ASANOR Conference Abstracts

Constituting the U.S. in the Twenty-First Century

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Anna S. Agbe-Davies—University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Conflicts, Contents, and Contexts: Teaching the Constitution as a "Foundation of American Democracy"

In 2024, the North Carolina legislature's House of Representatives passed the Reclaiming College Education on America's Constitutional Heritage Act, also known as the REACH Act. It would have required that every undergraduate student in a state university or college complete a course that examined what the legislature deemed to be foundational texts for American democracy, including the US Constitution. Ironically perhaps, many faculty at state universities and colleges experienced this Act as a challenge to their academic freedom and to freedom of speech—the latter being guaranteed by the Constitution itself. This paper examines the context of the legislation and the response of the state university system's Board of Governors, which developed a "foundations of American democracy" requirement that mirrors many of the Act's provisions. The author also reflects on methods for teaching foundational texts like the Constitution critically and with an awareness of increasing governmental hostility to higher education at both the federal and state level. What pedagogical strategies will help students to understand not only the content of these "foundational documents" but also the historical context of their production, as well as the political processes that have inserted them into college and university curricula statewide?

Fadime Apaydin—University of California, Riverside

The Roots of Anti-Muslim Hate in America

The dangers posed by anti-Muslim hate crimes have the potential to erode fundamental human rights, essential elements of citizenship, and harmonious relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims. The depiction of Islam as a faith characterized by animosity, aggression, and intrinsic narrow-mindedness in everyday discourse has become a fundamental element in the rise of extremist nationalist and anti-immigrant political movements. According to a recent analysis, there was a discernible increase in the number of assaults against Muslims in the United States during the years 2015 and 2016, which surpassed the previous peak figure recorded in 2001, the year that witnessed the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Notwithstanding this unfavorable situation, the United States has a diverse array of mechanisms that facilitate and promote the prevention of hate crimes. In this sense, one of the most useful tools for federal agencies working to prevent hate crimes is the Hate Crime Statistics Act of 1990, which provides a foundation for compiling statistics on crimes involving prejudice based on race, religion, sexual orientation, or ethnicity through the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program. Within this particular context, this research attempts to profile anti-Muslim hate crimes during the

period 2017–2021, encompassing the most recent five-year period for which data from the FBI UCR Program is accessible, referring to variables including the nature of the offense, the racial and ethnic identity of the offender, the identity of the victim, and the location in which the offense occurred.

Charles I. Armstrong—University of Agder

"This is Not America": Violence, Guns, and the Second Amendment in David Bowie's Lyrics

David Bowie had a close connection to the United States, both through his enthusiasm for the Beats and American artists such as Little Richard and Neil Young, and through his many years of residence in the States. While critics romanticise his short stay in Berlin towards the end of the 1970s, few pay much attention to the fact that 285 Lafeyette Street, in New York, was his home from 1999 until his death in 2016. Several of his songs take, however, a critical stance regarding aspects of the country, from the satirical undertones of the title song of *Young Americans*, via the enigmatic yet critical theme song for the film *This is Not America*, to the brazen hysterics of "I'm Afraid of Americans". This paper will home in specifically on lyrics by Bowie that focus on American violence and gun culture. Bowie penned songs about the Detroit 1967 riots ("Panic in Detroit") and the 1992 Los Angeles riots ("Black Tie, White Noise") that describe anarchic scenes of street violence, and also traced the resurgence of religiously inflected neo-Nazism in the Tin Machine song "Under the God" (1989). American gun culture is a returning motif in his songs, and particularly so after the murder of John Lennon in 1980, an event which significantly affected Bowie, and led him to flee New York. Although hardly an activist song writer, several of Bowie's later songs can nevertheless be read as implicitly critical of the Second Amendment of the U. S. Constitution. Of particular interest for this paper will be the lyrics and video for the song "Valentine's Day," which originally appeared on the *Next Day* album (2012), and later played a key role in the *Lazarus* musical (2016). It will be argued that Bowie here takes aim not only at the agenda of the National Rifle Association, but also more broadly at the American cult for private weapons.

Erin Small Capistrano—University of Oslo

Staging the Constitution: The Living Newspaper and Constitutional Critique

This paper explores how the Constitution was "staged" in the Living Newspapers of the 1930s. Developed by the New Deal's Federal Theatre Project, the Living Newspapers were a form of documentary theatre that dramatized the socioeconomic problems of the period using a fusion of journalistic and theatrical techniques. As government-funded theatre, they were at the center of controversies over censorship and freedom of speech: in many ways, their existence was made possible thanks to constitutional principles. But, in addition, the Living

Newspaper's interest in American history and politics meant that the Constitution itself was an object of both political and aesthetic analysis in many of the plays.

The paper examines two Living Newspapers in which the Constitution plays a key role: *Triple-A Plowed Under* (1936) and *Injunction Granted* (1936). Created by the New York Living Newspaper Unit and directed by Joseph Losey, both plays present a critical view of contemporary political and economic developments. *Triple-A* focuses on the agricultural crisis of the 1930s, while *Injunction* Granted explores the history of organized labor in the US. In these plays, the Constitution becomes a textual and visual presence onstage. It is used, at times, as an appeal to historical authority and foundational principles, but is also depicted as something that could be invoked disingenuously by elites to deny the American people their voice. Both literally and symbolically, the Constitution functions in the plays as a stable arbiter of American values. Yet they also present it as a living document, in need of change and subject to interpretation. Above all, these texts offer up the Constitution to their audience as the object of debate and analysis, thus arguing that constitutional critique belongs in the public sphere rather than the courtroom.

Harrison F. Dietzman—George Fox University, USA

"There is a pain – so utter": Emily Dickinson's Political Ontology of Pain

In this paper, I demonstrate how Emily Dickinson's ontology of pain represents a Burkean "Whiggish" critique of the "Blessings of Liberty." With reference to recent scholarship on Dickinson and pain by Michael Snediker and Thomas Constantinesco, the paper takes as its frame Charles Taylor's buffered vs. porous distinction, Talal Asad's diagnosis of liberalism's deep investment in pain-mitigation, and Edmund Burke's close identification of pain with sublimity. In contrast to Anglo-American liberalism's representation of pain as an oppressive passive subjectivity, Dickinson's poetry articulates a distinctly conservative view of pain as a multivalent relational experience.

The paper looks first to Dickinson's poems about pain and second to contemporaneous periodical sources to suggest that pain—an ostensibly private and privatizing experience—is in Dickinson's account a relationship that draws the self into the world, rather than cutting off the self from the world. This drawing of the self into the world via pain is precisely what liberalism seeks to limn. Pain, in Dickinson's poetry—an experience produced by the body and a force that possesses the body—speaks to the heterogeneity of the person who experiences pain, exists in relation to pain, and for whom pain provides an opening out of a buffered state. Dickinson's account of pain as an experience of relation and an opening-to-world exposes liberalism's efforts via obsessive pain-mitigation to interpolate the self into fictions of autonomy.

Stephen Dougherty—University of Agder

Persons, Corporations, Group Minds, and Replicants: The Science Fiction of the Fourteenth Amendment

"The Constitution," David Ciepley writes, "should be seen as a popularly issued corporate charter" (4). In that view, American constitutionalism inherits the form of the chartered corporation, an artificial body created in writing, endowed with defined powers, offices, procedures, and a bounded membership. Even "the modern concept of a sovereign people," Ciepley suggests, "is a naturalized corporation" (15). This paper brings that insight into contact with American science fiction. I want to argue that American sf is a particularly revealing site for thinking about artificial personhood because it emerges within a constitutional culture—diffused through law, politics, and everyday social thought—already shaped by corporate forms, corporate rights, regimes of membership, and struggles over who or what may count as a person. In that context, science fiction's recurring fascination with robots, replicants, cyborgs, clones, and group minds appears not simply as technological fantasy, and not just as an imaginary projection of the "governance technology" transferred from the corporation to civil government, as Ciepley puts it, but as a remarkable medium through which a national culture works through the problem of artificial persons.

The Fourteenth Amendment is central to this history. Intended to secure the rights of formerly enslaved peoples, it also became a crucial site through which corporations claimed constitutional protections. The result is that American debates about who or what may count as a person have invariably unfolded within a legal culture in which personhood has long been detachable from the natural human individual. Science fiction gives narrative-speculative form to that condition. Its artificial persons, collective intelligences, and manufactured beings dramatize a distinctively American habit of imagining personhood as attributed, composite, contestable, and modular (Kirkey).

By placing science fiction alongside recent work on corporate constitutionalism and racial history, I want to present American sf as a privileged site for tracing the cultural afterlife of the Fourteenth Amendment. Long before contemporary debates about AI personhood, U.S. law had already developed a powerful grammar for thinking about artificial persons. Science fiction reveals both the incredible imaginative reach of that grammar, and its entanglement with the constitutional history of race. My presentation focuses on Isaac Asimov, Octavia Butler, and Frederik Pohl, while situating their work within a broader U.S. archive that includes Theodore Sturgeon, *Blade Runner*, *Star Wars*, and Ted Chiang.

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Eir-Anne Edgar—Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)

Pedagogies of Resistance: Teaching Dystopian American Literature as a Civic Practice

In this presentation, I will discuss how contemporary American dystopian fiction can be used in the English classroom to cultivate democratic literacies and civic responsibility by exploring resistance, protest, and Constitutional ideals. Although dystopian fiction is stereotyped as pessimistic, taking place in far-off lands that may seem removed from readers' daily lives, recent scholarship suggests otherwise: at its core, dystopian fiction is hopeful, reflecting and offering possibilities and potentialities for conflicts found in "the real world." Using critical pedagogy and civic education frameworks (Freire, hooks, Giroux), I will discuss how instructors can use different dystopian novels to explore issues such as speech/silence, inequality, and citizenship/inclusion. I will also share various teaching lenses and activities, such as: engaging students in defining citizenship beyond legal status; debating what constitutes "freedom of speech" in various contexts; and linking literary depictions of inequality to constitutional ideals. With different dystopian novels, students can view literature as a space for imagining belonging, use close reading to trace the formation of counter-publics, and examine how narratives construct justice or its absence. I will also discuss the relevancy of such an American literature and culture-based project within the transnational context.

Aurora Eide—University of Agder, Kristiansand

Elsa Gidlow's Garden: Queer Counter-Visions of America

In 1954, at the height of the Lavender Scare, lesbian poet and activist Elsa Gidlow built the foundations of what would become a queer artistic community among the redwood forests north of San Francisco. As McCarthyism ravaged and the US government conducted congressional investigations to weed out communists and homosexuals from the public workforce, Gidlow cultivated a countercultural idea of America in the wild gardens of Druid Heights. Despite its isolated location, Druid Heights became a hotspot for alternative thinkers and bohemians and was referred to as a "Lesbian Avalon."

When the government systematically persecutes queer people, refusing to award them equal protection under the law, how does this shape and challenge the role of queer poetic communities in rural environments? In this paper I present parts of my PhD research and examine how Druid Heights and Elsa Gidlow's poetry can be read as a response to and a critique of the heteronormative idea of America as defined by its constitution. Through the interdisciplinary framework of queer ecology, I investigate the historical importance of the queer garden as a politically inscribed environment, where poetry, gardening, and activism go hand-in-hand. Close readings of poems written by Gidlow during this tumultuous era will demonstrate Gidlow's position as a "poet warrior" in the history of queer rights pre-Stonewall. Her unapologetically queer writing and the lifestyle she cultivated at Druid Heights reveal that this community was not merely a project of utopian escapism from society. Instead, I argue that Druid Heights becomes not only an imagined but a *lived* counter-vision of America that actively engages with and challenges the political landscape of the mid twentieth century. By embracing the role of nature in queer lives, Gidlow articulates a poetic

queer consciousness ahead of her time. And with the return of McCarthy-like attacks on queer rights in the US today, investigations into the history of queer critiques of the Constitution become more relevant than ever.

Susan Erdmann—University of Agder

New-fangled Treasons; Non-violence, the American Revolution, and the Treason Clause

During the American Revolution, the refusal of Quakers and German Anabaptist groups to bear arms or swear loyalty oaths made them targets of treason rhetoric and legal sanction, culminating in the 1777–78 exile of Philadelphia Friends and a wave of Pennsylvania treason proceedings. My presentation plans to discuss the Treason Clause (Art. III, §3) of the US Constitution and examine how its narrow definition of treason, overt-act requirement, two-witness rule, and ban on the prosecution of traitor families - constituted a deliberate brake on the conflation of pacifist conscience with «levying war» or providing «aid and comfort» to the enemies of the state.

Madison argued in *Federalist* 43, that the wording of the Treason Act effectively provided a barrier against the "new-fangled and artificial treasons.. by which violent factions.. have usually wrecked their alternate malignity on each other" and simultaneously worked at "restraining the Congress" from retributive prosecution of the factional engagement that created oppositional activity. Reading constitutional text against Revolutionary-era practice, I show how the framers of the Constitution attempted to accommodate religious scruples against war-making by fencing off expansive notions of treason and insisting that acts – as Chief Justice Marshall wrote in the Burr trial, the "actual assembling of men" - and not attitudes were the measure of treasonous activity. The paper plans to further explore the increasingly frequent accusations of treason throughout the 20th and 21st Centuries against the early restrictive prosecution history under the Treason Clause.

James Madison, *Federalist*, no. 43, 290 in *The Federalist*, ed. Jacob E. Cooke. Wesley University Press, 1961.

Marshall in *Ex Parte Bollman* and *Ex Parte Swartwout*, 8 U.S. 75 (1807)

Peter Paul Ferry—University of Stavanger

Constituting Narrative Empathy: George Saunders' (Crisis) Narratives of Masculinity

This paper positions George Saunders' fiction at the intersection of contemporary debates on American constitutional ideals and the evolving dynamics of citizenship, democracy, and masculinity. Through close analysis of stories such as "My Amendment" (2006) and "Love Letter" (2022), amongst others, the study considers the workings of Saunders' texts in which his male protagonists – often marginalized, anxious, or angry - face crises of their masculinity amid the perceived threat to their constitutional rights as American men.

This paper suggests that central to Saunders' aesthetic is the use of Narrative Empathy: his texts invite readers to inhabit the inner worlds of these troubled male protagonists, prompting engagement with the complexities that underpin their concerns with their insecurities, doubts, and desires for recognition. By engaging with Suzanne Keen's writings on narrative empathy, in particular strategic empathizing, character identification, and narrative perspective, this paper will consider how Saunders' satirical and often absurd tales not only reflect the emotional and cultural volatility of contemporary American life, but how Saunders stages empathy as an interpretive and ethical act, one that points to the power of fiction to not only offer necessary critique but also lead to mutual recognition and inclusion.
Engaging directly with present-day threats to liberal democratic traditions such as fragmentation, isolation, and extremism, Saunders' fiction insists on empathy as a vital mechanism for reimagining American civic ideals. His work demonstrates that narrative empathy operates both within and beyond the imagining, writing, and reception of a text: Saunders' stories in particular seem to encourage readers to question dominant paradigms while attempting to cultivate more inclusive modes of understanding through the act of reading. In light of contemporary crises, Saunders' fiction points to the enduring promise of literature to encourage empathetic engagement in American society.

David Gerwin—Columbia University

"…if you can keep it"

As the American Republic totters, what Constitution, exactly, are we teaching American students we are trying to keep (1789, 1868?) and what understandings clarify or obscure that keeping? Civics courses are obstinately procedural about the list of amendments or the nature of representation in the House or Senate. The Supreme Court appears in courses as a series of blockbuster cases with few materials on the shadow docket. Is the Constitution solely a written document as originalists argue as the only fair way to understand it or are we coming to understand (as Gienapp argues was true in the 18th century when the Constitution was adopted) again that its words are the tip of a series of traditions, understandings, and self-imposed restraints by those wielding power. When those fail what are the people to do?

William R. Glass—University of Warsaw

"We Need God in Our Country": The Quest to Christianize the Constitution

Not long after the assassination of Charlie Kirk, Sarah Longwell of The Bulwark in the Focus Group podcast asked a several members of Gen Z and followers of Kirk how their faith related to their politics. One young man answered, "I think just the promotion of promiscuity with ... dating apps and social media is corrupting our society, and I think it's tearing families apart…. And I think that our country's godless. I'm a Christian, if that isn't a surprise, yeah, I think we need God in our country." Unfortunately, Longwell did not give him the chance to explain the precise way having God in the United States would solve the problems of promiscuity or family collapse or other issue mentioned in the podcast like the violence

exemplified by Kirk's death, pornography, and other cultural issues. Perhaps Kirk's views might give a clue as to what the Zoomer meant. In 2024, Kirk claimed, "One of the reasons we're living through a constitutional crisis is that we no longer have a Christian nation, but we have a Christian form of government, and they're incompatible. So, you cannot have liberty if you do not have a Christian population." In other words, Kirk's solution to the social and cultural ills of the United States entailed converting its population to an evangelical Protestant interpretation of Christianity and placing Christians in positions of power to implement policies based on Christian values. The First Amendment's religion clause would seem to be an obvious obstacle to the realization of this vision of a Christian America. This paper will trace the way evangelicals tried first in the nineteenth century to Christianize the Constitution through an amendment to declare the United States a Christian nation and then gradually shifted their strategy to achieve the same goal through judicial interpretation.

Adam Głaz— Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin

Security at Risk, Safety at a Crossroads

Even though The Articles of Confederation, The Declaration of Independence, and the US Constitution use the words *safe*/*safety* and *secure*/*security* rather sparingly (total count: *safe*/*safety* - 3, *secure*/*security* - 4, the verbal uses of *to secure* excluding), the concept of safety/security can be seen as pivotal in all three documents. The Constitution sets up a framework for the security of the political, legal, and economic systems of the US; it guarantees the security of individual states within the Union, as well as that of the Union in the face of possible external threats; it provides for the safety of US citizens by protecting their right to free speech, religious freedom, and personal immunity.

Today, safety/security seems to have acquired an even higher status of a key concept that guides, frames, and organizes public discourse, even though neither word is listed among over a hundred keywords for American Cultural Studies in Burgett and Hendler (for a classic approach to keywords see Williams). This paper will look into the tensions that inhere in the use of these notions in selected contemporary public discourse in and about the US. Despite a large area of overlap, safety and security (as words, but also sociocultural concepts and realities of life) can involve contrasts and contradictions: strengthened national security need not lead to higher safety of individuals; focus on energy security need not lead to a safe environment (example: the Dakota Access Pipeline controversy); measures to ensure campus security may in fact jeopardize the safe environment for education and research.

Works Cited

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Milan Hain—Palacký University, Czech Republic.

“If the First Amendment Will Protect a Scumbag Like Me, It Will Protect All of You”: Lessons from The People vs. Larry Flynt for the 21st Century

The year 2026 marks the 30th anniversary of Miloš Forman’s *The People vs. Larry Flynt*, a film that, despite winning the Golden Bear, two Golden Globes, and earning two Academy Award nominations, provoked intense controversy upon its release. Feminist critics and others condemned the film for its portrayal of free speech, accusing it of glorifying a pornographer and trivializing the exploitation and sexual violence depicted in *Hustler* magazine. Forman—a Czech-American director whose life was shaped by experiences under Nazi and Communist regimes—interpreted such criticism as a form of censorship, reinforcing the film’s central concern with the fragility of freedom of expression.

The film ignited a national debate, intensified by a provocative marketing campaign that compared Larry Flynt (played by Woody Harrelson) to a crucified Christ figure. Supporters argued, in line with Forman’s views, that First Amendment protections must be absolute to prevent manipulation by those in power. Critics countered that the film obscured the harmful realities of Flynt’s work, presenting him as a champion of civil liberties rather than an emblem of misogyny and exploitation.

This paper revisits *The People vs. Larry Flynt* and its reception to explore the enduring relevance of the film—and of Flynt himself, even after his death in 2021—in the context of contemporary debates over free speech. In an era marked by polarized discourse around cancel culture, misinformation, and the role of social media, the tensions between liberty and responsibility have become more pronounced. By analyzing the film’s cultural impact and the debates it continues to provoke, this paper argues that its legacy offers important insights into how freedom of expression is contested in 21st-century America.

Jessica Allen Hanssen—Nord University, Bodø, Norway

***Myra Breckinridge* and the Limits of Constitutional Freedom**

What “constitutes” America more: the Constitution, or Hollywood? Both are culturally agreed-upon social artefacts that enforce supposedly American values. One documents our laws, the other our behaviors within those laws, but they are equal expressions of artifice and social engineering. One was arguably more successful at its aims than the other: most of us probably know more about Hollywood, its products, and its players than we do about the Constitution, its interpretation, or its original framers. The 1968 novel *Myra Breckinridge* by

Gore Vidal audaciously places these two centers of American values-creation, the Constitution and Hollywood, in direct conversation.

Myra Breckinridge, upon publication, was at the center of controversy: is it pornography, or does it contain any redemptive artistic or social value? Some, famously including conservative critic William F. Buckley, publicly denounced it as pornographic, but whether Buckley acted out of genuine concern or part of his personal vendetta against a rival remains ambiguous. A more generous view on the novel's supposedly pornographic elements firmly roots them in traditional political satire such as Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*, which also uses sexual deviancy as a metaphor for political overreach.

We fetishize the Constitution; *Myra Breckinridge* is a snarling critique of fetishism; therefore *Myra Breckinridge* can be read as a critique of the Constitutional obsession that we bind ourselves to. Is the Constitution indeed a living document? If so, it can be changed at will, just as Myron becomes Myra and becomes Myron again when it is economically and socially advantageous to do so: Vidal critiques such malleability at the same time as he celebrates it. The Constitution was supposed to enable American people to live freely, without fear of oppression. Vidal dares to present a vision of what that would actually look like. Notably, it's now out of print.

Ken R. Hanssen—Nord University, Bodø, Norway

Marlowe v. Brass Knuckles: Constituting Law in Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye*

Raymond Chandler's 1953 novel *The Long Goodbye*, his sixth featuring private investigator Philip Marlowe, arguably transcends the hardboiled genre in literary merit, some critics even deeming it "one of the most important novels in the history of American literature" (Gifford). When a distraught friend appears on his doorstep at night asking for help, Marlowe obliges and drives him across the border to Tijuana. Upon returning to Los Angeles, he is brought in by the cops for questioning and, exercising his constitutional right to remain silent, is summarily subjected to a beating. "He read that law book," one of the detectives muses to the other. "Like a lot of people that read a law book he thinks the law is in it" (41).

In the Greek historian Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War, the Athenian envoys to Melos famously affirm that "in the human realm, justice is enforced only among those who can be equally constrained by it, and that those who have power use it, while the weak make compromises" (5.89). That Marlowe should immediately brush up against habitual police brutality as such involves something more than a critique of the investigative practices of the LAPD; it opens on the larger and enduring question of the ontological and epistemic status of the Bill of Rights.

Over the course of Marlowe's investigations, everything from the petty infraction of street-level hustlers to the massive corruption of the out-of-sight rich, is considered against the question of how power is constituted in American society. To Marlowe, "Crime isn't a disease, it's a symptom," something ultimately inherent to (and indeed a desired effect of) a late-stage kratocratic capitalism for which the rule of law is but a convenient fiction impressed on a venal and acquiescent citizenry.

Richard Hardack—Independent Scholar

First as Alternative History, Then as Reality: Philip K. Dick and Corporatist Fascism in US Culture

Mussolini declared fascism should "be called corporatism because it merges state and corporate power." In this paper, I use Philip K. Dick's 1963 novel *The Man in the High Castle*, and his relatively obscure 1964 essay "Nazism and *The Man in the High Castle*" (in which he asserts Americans identify with "the war guilt of the Germans because they're so similar to us") to suggest the US effectively lost World War II and the Cold War. As Dick's alternative history seems to become actual history, the putative winner appropriates the loser's terminology in corporatist terms. Dick's assertion that the Nazi regime never ended was an exaggeration, but it does help locate a teleology that leads to corporatist fascism.

Dick, however, did not seem to believe in, or perhaps always experience, linear time. In his *Valis* novels and Exegesis, Dick repeatedly asserts the (Roman) Empire never ended, and that an authoritarian regime resides beneath our present facade. Of course, Orwell similarly admonished that the allies began to resemble what they defeated. In many ways, such inversions underpin much of US history. Langston Hughes asks, "who said the free / Not me," but having that Emersonian "not me" or Other in the equation is a structural necessity. That is, the issue is not just that the US initially promulgated Constitutional freedom for propertied white men while insuring inequality for everyone else, or that it periodically makes legitimate progress toward being more inclusive: it's that American freedom remains ontologically predicated on its "not mes," or economic and racial reifications and perpetuations of its opposite.

One context for how the US was overtaken involves the conceptual and linguistic processes of corporate takeovers (an outcome that Don DeLillo repeatedly narrativized). Chemical Bank, e.g., takes over Chase Bank, but retains the "conquered" name. As Žižek notes, there's a "market for brand names. If an old company with a recognizable name goes bankrupt, its name can still be sold." A similar process occurred at the end of the Cold War, as the U.S. first designated cabinet-level officials czars, a term imported from Soviet Russia, and soon started

calling itself the homeland, an often authoritarian designation. In other words, a victorious corporatized state took over the nomenclatures and politics of "bankrupted" totalitarian states.

Fiorenzo Iuliano—University of Cagliari, Italy

Once an outlaw always an outlaw: law, democracy, and the origins of the United States in William C. Williams' *In the American Grain*

This paper reads William Carlos Williams' *In the American Grain* (1925) as a critical intervention into the mythic and constitutional origins of the United States. By tracing the outlaw's role at the inception of American history, the paper analyzes the complex interplay of law, democracy, and dissent at the heart of the U.S. story.
Focusing on the opening chapter devoted to Eric the Red, in fact, I argue that Williams reframes American beginnings around the figure of the outlaw rather than the virtuous Puritan settler. Expelled by the Althing, Iceland's democratic assembly, Eric's transgression situates him outside law and society. His lawlessness, rather than democratic consent or divine mandate, becomes the engine of exploration and settlement in Greenland and, ultimately, America/Vinland. By beginning America's story with an outlaw, Williams destabilizes foundational narratives of liberty, collective consent, and constitutional order. The text invites readers to consider how national identity emerges not only from democratic ideals but also from acts of exclusion, defiance, and marginalization. This intervention resonates with late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Viking revivalism, which mythologized Norse ancestry as shaping American character. Williams, however, exposes the ideological construction behind such heroic narratives, highlighting the tension between law, sovereignty, and individual agency.
Framing the outlaw as a foundational figure also offers a lens for reflecting on contemporary challenges to U.S. democracy. If early American identity can be imagined through lawless defiance, Williams anticipates the paradoxes inherent in a polity that venerates popular sovereignty while simultaneously contending with exclusionary practices, illiberal impulses, and contested authority.

Jee H. An—Seoul National University

Constituting the US: Liberty, Property, and the Racial Foundations of the American Republic

This paper asks: *How did the racial and colonial logics of 1776 constitute the American concept of liberty, and how do these exclusions persist in contemporary understandings of*

freedom? I argue that the United States was constituted not merely through a declaration of liberty but through racialized and colonial frameworks that made such liberty intelligible. The events of 1776 mark not only political independence from Britain but also the creation of a new imperial subject: the self-possessed, white, male citizen whose freedom is inseparable from property and the systematic exclusion of Others. Revolutionary rhetoric and performative acts shaped both individual identity and the national imaginary, rendering liberty a theatrical and embodied practice. Drawing on Jay Fliegelman, I examine how these acts constituted the self and the nation simultaneously, illustrating that freedom was enacted, not merely declared. In a broader transatlantic context, Michael Warner and Patricia Williams demonstrate that the universality of "public" freedom depends on exclusion, while Anthony Bogues situates Enlightenment ideals of liberty within the structures of colonial modernity, showing how they define the human through racial difference. By placing 1776 within these global frameworks, the paper contends that America's constitutional founding re-enacts, rather than transcends, imperial logics: liberty and equality were structured through racial hierarchy, producing a polity that universalizes its exclusions. Ultimately, this paper argues that the rhetoric of freedom continues to sustain illiberal and imperial structures, shaping both historical memory and contemporary political discourse. At the same time, Black and postcolonial thought continually challenges and reimagines the meaning of liberty, offering alternative frameworks for understanding freedom that acknowledge its historical limitations and the ongoing work of inclusion and justice.

John A. Kirk—University of Arkansas at Little Rock

Cruel and Unusual: Race, Gender, Capital Punishment, and the US Constitution

Whether the Eighth Amendment's protection against the infliction of "cruel and unusual punishments" extends to capital punishment is a long and ongoing debate. For a decade between 1967 and 1977 there were no legal executions in the United States, although recent decades have seen a renewed dedication to the death penalty. As with many other constitutional issues, debates about capital punishment have examined how the constitution is interpreted and applied. The demographics of those executed is telling. According to *The Epsy File*, the most comprehensive list of the 16,047 legal executions in the United States that took place between 1608 and 2002, African Americans account for 48 percent of those executed, whites 42 percent, others 5 percent, Hispanics 3 percent, and Native Americans 2 percent. This reveals a significant racial imbalance in relation to the overall population. In terms of gender, the figures are even more striking: men account for 96 percent of those executed, women 4 percent. Studies on gender and the death penalty are far fewer than those on race and the death penalty, and those giving attention to intersectionality—how the death penalty applies to Black women—are fewer still. Part of the issue with the lack of finer grained studies about capital punishment is the bifurcation of scholarship into "top down" overviews that provide the bigger picture but miss the details and nuances of individual cases, and

individual case studies that lack the context of a bigger picture. This paper presents a case study of race, gender, and capital punishment in the southern state of Arkansas that includes both detail and context, and in so doing offers new insights and points toward new possibilities in the field.

Dean J. Kotlowski—Salisbury University, USA

Terminating and Restoring Wisconsin's Menominee Tribe: Indigenous and Government Responses to Assimilation Pressures

"The Menominee," Dwight D. Eisenhower declared in 1954, "have demonstrated that they are able to manage their assets without supervision and take their place on an equal footing with other citizens of Wisconsin." So said the president of the United States as he approved legislation to terminate the federal trust status of the Menominee in order to ease the tribe's integration into the wider American mainstream. The termination policy of the 1950s was born, in part, of the optimism postwar conservatism: Americans generally, and American Indians specifically, would flourish socially and economically once freed from government strictures or, in the case of Indians, federal wardship. Eisenhower congratulated the Menominee on "the impressive progress they have achieved" and their "growing self-reliance." Yet freedom from federal control meant added burdens on the Menominee economy and growing opposition to integration among American Indians. "We don't want to be like the Negro who wants to be your equal," one Menominee asserted. "We are a different race." The Menominee mobilized to demand restoration of the tribe's federal trust status, which happened in 1973. The Menominee Restoration Act (1973) was, the Native American Rights Fund averred, "a symbol for all Native Americans" that the U.S. government "can be used as a tool to preserve Indian culture." The Menominee Termination Act (1954) represented the opposite approach.

The Menominee termination and restoration underscores the economic challenges, and the political agency, of Indigenous peoples during a time of ostensible prosperity and racial integration. It illustrates the disconnect between the government officials who draft policies to promote a sense of national belonging and the minoritized populations which must endure them. In 1965, Constance Deer (Menominee) blamed her tribe's desperation and impoverishment on the termination policy of Dwight Eisenhower, whom she accused of theft and genocide. Shocked, the former president brought her complaints to Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall, who confirmed that the "Menominee Indians are experiencing many problems and much hardship." The discontent in Deer's letter fueled the Menominee's movement for Indian self-determination.

Navneet Kumar—Mount Royal University, Calgary

Constitutional Contradictions: Racialized Power and the Enduring Illiberalism of U.S. Democracy

This paper theorizes the persistence of illiberalism in the United States, situating racialized exclusion as a structural and enduring feature of ostensibly liberal democratic institutions. Drawing on Charles Mills' *Black Rights/White Wrongs* (1997), Derrick Bell's *Silent Covenants* (1992), and Mari Matsuda's critical race scholarship (*Looking to the Bottom*, 1987; *Words That Wound*, 1993), it argues that U.S. democracy operates through normative frameworks that simultaneously espouse equality while sustaining hierarchical social orders. Mills' critique highlights the racialized foundations of liberalism, showing how constitutional principles, legal rights, and procedural guarantees have historically coexisted with the subordination of Black communities, revealing the limitations of formal equality as a mechanism for substantive justice (*Black Rights/White Wrongs* 50–55, 123–26). Bell's notion of "silent covenants" demonstrates how elites contain reforms—legal, political, or constitutional—to preserve entrenched hierarchies, making victories often symbolic rather than transformative (*Silent Covenants* 4–7, 241–46). Matsuda extends this analysis by emphasizing how law can both reproduce inequities and serve as a site of contestation, highlighting the importance of centering marginalized voices to expose and challenge structural injustice ("Looking to the Bottom" 363–64; *Words That Wound* 23–25).

The U.S. Constitution, often celebrated as the guarantor of liberty and equality, is understood here as a site of both promise and contradiction. Constitutional provisions and amendments—from the Three-Fifths Compromise to the Reconstruction Amendments—formalize ideals of equality while codifying exclusions and constraints that have historically marginalized Black communities and other minoritized groups. Landmark interventions, such as *Brown v. Board of Education* and postwar civil rights legislation, are thus framed not as endpoints of justice but as mediated reforms that redistribute, rather than dissolve, racialized power. Contemporary challenges—including executive overreach, voter suppression, threats to judicial independence, and constraints on press freedoms—demonstrate the adaptability of these illiberal structures and the ongoing operation of "silent covenants" within both legal and political institutions.

By synthesizing Mills, Bell, and Matsuda, this paper emphasizes that illiberalism is constitutive, not incidental, to American democracy. Legal, constitutional, and procedural frameworks operate within bounded norms that regulate inclusion and exclusion, sustaining racialized and hierarchical social orders. The paper analyzes both historical and contemporary political crises, revealing the limits of procedural democracy and offering a theoretical lens for understanding the enduring structural and normative logics of U.S. illiberalism.

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Hamid Masfour—Sultan Moulay Slimane University, Morocco

Indigenous reactions to U.S. constitutional frameworks of sovereignty and land rights: The case of Tommy Orange's *There There* (2018)

This paper sheds light on Indigenous reactions to constitutional frameworks concerning sovereignty and land rights from the perspective of Tommy Orange's *There There* (2018). Highlighting urban Native experience in Oakland, the novel unfolds a polyphonic narrative deeply embedded in histories of dislocation, dispossession and the denial of treaty-guaranteed rights. I argue that *There There* addresses a couched critique of U.S. constitutional law's failures to sustain tribal sovereignty by fictionalizing the enduring effects of the factual historical federal policies such as removal, allocation, and urban relocation. While the characters' efforts to claim space in the city underscore persisting struggles for recognition beyond reservation boundaries, the novel reflects the legal and territorial disintegration enforced upon Indigenous nations through its disjointed narrative structure. Integrating Native American and Indigenous Studies scholars (e.g., Simpson; Rifkin; Barker), besides representative cases like *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832) and *McGirt v. Oklahoma* (2020), the paper deals with Orange's novel as a cultural literary work that foregrounds the discord between the constitutional respect of sovereignty and its practical renunciation in federal Indian law. By reading *There There* against the constitutional configurations that regulate land rights, I demonstrate how Orange both records what Gerald Vizenor calls Indigenous "survivance" within a context of legal removal and suggests substitute modes of sovereignty that continue in intergenerational, urban, and collective practices of belonging.

Zbigniew Mazur--Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin

The Border as Constitution: Cinematic Imaginaries of Sovereignty and Exclusion in American and Polish Film

This paper examines how contemporary American and Polish films and television dramas reimagine the border as a constitutional threshold—where the legal fictions of sovereignty, citizenship, and human rights are tested, suspended, or redefined. Drawing on U.S. productions such as *Sicario* (2015) and *No Country for Old Men* (2007), alongside Polish works like *Wataha* (*The Pack*, HBO Europe, 2014–20), and *Green Border* (Zielona granica, dir. Agnieszka Holland, 2023), the paper explores how each national cinema visualizes the tension between constitutional ideals and the state's exercise of border control. While American films situate the border as a site of internal contradiction—balancing constitutional rights with security imperatives—Polish productions expose the emergence of a "fortress Europe" ethos that mirrors American border militarization and constitutional ambivalence. Through comparative textual and visual analysis, the paper argues that both cinematic traditions function as arenas of *cultural constitutionalism* (Kahn, 1999), where legality, morality, and belonging are negotiated through affect, space, and spectacle rather than through juridical discourse. By foregrounding how cinematic representations of refugees, migrants, criminals, border guards, and law enforcement officers embody competing constitutional imaginaries, the study contends that film participates in the ongoing reconstitution of the U.S. and Poland as moral and political projects. In both contexts, the border becomes a mirror reflecting the fragility of constitutional democracy.

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Ida M. Olsen—University of Agder, Kristiansand

Cats and the Constitution

As humanity's environmental footprint deepens, mounting evidence points to an ongoing mass species extinction event caused by human activity. While biodiversity loss is often associated with distant, exotic ecosystems and charismatic megafauna, the epicentre of extinction is arguably located in suburbia—those suburban spaces directly linked to consumerism and the neoliberal economy. To trace the drivers of biodiversity loss, one might first attend to the ecological consequences of middle-class life and the cumulative effects of automobile dependence, residential development, and garden pesticide use. Or perhaps what we really should consider in order to understand species loss is the *keeping of domestic cats*.

Proceeding from the idea that cats are both witnesses to and makers of history, this paper explores the relationship between domestic cats, biodiversity decline, and suburban experience within the context of present-day American society. Using Jonathan Franzen's

writings and (anti-)cat activism as a case study, the paper will hone in on representations of suburban life that illustrate the American middle-class subject's growing awareness of and unease about anthropogenic – as well as *feligenic* – destruction of the natural world. This awareness partly manifests as a realization that middle-class faith in constitutional values is entangled with a way of life that undermines the conditions necessary for both ecological and democratic flourishing.

By portraying species extinction as a form of slow, invisible violence embedded in the routines of suburban life – and in the keeping of cats – Franzen's work reveals how the threat of environmental collapse destabilizes foundational ideals of permanence, freedom, and justice. The paper argues that Franzen's work not only critiques the ecological impact of suburban consumerism but also suggests that the American constitutional project is itself imperilled by the environmental crisis.

Gabriele Pisarz-Ramirez—Leipzig University, Germany

Dangerous Spaces: Constituting (In)Security in Literary Spatial Imaginations of the US-Mexican Border

One of the key principles underpinning the constitution of the United States is freedom. Scholars of American Studies have observed that over the past two decades, beginning with September 11, 2001, the narrative of freedom and democracy has increasingly been replaced by the narrative of security. Debates about security and the supposed threats to Americans - from terrorists, criminals, migrants – dominate large parts of the public discussion; at the same time affects and narratives of insecurity and vulnerability have also increased. While security-related spatial and ordering politics have attracted critical attention in the past years, the reflection, translation or questioning of these processes in literature has so far been under-researched. This paper examines fictional texts that negotiate (in)security on different spatial scales, arguing that literary texts can function as a form of aesthetic counter-archive that challenges dominant narratives of security, citizenship, and national belonging. Focusing on the US-Mexican border, it discusses two books: Octavio Solis' *Retablos: Stories from a Life Lived Along the Border* (2018) and Daniel Peña's novel *Bang* (2018). The characters in Solis' collection face precarity not only in material deprivation- scarce resources, unstable work— but also in the affective and cultural vulnerabilities produced by racism, linguistic marginalization, and social exclusion. Peña dramatizes the border as a site where militarized checkpoints, deportation systems, and narco-controlled zones render migrants' lives disposable within overlapping state and non-state logics of violence. Yet both texts also gesture toward alternative imaginaries of security that resist the border's exclusions and envision community beyond the nation-state.

Ingunn Røysland—Skigymnaset (Setesdal vidaregåande skule, avd. Hovden, Norway)

'Run into the arms of America': U2 & the Ambiguity of The Promised Land

U2 have always had a deep fascination with America, from childhood years, into adolescence and adulthood. As a child, Bono saw America as The Promised Land; a place in which everything was possible. This view manifested as he was nine years old, and Bono heard about Neil Armstrong setting foot on the moon. U2 first experienced the USA as young men while touring the country in 1980. However, over the course of time Bono's view of America changed, and the innocent perception of the United States was to be replaced with a more nuanced view, seeing it both as an ideal and as a country in its own right. The colliding aspects of the 'two Americas' are particularly addressed on *The Joshua Tree* album and on *Songs of Experience*. In this paper, I will focus on the ambiguity of U2's relationship with America, taking a closer look at 'American Soul' addressing America as an *ideal*. I will also be focusing on U2's artistic responses to American foreign policy in Central America, and how the global reception of America and the violation of America as an ideal has disappointed U2 from abroad. In addition, I will touch upon gun violence and the implicit critique of The Second Amendment in relation to the murder of John Lennon. On *The Joshua Tree* album, both 'Bullet the Blue Sky' and 'Mothers of the Disappeared' act as critique of American military interference and support of brutal regimes in Central America. Both songs are inspired by Bono's first-hand experiences with American brutality based on his and Ali's visit to Nicaragua and El Salvador. Above all, these songs address the violence inflicted upon the people of Central America. 'Bullet the Blue Sky' describes brutal eyewitness accounts of 'fighter planes / Across the mud huts where the children sleep' (ll. 29-30) whereas 'Mothers of the Disappeared' pays homage to the mothers whose children have been 'cut-down and taken from us [them]' (l. 2). These acts of violence stand in stark contrast to Emma Lazarus' poetic image of America as a welcoming mother, ready to embrace the 'huddled masses / yearning to breathe free' (ll. 3-4).

Claudia Sadowski-Smith—Arizona State University

Refugee Narrative and the Reimagining of U.S. Belonging

This paper examines fiction by U.S. authors Aimee Phan, Aleksandar Hemon, and Héctor Tobar that is set in the 1980s and 1990s to argue that contemporary refugee narratives compel a rethinking of U.S. citizenship, inclusion, and belonging amid shifting legal and cultural regimes. Each text centers figures that U.S. migration law does not recognize as "refugees": mixed-race Vietnamese children evacuated under humanitarian parole (HP) before the passage of the 1980 Refugee Act; a Bosnian migrant who receives Temporary Protected Status (TPS) after arriving at the outset of the Bosnian war; and a Guatemalan displaced by civil war yet denied formal refugee status.

Together, the novels trace how U.S. entanglements in Vietnam, Guatemala, and Bosnia helped generate these migrations and how U.S. migration law then shaped the context of refugees' arrival and integration. By highlighting nonrecognition and temporary status, they expose how legal labels arbitrarily distribute access to housing, employment, legal stability, and upward mobility. The texts point to the proliferation of temporary protections since the 1990s and anticipate the growing vulnerability of such statuses to executive action since the mid-2010s.

At the same time, they chart the difficulties of refugee adaptation to preexisting ethnic and racial communities, showing how trauma and divergent politics fracture diasporic cohesion and structure incorporation into U.S. racial hierarchies.

Formally, the fictions' distributed, networked structures mirror transnational social worlds and insist that narrative can register broader patterns of forced mobility beyond narrow legal categories. Read together, they propose a comparative framework encompassing the forcibly displaced who lack official status, those culturally understood as refugees though never legally named as such, and those granted temporary protections. Ultimately, these works demand a recasting of belonging as a negotiated, relational practice rather than a status bestowed by the state.

Tim Saunders—Volda University College, Norway

Constitutional Architecture

One way of visualising and assessing what a constitution is and what it does is through the language and practice of architecture. This approach would at any rate seem to be especially conducive to an analysis of the United States Constitution, whose mathematical, geometrical and other structuring rhythms, principles and forms have frequently been observed. It invites us to consider, for instance, the process of that constitution's composition and the realisation of its final form in terms of the building in which it was created (the Pennsylvania Statehouse) and to enquire into the material instantiation of its institutionalised routines by studying the design of the US Capitol and other federal buildings.

In this paper, I wish both to adopt and to address this practice of analysing the US Constitution architecturally. I will illustrate, on the one hand, how its association with different architectural styles reflects and makes possible different understandings of what this constitution is and what it can (or should) do. But I will also highlight what might be at stake in the very use of architecture as a constitutional metaphor in and of itself. Taking my cue from President Trump's executive order, "Making Federal Architecture Beautiful Again," of 28 August 2025, in which he demands a return to a more classically inflected style, I will treat the US Capitol Building as a representative of the classically inflected understanding of how the United States Constitution is built and intended to operate. In direct competition with this, I will sketch out the call for a different style of constitutional order and a different compositional approach to the task of repairing and rebuilding we find in Amanda Gorman's poem "The Hill We Climb," which was itself delivered in front of the Capitol a mere two weeks after its storming in 2021 by Trump's supporters. To throw my account of these two projections of the architecture of the Constitution into relief, I will compare them with examples of federal buildings that have eschewed the traditional classical forms. But most of all, I will assess them in the light of the criticism Walt Whitman offers in his poem "As I sat alone, by blue Ontario's shore" of the very practice of conceiving of a constitution as a building at all.

Abigail Shupe—Colorado State University, Fort Collins

Softening the Imperial Blow: 9/11's Musical Memorials during the Global War on Terror

The orchestral work *On the Transmigration of Souls* (2002) by composer John Adams conveys the trauma of 9/11 and its aftermath. Commissioned and premiered by the New York Philharmonic, it was initially well-received. Since then, however, it has been criticized for its political vacuousness. In this way, its reception resembles criticisms of the 9/11 Memorial & Museum in New York City. As in the musical work, the memorial-museum's politics have received negative press. These memorials confronted the same ethical challenge: to create space for public memorialization while meeting dominant political expectations. Both were created against the backdrop of the Global War on Terror.

I use musical and cultural theory to compare Adams's *On the Transmigration of Souls* with the 9/11 Memorial & Museum. Following James Herbert (1999), juxtaposing the structure of the physical memorial-museum alongside the aesthetic features of Adams's piece reveals the interdependence between identifying Americans as victims yet entitled to righteous vengeance. Both the memorial-museum and the music reproduce what Erika Doss (2010) calls a "unified narrative of national innocence." Such narratives inspire intense sentiments that remove the demand for national or political culpability while supporting calls for retaliation. In the Museum and orchestra piece, the names of victims, phrases from victims' phone calls, and other texts appear without adequate context. I argue that the *Transmigration* creates the perception of innocence that, in turn, allows 9/11 deaths to be manipulated for the purposes of American militarism. In Adams's piece, 9/11 becomes a tragedy remembered through a lens of personal trauma without reference to either prior historical context or post-9/11 U.S. foreign policies. Focus is instead directed to individual Americans' deaths. Yet attempts to appear apolitical in fact implicitly endorse a unified narrative of nationalism with the United States as victim. Ultimately my work shows how aesthetic choices in memorializing 9/11 have ethical consequences that support American imperialism and militarism.

Oksana Starshova—Petro Mohyla Black Sea National University, Mykolaiv, Ukraine (British Academy Researchers At-Risk Fellow, Pembroke College and Faculty of English, University of Cambridge)

Cartographies of Exclusion: Migrant Re-Mappings of the "American Dream" in Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers*

The U.S. Constitution's preamble, with its promise to "promote the general Welfare" and "secure the Blessings of Liberty," projects a national space of equal opportunity. For the 21st-century migrant, however, this constitutional ideal is mediated not by legal text alone, but by the deeply unequal geographies of the American city. This paper employs a spatial-migration

studies framework to analyze Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers*, arguing that the novel exposes a fundamental recalibration of the US Constitution by mapping the disjuncture between America's constitutional self-image and the lived, spatial reality of its marginalized newcomers.

The paper traces the journey of the Jonga family from Cameroon as they navigate New York City – a potent symbol of the American Dream. Moving beyond a mere narrative of struggle, the analysis frames New York as a polyphonic text where the migrant's identity is constituted through a constant negotiation with exclusionary spaces. The opulent, yet alienating, interiors of the Upper West Side and the Hamptons occupied by the Edwards family are contrasted with the Jongas' precarious, transient dwellings in Harlem. This spatial dichotomy reveals how social and legal hierarchies are physically inscribed onto the urban landscape. The paper further examines how functional spaces – the immigration court, the chauffeur's seat of a car, the kitchens of the wealthy – become sites where legal status, labor, and personhood are disciplined, challenging the constitutional guarantees of liberty and justice.

Ultimately, the Jongas' decision to voluntarily return to Cameroon represents a profound spatial act. It is not a failure, but a rejection of a constitutional promise that has proven spatially contingent. By choosing to leave, they reclaim agency over their own narrative, re-constituting their identity outside the exclusionary cartography of the American Dream. This paper concludes that Mbue's novel uses the migrant experience to critique a 21st-century America where the constitutional project is faltering, its ideals fractured by the very spaces meant to embody them.

Hilde Løvdal Stephens—University of Oslo

Gay Rights on the Front Range: The 1990s Culture Wars over City Ordinances in Colorado

This paper examines the build-up to and fallout over Amendment 2 in Colorado. In the early 1990s, Colorado Springs was at the center of a tense debate over gay rights. In 1991, an evangelical coalition in the city launched a campaign to stop civil rights ordinances in the state. Colorado Springs, often referred to as the "Evangelical Vatican" or "Jesus Springs," was rapidly becoming a hub of evangelical political and cultural activity as a growing gay rights movement was achieving city-wide civil rights ordinances in places like Aspen and Denver. Seeking to halt this development, evangelical activists marshaled in 1992 enough support in a statewide referendum to void such ordinances. It was not just a matter of Colorado politics, however. This was a test case for an evangelical legal movement that sought to launch similar referenda nationally. The Colorado Springs case, then, illustrates how local, state, and national politics play into discussions over American civil rights and provides the historical context to ongoing battles. The Alliance Defending Freedom (orig. Alliance Defense Fund) is a case in

point. The group was launched in the wake of the referendum by, among others, James Dobson, a key player in the campaign for Amendment 2, and is now at the forefront of the legal campaign to pick apart civil rights protections for LGBTQ Americans.

Randall J. Stephens—University of Oslo

Reds under the Bed: Conservative Protestants, Race, and Anti-Communism

This paper will examine how the anti-communist crusades of white evangelicals, fundamentalists, and pentecostals led to politicization in the postwar years. Large protestant denominations like the Southern Baptist Convention, with approximately 12 million members in the 1960s, focused greater attention and called for action against Red subversives at home and communist threats on the mission field abroad. Such institutions were also growing dramatically in the postwar era, just as more liberal and left-leaning protestant churches were declining in membership and influence. This paper therefore asks how the urgency of anti-communist campaigns helped conservative denominations and groups gain ground. It will look at the work of evangelical organizations like Christian Crusade (Tulsa, Oklahoma), Christian Anti-Communism Crusade (Long Beach, California) and the American Council of Christian Churches (Collingswood, New Jersey) and analyze how these rallied the faithful and fused right-wing theology, anti-democratic values, and conservative politics. Anti-communist stalwarts came together in opposition to the civil rights movement, the federal government, the liberal establishment, and ecumenism. Anti-communism was one of the most striking ways that believers entered the political realm, especially in the postwar years. When evangelicals joined ranks against a "godless," red menace, participated in anti-communist church campaigns, or read the countless articles, books, and pamphlets that rolled off their church presses, they were laying claim to a particular vision of the country and its future. Laypeople and prominent evangelists like Billy Graham willingly lent their support to politicians and public figures—Ronald Reagan, J. Edgar Hoover, and Barry Goldwater among them—who most adamantly opposed the spread of communism at home and overseas.

Fabrizio Tonello—University of Padua

Donald Trump's place in the authoritarian traditions of in American life

Before Donald J. Trump, at least four other leaders of a similar mold appeared on the American scene in the twentieth century: Father Coughlin, Charles Lindbergh, Joe McCarthy, and George Wallace. Their political careers show that authoritarian and violent impulses are an integral part of American political life, producing at least one leader of national stature in

every generation (five would-be dictators in the ninety years between 1926 and 2016 when Trump was elected for the firste time).

In 1950, the literary critic Lionel Trilling wrote that liberalism was "not only the dominant intellectual tradition; it is the only one. It is a fact that there are no conservative or reactionary ideas in circulation today." The opposite was true: conservative or reactionary ideas not only exist now, for instance in reports by the Heritage Foundation or in Donald Trump's odd, nocturnal ramblings on social media, but they also existed in the 1950s, when writer Ayn Rand celebrated selfishness and economist Friedrich von Hayek taught at the University of Chicago, not to mention Senator Joe McCarthy. Antisemitism was present in the 1930s with Charles Lindbergh, while xenophobia and racism have run throughout American history, periodically demonstrating their strength and persistence. Trump's hostility toward science, authoritarian impulses, and political use of religion were already evident in the Prohibition movement at the end of the nineteenth century. This paper will attempt to show how authoritarian traditions have always existed in the United States; Donald Trump has simply "liberated" them.

María Luz Arroyo Vázquez—UNED (The Spanish National Distance Learning University)

Raising Voices and Awareness: Women's Struggle for Equal Rights in the U.S.A.

This paper reflects on how gender equality has been dealt with in the US throughout its history. This work intends to shed light on contemporary American women voices who have become relevant leaders in the struggle for getting equal social and political rights.
This work refers to their critiques and their demands for changes in legislation since those modifications can encourage women's empowerment and challenge unjust situations. The 19th Constitutional Amendment recognized women's voting right after more than one hundred years of struggle and in 1923, the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was proposed in Congress to protect full equality for women. However, to date there is still work ahead so that American women can participate in political and social fields in equal terms.
Few American women have reached high-ranking offices in the political sphere. In 1968, Shirley Chisholm exposed in her speech "Equal Rights for Women" that women faced systemic discrimination, especially in the workforce, and advocated to end it. She wondered why it was "totally unacceptable for them to be managers, administrators, doctors, lawyers, and Members of Congress" and argued that prejudice against women remained widely accepted, much more than racial discrimination stating: "I have been far oftener discriminated against because I am a woman than because I am Black." This discriminatory situation has not changed much in the political sphere since then. In 2025, women are still underrepresented in high-level appointments and in the US House of Representatives there are only 125 women (not including four women who serve as non-voting delegates), which means that women only occupy a low percentage, 28.7% of 435 seats.

In conclusion, this work invites to reflect on the work and messages conveyed by outstanding American women figures who have claimed for legislation to secure gender equality and promote political progress of women.

Sabrina Vellucci—Roma Tre University

Constituting Freedom: Phillis Wheatley and the Reimagining of US Citizenship in Honorée Fanonne Jeffers's *The Age of Phillis*

Writing in the years preceding the drafting and ratification of the U.S. Constitution, Phillis Wheatley (c. 1753-1784) engaged Enlightenment ideals – liberty, reason, and natural rights – that would later serve as rhetorical cornerstones of the new republic. Yet, as an enslaved African (young) woman and the first African American to publish a book of poetry, Wheatley occupied a position structurally excluded from the political subjectivity the Constitution would claim to enshrine. This paper examines the tension between the founding ideals of the US Constitution and the racial and gender exclusions embedded within its formation, as refracted through Wheatley's neoclassical poems and Honorée Fanonne Jeffers's 21st-century poetic reimagining of the author and her work in *The Age of Phillis* (2020). Wheatley's "America," "To the University of Cambridge," "On Being Brought from Africa to America," and her verse addressed to figures like "General Washington" or the "Earl of Dartmouth" perform an early negotiation of American identity at the intersection of race, faith, and Enlightenment reason. Her appeals to Christian universality and moral equality operate within, yet subtly critique, the ideological framework that would soon be codified in the Constitution. Jeffers' poem sequence reconstitutes Wheatley's
silenced archive, recentering the enslaved Black young woman poet as a constitutional thinker in her own right, and rewrites the foundational statement of subjectivity in the Constitution – "We the People" – to include those subjects historically written out of its premises. Wheatley's neoclassical poetics, read in conversation with Jeffers' contemporary re-visioning, demonstrate how poetry can become a mode of constitutional interpretation/critique, exposing the limits of American democracy and the intersectional exclusions embedded in its founding text.

Christa Wirth—University of Agder, Kristiansand

Anthropology and the Constitution: A History of Sexuality, Race, and the Colonial Philippines around 1900

After the Spanish-American war of 1898, the Philippines fell to the United States thereby consolidating the latter's overseas colonial ambitions. What unfolded was a debate in the U.S. public surrounding the role of the U.S. in the Philippines. The Philippine intellectual elite, the

ilustrados, argued in vain that self-governance was a core principle of the American Revolution and the U.S. constitution and that these rights also applied to the Philippine people who should cultivate their own national sovereignty. These publicly voiced interventions made by Filipinos were dismissed and the Philippines was colonized by the USA until 1946, albeit with a brief hiatus during World War II. In this presentation, I will for one highlight the *ilustrados*' reading of the constitution for a U.S. public. More importantly, I will illuminate how U.S. anthropologists created scholarly knowledge by which they infantilized and sexualized the colonial subjects in the Philippine Islands, with the effect of impeding the Filipinas' and Filipinos' right to self-government. With this form of *Orientalization*, self-government for the Philippine Islands could be pushed into an indefinite future.