

THE AMERICAN LITERATURE SOCIETY
CALL FOR PAPERS
37th Annual American Literature Association Conference
May 20-23, 2026 | Chicago, Illinois
The Palmer House Hilton

In arguably her most famous poem, “We Real Cool” (1959), the African American Pulitzer Prize winning poet Gwendolyn Brooks centers Black male subjectivity within mid-twentieth century urbanity. With Chicago as her literal and metaphoric backdrop, Brooks’ poem highlighted a familiar struggle between Black boyhood and America’s racial absurdity. Instead of leaning into the convenient questions of responsibility and deviance, Brooks instead asked, “I wonder how they feel about themselves.” Her inquiry not only gave language to an otherwise muted or silenced Black interiority, it also broke open a discourse for the reader and the world to note and understand Black boys or men as sentient subjects, as beings who *felt* things in and about the world. Brooks’ poetic wander echoes with other writers who were interested in capturing and thinking through how Black male subjects negotiated their lives and conceptions of themselves in a fraught world.

Considering Gwendolyn Brooks – the longtime Chicago native – as inspiration, the American Literature Society (ALS) invites abstracts for papers for the American Literature Association Conference (<http://americanliteratureassociation.org/>). Papers might explore themes of Black boyhood/manhood and its orientation to American spatialities – urban, rural, imaginative; grapple with works featuring similar concerns like Richard Wright’s *Native Son*, Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*, James Baldwin’s *If Beale Street Could Talk*, et cetera; or that center questions about Black male interiority and feeling as a foundational American query. ALS is also open to papers that raise other critical conversations surrounding Black manhood and masculinities in American literature, film, and culture.

Please send abstracts (250 words or less) or questions to Ernest Gibson (elg0036@auburn.edu) by **January 25, 2026**. Accepted proposals will be acknowledged by January 30th. Graduate students and independent scholars are also encouraged to apply. With your submission, place **American Literature Society Panel** as the subject line, and include your name, institutional affiliation (if any), and your email address within the body.