

Call for Papers for WLA’s “Gateways, Crossroads, and Turning Points to and from the West” panel at the 2024 American Literature Association Meeting (Chicago, May 23-26)

The West is a region shaped by movement. Manifest Destiny’s call for westward expansion and popular rejoinders like “Go West, young man” have created lasting associations with the frontier, adventure, and national growth. To borrow Jodi Byrd’s phrase, this “transit of empire” also witnessed the continuous and violent encroachment onto Indigenous lands in North America and beyond. Today, cities like St. Louis and Omaha (both nicknamed “Gateway to the West”), Salt Lake City (“Crossroads of the West”), and Fort Worth (“Where the West Begins”) claim some kind of stake in narratives of western movement. But this region associated with boomtowns and boundless growth is increasingly subjected to the stark realities of climate change: increasing temperatures, drought, and fire. Broadly, this panel invites papers that consider where the West might yet be heading and at what costs.

Proposals for presentations working outside of single disciplines are especially encouraged, as are those that embrace an expansive definition of “texts.” All proposals will be considered, but specific interest will be shown to those that address one or more of the following:

- Cities marketed as passageways to the West: St Louis, Salt Lake City, El Paso, etc
- The Great Migration to western cities like Chicago, Detroit, Oakland, Los Angeles, and Seattle
- Forced removals and Indigenous diasporas, such as the Trail of Tears or Navajo Long Walk
- The frontier as a shifting boundary
- Transnational connections between the West and U.S. empire
- Effects of climate change on the Western ecosystems
- Genre approaches to climate crisis in Western literature and film

For consideration for this panel, please submit an abstract (250-400 words) to Travis Franks (travis.franks@usu.edu) by **DECEMBER 31, 2023**. Current membership with WLA is not required in order to submit a proposal, though all presenters must be current members by the time of the conference.

The Western Literature Association is an affiliated organization of the ALA, and I will be proposing that the panel be submitted as the WLA’s guaranteed panel for the meeting.

The American Literature Association’s 35th Annual Conference will meet at the Palmer House Hilton in Chicago from May 23th through May 26th, 2024 (Thursday through Sunday of Memorial Day weekend).

For further information about the American Literature Association conference, please consult the ALA website at <https://americanliteratureassociation.org/ala-conferences/ala-annual-conference/>