

Freedom: Independence & Sovereignty in the Americas

MALAS 2026 - 76th Annual Conference - October 23-24, 2026
Colorado Mesa University, Grand Junction, Colorado

The Midwest Association for Latin American Studies invites proposals regarding genealogies of freedom, independence, and sovereignty in the Americas to trace their legacies and ongoing reconfigurations across Latin America and the Caribbean. Independence was not simply declared from above; it was lived from below through the actions of soldiers and militias, urban workers and rural laborers, women who sustained and subverted political orders, enslaved and free Afro-descendant populations who seized on the contradictions of liberal ideology, and Indigenous communities who pursued their own survival and sovereignty on their own terms.

As the United States approaches the 250th anniversary of its independence, this moment invites critical reflection. Situating the United States as one experience among many, rather than as the singular model of modern self-determination, invites critical and comparative understanding of how freedom, independence, and sovereignty have been defined, debated, and reimagined across the Americas. Much like the fight for freedom and independence in the United States, Latin America followed similar trajectories: prolonged conflicts, fragile alliances, and competing visions that gave rise not to a single founding moment, but to a series of uneven, disputed, and regionally distinct ruptures. The Haitian Revolution, for example, still epitomizes struggles for political sovereignty, inseparable from tensions over race, labor, bodily autonomy, and the meanings of freedom across the hemisphere.

Efforts to articulate continental unity—such as the Congress of Panama in 1826—also underscore both the possibilities and limits of postcolonial coordination in the face of internal divisions and external pressures.

Today, scholars challenge traditional narratives about revolutionary wars in the Americas and the social consequences of processes of nation building and modernization. They have opened new pathways for more inclusive histories that foreground Indigenous and Afro-Latin cultures, as well as studies on the growing political and social representation of women and LGBTQ+ individuals in shaping national and regional identities. At the same time, activists have identified state officials as agents of environmental destruction. Thus, in so doing, they affirm the rights of people and communities to govern their natural resources according to local needs, knowledge, and sustainability, as reflected in anti-mining movements, Indigenous land claiming, and struggle over climate policies in island nations. Therefore, the 76th MALAS conference aims to rethink conceptions of freedom and independence, and to broaden established notions of sovereignty to include often overlooked voices, marginalized agencies, and environmentalism. We invite academics, students, independent scholars, practitioners, and artists to exchange ideas about intra-regional and inter-regional cooperation in order to enhance cultural understanding and build social tolerance throughout the Americas and beyond.



www.malasnet.org

Call for Papers

The Midwest Association for Latin American Studies invites participants to revisit the meanings of freedom, independence, and sovereignty in ways that move beyond conventional definitions and make space for voices, experiences, and concerns that are too often excluded. This includes attention to marginalized communities, alternative forms of agency, and environmental questions that shape life across the Americas. Scholars, students, independent researchers, practitioners, and artists are encouraged to contribute perspectives on regional and cross-regional exchange, with the goal of strengthening cultural understanding and encouraging greater social tolerance within the Americas and beyond. Open to all disciplines, the conference will offer a varied forum for dialogue on ***Freedom: Independence & Sovereignty in the Americas***.

Areas of Scholarship

MALAS is an interdisciplinary organization and welcomes papers on a variety of Latin American topics such as Regional Organizations, Immigration, Environmental Studies, Sustainable Development, Gender Policy, Migration, Caribbean Affairs, Social Justice & Human Rights, Democratic Processes, Latinos in the U.S., Culture and Identity, Free Trade Agreements, Economic Policies, Indigenous Peoples, Latin American Cinema, Political Science, Country Studies, Natural Resources, US-Latin American Relations, International Relations, Literature, Art, Music, Contemporary History & Landscape, New Technologies, Architecture and Urban Studies, and Regional Economic Integration, among others.

Format of Submission

Abstracts should define the subject and outline the argument to be presented at the conference. The content of the presentation must be the product of original research related to the people, places, and things of Latin America. Each submission should have a title, a 250-word abstract, and your contact information. It should also specify the type of participation (Individual Paper, Panel, or Workshop) and language of presentation (Spanish, Portuguese or English). After acceptance and at the time of registration you may choose whether to present in-person or virtually. This is a hybrid conference. In the case of an organized panel session, all presenters should be either in-person or online.

Types of Participation

Presenters are expected to attend the annual conference either virtually or in person to present at the scheduled session(s) on October 23-24, 2026.

Individual Papers: Abstract for individual papers may be submitted for consideration. The accepted presentations will be organized into sessions by the conference organizers.

Panel Sessions: Organized panel sessions may involve a minimum of three and up to five panelists in the presentation and should include discussion of content, and materials. Panel sessions may address a multitude of topics about Latin America, as the MALAS conference is multidisciplinary and international in nature. Presenters are encouraged to collaborate with colleagues and professionals from different campus units/offices and/or with colleagues from other institutions for greater consideration. Potential presenters should submit their papers individually and not as part of a panel per se; the committee selecting the papers will determine in what day and time slot to place the panel.

Workshops: A workshop provides an opportunity for the presenter(s) to involve participants in interaction, including hands-on activities and discussions. These sessions should include the presentation of appropriate material and allow ample time for participant engagement, discussion, and action planning, as appropriate. Workshop submissions are expected to include a chair and have no more than four (4) total presenters including the chair of the session.

In addition, there will be invited speakers, panel discussions, and cultural activities.

Important Dates

August 14: Deadline to submit proposals

September 18: Notification of acceptance

October 2: Registration and payment due

October 23-24: Dates of the conference

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