratives for their audiences. Despite these similarities, if they had met in the 1930s, they would have been enemies. While Terkel's ideological commitments never wavered, Sergio's did before WWII when she fled to the United States. When the two finally met in the 1980s, both were ardent believers in the American promise of democratic freedom. Yet, they had different ideas about the importance of an iconic Italian folk song in the fight against fascism.

The argument over "Bella Ciao" serve as a prism through which to observe how music and song become wrapped in both collective resistance and its memory. While "Bella Ciao," in particular, and folk music, in general, have been studied as pillars of 20th century democracy movements, other forms of music, including more classical genres, also had similar contemporary meaning. Yet, the legacy of the latter has been seen as more associated with those who held power than those who fought for freedom.

Caroline Waldron is Associate Professor of History at the University of Dayton. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign in History, with field concentrations in Comparative Labor, U.S., and African History. She serves as H-Net's Vice President for Networks and is co-book review editor of Altreitalie. International Journal of studies on Italian migrations in the world. Her recent publications include "'O Mother Race': Race, Italian Colonialism and the Fight to Keep Ethiopia Independent" (*Zapruder World*) , "Naming Rape: Historicizing Women's Human Rights Activism and Agency in the ItaloEthiopian War" Eileen Boris, Sandra Trudgen Dawson, Barbara Molony. Ed (Routledge 2020) and, "No Labels: How Lisa Sergio Translated Fascism, Feminism, and Herself on Radio," in *Gendering Fascism*, Andrea Germer and Jasmin Rückert, ed. (Brill 2025)

Wesling, Megan

University of California, San Diego

RECONSIDERING FEMINIST FREEDOMS IN THE CONTEXT OF NEOLIBERALISM

This essay addresses feminist visions of freedom in the current moment by examining the collective culture of feminist disappointment that circulates in feminist lifestyle magazines and on social media. I am interested not just in feminists' disappointment at the loss of reproductive freedoms, but a pervasive disappointment in sex itself, or more precisely, in heterosexuality. In exploring the emergence of a feminist political affect expressing what Asa Seresin has called "heteropessimism," I examine a variety of online and pop cultural sources (Teen Vogue, Barbie, and Taylor Swift, to name a few) popular with Gen Z feminists to ask what visions of freedom popular feminisms propose and circulate today. What constitutes feminist freedom in a neoliberal, white supremacist, patriarchal and fascist state? And do feminist articulations of discontent and anger with heterosexuality and heteropatriarchy offer compelling visions for liberation? I argue that the centrality of heteropessimism to mainstream feminist discourse today is linked to the absence of an analysis of heterosexuality as a political system – that is, under the conditions of neoliberalism, feminist "freedom" in the public consciousness has largely been redefined as individual expression rather than systemic change or collective struggle. Second wave feminists' theorizations of sexual and erotic freedoms as forms of political resistance have been replaced by neoliberal frameworks of privatization and individualism, so that contemporary feminisms, to the degree that they are expressed in popular culture, are focused on self-expression, wellness, and participation in fan communities online. What are the limitations of feminist fan cultures in theorizing liberation, then, and how do we draw from a range of feminist histories at the current conjuncture to offer compelling visions of freedom?

Meg Wesling is Associate Professor of US Literatures at UC San Diego, and an affiliate of the Critical Gender Studies Program. She is past faculty director of UC Education Abroad Program in France (2013-2015). She earned her doctorate from Cornell University (English) and her bachelor's degree from Indiana University (French and Women's Studies). She is the past recipient of a year-long faculty fellowship at the Society for the Humanities at Cornell University, and of the Hellman and other faculty research fellowships at UC San Diego. Professor Wesling's monograph, *Empire's Proxy: American Literature and US Imperialism in the Philippines*, was published by NYU Press in 2011. She is also the author of numerous essays on American literature, sexuality studies, and feminist theory, published in *American Quarterly*, *MELUS*, *Mosaic*, *GLQ*, *American Literature*, and *Feminist Review*, among others.

Wiedlack, Katharina

Universität Wien

‘THROUGH CREATING I ASSERT MY FREEDOM’: LIFE, LIBERTY, AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS IN CONTEMPORARY ALASKA NATIVE VISUAL ART

From the perspective of the renowned Tlingit and Unangax artist Nicholas Galanin, freedom is intertwined with self-determination, cultural preservation, and sovereignty over Alaska Native lands and resources. Galanin uses the word ‘freedom’ consciously and critically in interviews, arguing that “Through creating I assert my freedom” (Galanin, *Brokenboxes* Podcast, 2014). In his sculptures, multimedia installations, and paintings such as “The American Dream is Allie and Well” (2012), Galanin engages with the symbols of ‘American Freedom’ in historic and contemporary visual capitalist culture, making explicit his positionality as an Alaska Native decolonial anti-racist artist activist. Like his contemporary, the Athabascan and Alutiiq artist Rebecca Lyon in her assemblage “Counting on Liberty” (2016), a collage of historic family photographs and activist paraphernalia in the shape of the Statue of Liberty, Galanin claims authority over the definition of ‘freedom’ by (re)signifying it through references to the historic struggle against colonial policies that stripped Alaska Natives of their sovereignty and land, leading to a continued focus on reclaiming and asserting inherent tribal sovereignty, and the fight for Alaska Native self-governance and control over cultural practices. Analyzing selected works by Galanin and Lyon, including the two mentioned pieces, I will delineate a working definition of Alaska Native decolonial reclamations of the ‘pursuit of freedom and self-determination,’ which includes claims to self-governance, subsistence and nature preservation, as well as cultural preservation, the freedom to preserve and transfer cultural wisdom, which has become a priority as well as reclaiming history. In doing so, I aim not only to introduce contemporary Alaska Native voices to general discussions on the challenges and fights for American freedom, but also to show that Alaska Native artists contribute in significant ways to broader coalitional anti-racist feminist and decolonial movements, in solidarity with Black and immigrant struggles. Importantly, by applying Alaska Native world views to these contemporary critiques and civil rights claims, they offer perspectives that reach beyond individual rights claims and connect civil rights, the fight against extractivism, and gender-based violence to environmental rights claims and more.

Katharina Wiedlack is an assistant professor of Anglophone Cultural Studies at the Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna. Her research fields are primarily American studies, Russian American relations, queer and feminist theory, popular culture, postsocialist, decolonial, and disability studies. She has published on queer-feminist punk cultures, Russian representations in graphic novels and film, the (Russian) history of the American feminist and Black movements, among other things. Her most recent monograph *Under Western Eyes: Vulnerable Minorities and the Russian State in New Cold War Cultures* (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press) was published in 2025 and is available at: https://www.degruyterbrill.com/document/doi/10.1515/9798887197500/html#contents

FREEDOM AND IDENTITY

Wilkerson, Kabl

Harvard University

FROM IRA TO IRA: INDIAN REMOVAL AND INDIAN REORGANIZATION AS IMPERIAL CALL AND RESPONSE

The cataclysmic history of Indian Removal is well-trodden, even if unevenly treated in American History. Though burned into the American psyche, the scale of Indian Removal is only now becoming clear to historians through the work of Jeffery Ostler and John Bowes, who have expanded the regional and temporal focus of Indian Removal beyond its classical beginning and end. However, few have considered the legacy of removal in constituting a new imperial relationship between the removed tribal nations from the Great Lakes and the United States. Post-removal life marks the clearest shift from sovereignty to dependency for communities such as the Potawatomi, Kickapoo, Sauk, Meskwaki, Shawnee, and Iowa. As tribal nations such as the Potawatomi were removed from their home in the Southern Great Lakes, the social, cultural, and political organization of the community eroded under the weight of between twelve and (potentially) seventeen removals beyond the Mississippi. The combination of removal and a pronounced reliance on materials guaranteed by treaty to survive in their new residence only reinforced tribal nations’ dependency upon the United States. This paper will focus on the complex processes of Potawatomi dependency, which developed as a consequence of Indian Removal. These processes ultimately set the stage for the children and grandchildren of these Potawatomi to be considered federal “wards” by the early twentieth century and galvanized the New Deal-era reform of Indian Affairs.

Kabl Wilkerson (they/them) is an enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation of Oklahoma (Bear Clan & Bourassa/Muller families) and is a doctoral candidate in History at Harvard University. Their work reconsiders the early twentieth-century reform of Indian Affairs within the broader context of U.S. continental imperialism in the century preceding it, primarily focusing on the experience of the Potawatomi, Sac & Fox, Kickapoo, Shawnee, and Iowa of Oklahoma. A committed public historian, Kabl maintains collaborative scholarly relationships with the Citizen Potawatomi Nation Cultural Heritage Center, the Pokagon Potawatomi Center for History & Culture, and the Newberry Library of Chicago, having served as a primary researcher for the Indigenous Chicago Project. They are a proud graduate of the Texas Tech University history program.

NATIVE AMERICAN MIGRATIONS: FREE AND COERCED

Wilson, Laura

University of St Andrews

“OUR MONTICELLO”: BLACK RESISTANCE AND RECLAMATION IN JOCELYN NICOLE JOHNSON’S MY MONTICELLO

“What am I supposed to do with these ancestors?” ponders Da’Naisha Hemings Love in the titular novella from Jocelyn Nicole Johnson’s 2021 collection of short stories, *My Monticello*. By concentrating on Da’Naisha and her matrilineal descendancy from Sally Hemings, Johnson’s text performs important work of historical correction, interrogating how Black families reconcile the painful legacies of their connection to white enslavers and abusers, and reframing histories of Monticello–the private residence of Thomas Jefferson–to focus more closely on the Hemings line. I combine my analysis of this fictional text with the important historical work being done to re-evaluate the life of Sally Hemings, and her relationship with Jefferson, by scholars such as Annette Gordon-Reed and Lucia Stanton.

Johnson’s story is set in a dystopian near-future Virginia, following what is called the “unraveling”. The Charlottesville riots of 2017 are in living memory in this universe, as the death of Heather Heyer is invoked by Da’Naisha’s mother; with white supremacist violence once again descending upon the city in this tale, Johnson offers provocative commentary on far-right ideology and the repression/repetition of the past. Desperate to escape the looming terror, Da’Naisha flees the city with her grandmother MaViolet and her white boyfriend Knox, driving and driving until they find themselves at Monticello. “I did not know that I would bring us here”, Da’Naisha admits, but “that was the night we came and claimed this place”, as she and a small community of other marginalised Charlottesville refugees set up shelter in the tourist areas of the property. Johnson thus interrogates Monticello’s position as a perverse place of refuge, drawing attention to central ideas of ownership and reparations, alongside the eerie pull of ancestral connection. Although the shadow of the “Big House” looms over the group omnipresently, they refuse to enter it for days, sticking instead to the visitor centre, car parks, restaurant, and gift shop at the bottom of the hill. Here then, Johnson probes themes of plantation tourism, the whitewashing of traumatic history with commercialism, and the biased narratives told by heritage sites, which often gloss over stories of the enslaved. This paper thus offers a close reading of Johnson’s novella, examining its pertinent critiques of how slavery and the plantation regime are remembered, and exploring how it reckons with persisting legacies of white supremacist violence.

Dr Laura Wilson is a Research Fellow in the English Department at the University of St Andrews, Scotland. She received her PhD in English from the University of Mississippi with a dissertation exploring the theme of soil in twentieth century African American literature. From 2020-2022, she was a CLIR Postdoctoral Fellow in Data Curation for African American Studies at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, before working for three years at the British Library in London. Laura has published on Eudora Welty, Zora Neale Hurston, and William Faulkner, and has an edited collection entitled *The Living Legacy of African American Studies: Its Past, Its Present, and Its Future(s)*, forthcoming from UGA Press. Her latest research project, from which this presentation is taken, examines contemporary representations of the plantation by Black authors from the 1970s to the present.

Winberg, Oscar

Turun yliopisto

UNFAIR AND IMBALANCED: BROADCASTERS, BALANCE, AND THE BATTLES OVER CBS NEWS IN THE 1970S

While freedom of the press is a core American principle, in practice news media has always been contested by political interests. Television news, the primary source of information in the latter half of the 20th century, was (and remains) particularly vulnerable to political pressure since broadcasters are licensed by the federal government. Indeed, most of the literature on political attempts to intimidate or control television news focuses on the executive branch and the attempts of presidents, from Richard Nixon to Donald Trump, to browbeat the networks. This paper, however, turns to the legislative branch, Congress, and to local, affiliate stations around the country to provide a fuller understanding of the relationship between television news, freedom of the press, and political interests.

This paper examines the campaigns of conservative managers of local television stations affiliated with the national network to remake the news principles at CBS News in the 1970s. Convinced that the network news department was controlled by liberals, the station managers allied with members of Congress to apply pressure on the network. “My suggestion,” one affiliate manager wrote the president of CBS News, “is that we hire a mutually agreeable party to review your coverage [...] and report back to us their findings with respect to news balance or imbalance.” Weaponizing the idea of “fairness,” affiliate managers demanded that the news department allow conservative voices in the newsrooms and on the evening news to provide equilibrium.

Relying on the correspondence between representatives of the affiliates and CBS news, this paper illustrates how broadcasters, working with political allies, attacked network television news as unfair and imbalanced. In the 1970s, their success was limited but the idea of weaponizing fairness became a foundational media strategy on the political right. Today, the result is evident not only in the success of cable television news like Fox News, or broadcasting groups such as Sinclair Broadcasting, but also in the current corporate leadership of CBS itself.

Oscar Winberg is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Turku Institute for Advanced Studies and the John Morton Center for North American Studies at the University of Turku. He has a PhD in History from Åbo Akademi University. He is the author of *Archie Bunker for President: How One Television Show Remade American Politics* (University of North Carolina Press, 2025). His work has also appeared in journals such as the *European Journal of American Studies*, *Wider Screen*, and *PS: Political Science & Politics*. His work focuses primarily on the connections between the media and politics in the modern and contemporary United States.

Winkler, Robert

Universität Salzburg

"THE MASK / OF MASCULINITY / IS A MASK / A MASK THAT'S WEARING ME": DE/CONSTRUCTING VISIONS OF MALE FREEDOM IN SERGIO LEONE'S ONCE UPON A TIME IN AMERICA (1984)

As epitomized in James Cagney's famous exclamation "I made it, Ma! Top of the World" at the end of *White Heat* (1949), classical gangster films not only question what came to be called the American Dream, they simultaneously problematize gender roles in general and notions of masculinity in particular. These films hence negotiate what the British post-punk band IDLES called "The mask / Of masculinity / Is a mask / A mask that's wearing me."

This paper zooms in on one of the prime examples of the genre – Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in America* (1984) – to explore its ambivalent and intertwined depiction of freedom and masculinity. The film follows the Jewish friends David "Noodles" Aaronson (Robert de Niro) and Maximilian "Max" Bercovicz (James Woods) as they rise from rags to riches to become New York City's leading mobsters. As the title already suggests, *Once Upon a Time in America* is a mythic deconstruction of their protagonists' striving for "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness." Epic both with regards to runtime (229 minutes) and narration (complexly interweaving three timelines set in 1922, 1932/33 and 1968), Sergio Leone's last masterpiece is, however, also infamous for its brutal and apparently approving depiction of misogyny and rape. As the journalist Svetlana Sterlin pinpoints: "How would (a woman) feel watching the r*pe and sex scenes, which are indulgent, exploitative, and deeply disturbing?" This paper accordingly analyses how the film's cinematic techniques and narrative structure contribute to its problematic de/construction of visions of male freedom.

Robert A. Winkler is a postdoctoral lecturer and researcher in the Department of English & American Studies at the University of Salzburg in Austria. He received his PhD from the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC) at the University of Giessen in 2019 with a dissertation on race and gender in 1980s and 90s hardcore punk (Generation Reagan Youth: Representing and Resisting White Neoliberal Forms of Life in the U.S. Hardcore Punk Scenes (1979-1999), WVT, 2021). His habilitation project explores the significance of the "cabin" in American cultural and literary history. Robert has published widely, among other things on hardcore punk, whiteness studies, black heavyweight boxers, Thoreau's Walden, literature and death, the Unabomber, or the philosophy of Martin Heidegger.

CONSTRAINTS OF FREEDOM IN AMERICAN CINEMA: GANGSTERS, SOLDIERS, INSTITUTIONS

Yamada, Masayoshi

Cornell University

'I'M FIGHTING FOR THE FREEDOM OF JAZZ AND FOR THE FREEDOM PEOPLE HEAR IN IT': LISTENING TO MARY LOU WILLIAMS IN THE MAKING OF THE BLACK PUBLIC SPHERE IN THE LONG 1960S

This paper argues that jazz pianist Mary Lou Williams's music, public statements, and correspondence with African American listeners—especially the poor, the young, and the incarcerated—helped constitute a Black public sphere organized around attentive listening and mutual care during the 1960s and 1970s. Building on her wartime fan networks, postwar African American listeners regarded Williams's success as a collective achievement and mobilized letters to sustain her career. She reciprocated by framing jazz as a healing art rooted in Black history— spirituals and blues—and by founding a charitable foundation offering practical and spiritual counsel.

In the 1960s, Williams reentered public life as a Catholic artist. Her performances, liturgical compositions, and pedagogy insisted that listeners "play with" musicians because healing required attentiveness. Fan letters testify to the therapeutic effects of her music during periods of societal and emotional upheaval. At the same time, Williams's critique of the jazz avant-garde—cast as aesthetically "agitating" and politically misdirected—was less an anti-modernist refusal than an intramural intervention: a call to reclaim heritage and interiority as resources for Black freedom. African American newspapers amplified this debate, presenting her as a figure of clarity in an age of turmoil.

In the wake of urban rebellions that swept across Newark, Detroit, and other cities, Williams became a moral voice urging healing over destruction. Having witnessed similar unrest in Harlem, she interpreted the uprisings as expressions of psychological and spiritual exhaustion produced by structural racism. Her composition "People in Trouble" (1967) and her correspondence with Newark students reveal a vision of freedom grounded not in militancy alone but in the restoration of faith and community. For Black youth reeling from the upheavals of the late 1960s, listening to Williams became an ethical and historical practice that redefined belonging—and, by extension, Blackness.

Williams's correspondence with incarcerated African Americans likewise shows how music and writing forged alternative publics within spaces of confinement. Letters from imprisoned men in Texas and New York sought her guidance, counsel, and help with parole. For them, Williams represented not celebrity but care—a listener who affirmed their humanity. These exchanges strengthened her conviction that jazz could rehabilitate the soul and that listening was itself a collective act of freedom.

Taken together, Williams's musical and epistolary practices bridged sacred and secular domains, linking performance to pedagogy, spirituality to politics, and individual healing to collective liberation. Listening to Williams, I argue, was a mode of political imagination through which freedom in jazz became freedom people could hear—and practice—in their lives.

Masayoshi Yamada is a University of California President's Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of History at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and an incoming Klarman Fellowship Postdoctoral Associate in the College of Arts and Sciences at Cornell University. Masa received his PhD in History from UCLA in 2024. As a historian of the modern United States, Masa research focus on the intersection of popular music and social change with an emphasis on the political potential of the listening public. His dissertation on the history of jazz listeners was a finalist for the 2024 Ralph Henry Gabriel Prize of the American Studes Association. His recent publication includes "Hot Music Society of San Francisco: Peter Tamony and the Racial Politics of Record Collecting in 1930s San Francisco Bay Area," published in the Japanese Journal of American History.

THE AESTHETICS AND POLITICS OF FREEDOM IN THE ERA OF JIM CROW

Yaşayan, Vahit

Erzurum Teknik Üniversitesi

WHO WRITES AMERICA? FREEDOM, AUTHORSHIP, AND ERASURE IN PERCIVAL EVERETT'S JAMES

This paper argues that Percival Everett's James (2024), a revisionary retelling of Mark Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884), powerfully interrogates the American myth of freedom by centering the perspective of the enslaved character Jim—renamed James—and foregrounding his pursuit of literacy, authorship, and narrative agency. By repositioning a historically silenced figure as both subject and storyteller, Everett confronts the exclusionary foundations of American democracy and exposes the mechanisms through which freedom has been selectively granted, regulated, and denied. Set against a backdrop of enduring national contradictions—between the ideal of liberty and the realities of racial, social, and epistemic injustice—the novel dramatizes how control over language, authorship, and self-representation becomes the most vital expression of freedom for the historically oppressed. James's critical engagement with Enlightenment thought, his suspicion of white-authored slave narratives, and his skepticism toward institutionalized knowledge challenge the legitimacy of dominant literary and philosophical traditions that have long spoken about African American subjects without ever granting them voice. This paper situates James within a long tradition of African American literature that defines freedom not merely as legal emancipation but as the ability to claim authorship over one's own story and to resist the narrative frameworks imposed by others. As such, James functions as a bold intervention into American cultural memory, one that reveals the ideological work of literary canon formation while reimagining the role of the African American subject in national mythmaking. In doing so, James speaks to the urgency of rearticulating freedom as a plural, contested, and participatory practice. Through its re-centering of an African American voice once relegated to the margins of a white-authored tale, the novel compels the readers to rethink whose stories count, who gets to write the nation, and what true democratic authorship might entail.

Vahit Yaşayan is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English Language and Literature at Erzurum Technical University. He obtained his BA in American Culture and Literature from Başkent University and his MA and PhD in American Culture and Literature from Hacettepe University. He received a Fulbright award, which allowed him to conduct research on his PhD studies in the Department of English at Harvard University in the 2018–2019 academic year. His publications have appeared in journals such as *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction and American Studies in Scandinavia*. He is a member of the American Studies Association ofTurkey (ASAT), where he served as an Executive Board Member between 2014 and 2016, and as Treasurer between 2016 and 2018.

A LONG QUEST FOR FREEDOM IN AFRICAN AMERICAN WRITING

Zamai, Alice

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A FOREIGNER IN A FOREIGN MARKET. UNITED STATES' PERCEPTIONS AND REACTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY'S SECOND BANKING DIRECTIVE (1988-1990)

This paper focuses on the American perception and reaction to the Second Banking Directive (SBD) of the European Community (EC). More specifically, it aims at interpreting the United States (US) government's attitude towards this Directive as the reaction to a perceived obstacle to its economic freedom and leadership in the multilateral, international sphere that was taking shape in the late 1980s.

The SBD was one of many directives approved by the EC as part of its efforts towards the creation of the Single Market, to be completed by 1992. The directives moving "EC 1992" forward were being closely observed in US government circles, both by the Administration and Congress: after all, the EC was the US' biggest trading partner. US observers were particularly alarmed by the first draft of the SBD (1988), which they interpreted as nothing short of protectionist. The EC was announcing its intention to refuse unconditional national treatment to third-country firms, seeking reciprocity instead – meaning, treating companies from non-EC countries according to how such countries treated EC companies, instead of granting them full access to its internal market. Such a shift was perceived as a threat to the rising multilateral liberalization that the Reagan and Bush administrations had been pushing in international markets. Thus, as the EC was evolving from just being a close ally towards becoming a potential competitor, the US set out to oppose the culpable directive. In the following years, such opposition was voiced directly through negotiations with EC officials, but was also a topic of discussion within US government circles, leading to an attempt to modify US financial legislation accordingly.

Exploring the period going from 1988 to 1990, the multifaceted nature of this opposition sits at the center of this paper, which uses the SBD as a case study to investigate the American response to a perceived threat to its economic freedom outside the domestic sphere. The paper will show how the US acted to covet the multilateral system that would then give way to economic globalization in the 1990s while protecting its role as the primary actor of that same system.

Alice Zamai is a Second Year PhD Candidate in the Department of History and Civilization (HEC) of the European University Institute (Fiesole, Italy). She holds a BA in History from Ca' Foscari University of Venice and a MA in History and Oriental Studies from the University of Bologna.

Her research interests lie at the intersection between US history and the history of European integration, with a focus on the history of finance and banking. Her current research project, titled "The Potential for Rivalry. United States Perceptions of the Development of Economic and Monetary Union in the European Economic Community (1985-1993)" investigates the perceptions and reactions of the US government apparatus to the economic and monetary integration of Europe between the end of the Cold War and the start of the global age.

BOUND TO BE FREE? MARKET FREEDOM AND POLITICAL CONSTRAINTS AFTER THE NEOLIBERAL TURN

Zatout, Eglantine

Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3

TWO VISIONS OF FREEDOM ON FAMILY VALUES

Debates over "family values" have become increasingly heated in the current American political discourse (May). In this context of political polarization, both sides have attempted to use "freedom" in defence of their vision of the normative family. These two sides illustrate the "two concepts of liberty" identified by Isaiah Berlin in a complex way.

The right argues for religious freedom, meaning that they demand to be free *from* governmental intervention when it comes to practicing their religion. This is epitomized in their interpretation of the *Religious Freedom Restoration Act* (RFRA) of 1993. It has been used by rightwing groups to request exemptions from anti-discrimination laws of general application, in order to be able to refuse catering same-sex couple's weddings (in *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission* in 2018 and 303 *Creative LLC v. Elenis* in 2022). They have also used this reasoning to deny placement of children with married same-sex couples (*Fulton v. Philadelphia* 2021). In other words, they have a negative definition of freedom (Berlin's freedom *from*): they are free provided the government leaves them be. The consequence of freedom for this group in those circumstances is less freedom for others to do what they want.

On the other side of the political spectrum, a non-profit organization, Family Equality, which is dedicated to protect and defend LGBTQ+ families, has argued for the freedom to marry. Family Equality has responded to the right's argument on freedom and family values. They argue that people should be free to choose their spouse and that LGBTQ+ families deserve to be legally and socially recognized because they embody family values. This group has a positive definition of freedom (Berlin's freedom to): they want the freedom to do something. This vision of freedom doesn't really take any freedom away from anyone else even though the right argues that it infringes on their freedom.

In this conference, I will study the way political concepts of freedom are used to underpin both sides of the argument on family values. I will analyse rationales presented to the courts as well as the rhetoric developed in the press. I will focus on the period following President Trump's first election in 2016, as this is when the right's narrative started to have political and judicial sway.

Eglantine Zatout is a senior lecturer at Jean Moulin Lyon 3 University. She specializes in the study of American LGBTQ+ families. She focuses on the norms and laws that prevent their formation as well as their fight for legal and social recognition. She studies the conflicting narratives of the right and members of the LGBTQ+ community on the topic of the family (custody, family formation, marriage, adoption).

FAMILY, FREEDOM AND CONSERVATISM

Ziarkowska, Joanna

Uniwersytet Warszawski

ASSIMILATING INDIANS: SIOUX SAN SUN, A TB SANATORIUM PAPER, AND THE TRADITION OF OFF-RESERVATION BOARDING SCHOOL PERIODICALS

The presentation aims to analyze health-related articles written for *Sioux San Sun*, an Indian TB sanatorium paper published between October 1938 and September 1941 at the Sioux Sanatorium in Rapid City, SD. These informative and seemingly transparent articles were written by M. K. Mihran, the main physician and the superintendent of the sanatorium. My claim is that by mixing public health content with an assimilationist agenda, *Sioux San Sun* performed the function of transforming Indian TB patients into compliant American citizens, fluent in Anglo-American values and traditions. Thus, the TB sanatorium paper contributes to the long tradition of off-reservation boarding school periodicals published across the United States. When, in 1879, Richard Henry Pratt officially opened the first educational institution for Indigenous students, he was well aware that if his plan of civilizing Indians was to be successful, the inculcation of American values must start immediately and be realized on multiple fronts simultaneously. Periodicals published by students under the supervision of white teachers and administrators were an excellent tool to achieve this goal. I believe that *Sioux San Sun* created under similar controlled circumstances, mirrors the ideological agenda of these periodicals.

Joanna Ziarkowska is an Associate Professor at the University of Warsaw, Poland. She is the author of *Indigenous Bodies, Cells, and Genes: Biomedicalization and Embodied Resistance in Native American Literature* (2021) and the co-editor of *In Other Words: Dialogizing Postcoloniality, Race, and Ethnicity* (2012). She has published several articles and chapters on Native American literature. Her current project concerns the early twentieth-century history of health care in Native Country. She teaches courses on Indigenous literatures, medical humanities, and film studies.

RELATIONAL SOVEREIGNTIES: INDIGENOUS (RE)VISIONS OF FREEDOM ACROSS LAND, BODY AND IMAGINATION