

American Literature Association
May 21-24, 2025
The Westin Copley Place, Boston, MA

The Richard Wright Society announces two sessions on Wright to take place at the 36th Annual American Literature Association Conference.

Roundtable: Richard Wright's Contributions to Postcolonial Studies

In his introduction to *AfroAsian Encounters: Culture, History, Politics*, Vijay Prashad tells the story of how Richard Wright came to attend the historic Bandung Conference in 1956 and declares that his book on Bandung, *The Color Curtain*, “inaugurates our tradition of AfroAsian studies” (xi). Bill Mullen calls Wright “a founding member of ‘postcolonial’ studies,” noting that he first used the term in *White Man, Listen!*. Wright was also the first author to invoke the term “Black Power” in 1954, a full decade before it became the rallying cry for militant Black activists in the US frustrated by state violence and the slow progress of the nonviolent civil rights movement.

More than a decade before Wright fled the US for Paris in 1947, he adopted an internationalist perspective connecting Black freedom struggles in the US to anticolonial movements in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Although he remained active from afar in the US civil rights movement, he was a central figure in European anticolonial circles, publications, and conferences—aspects of his life and work that remain under-appreciated and understudied.

The Richard Wright Society invites proposals that address the relevance of Wright's connection to anti-colonial struggles and postcolonial history for us today. Topics may include but are not limited to the following:

- His engagement in intellectual/political networks
- His involvement in anti-colonial activism and organizations
- The impact of the politics of publishing on his career
- Interpretations of his writing from 1947 to 1960
- His impact on postcolonial studies

Panel: Richard Wright: Tracing Roots of Fascism

During the period of emergent fascism in the 1930s, Richard Wright's fiction traces fascist leanings in unexpected places, depicting black male protagonists, such as Bigger Thomas from *Native Son* and Jake Jackson from *Lawd Today!*, who imagine a Fuhrer-like solution to their problems. In "How Bigger Was Born," Wright explains that the allure of fascism extends to disenfranchised workers across racial lines. Within a modern capitalist society, "[a]ll Bigger Thomases, white and black, felt tense, afraid, nervous, hysterical, and restless" (xix), and seek a "way out" (xx). Wright grasps how fascism can be attractive to the "dispossessed and disinherited," appearing as an alternative to the "status quo," and offering a sense of "doing something" against a hostile world. Similarly, in "Memories of My Grandmother," *12 Million Black Voices*, and his introduction to *Black Metropolis*, Wright theorizes reactionary responses to social alienation. Like many on the Left during this time, Wright saw fascism not as some foreign aberration, but as an organic expression of capitalism in crisis.

The Richard Wright Society invites paper proposals addressing Wright's views of fascism and its appeals. This may include Wright's responses to the movements for fascism and authoritarianism in the mid-20th century, as well as his broader understandings of the complex subjective, social psychological, and ideological reasons for the support towards elements of fascism among common people, including the oppressed—and how that appeal can be countered, through literature and political struggle.

Abstracts of 250 words for either the roundtable or the panel should be submitted by January 20, 2025, to WrightSociety@gmail.com. Please include a short bio and indicate if you would require any audio/visual equipment.