WLA, We Have a Problem:

Engineering the Future of U.S. West Studies



Local Host: Rice Professor José F. Aranda, Jr., President WLA 2027
Conference Site: Houston Marriott Medical Center/Museum District

Call for Papers

WLA, We Have a Problem: Engineering the Future of U.S. West Studies will convene scholars, writers, and activists to tackle the historic challenges facing humanities education broadly across the subfields that comprise today's US West Studies. The conference title takes off from the famous "Houston, we have a problem" statement beamed to NASA from outer space some 55 years ago. A sudden and potentially catastrophic problem had arisen that threatened the Apollo crew, required immediate address, and ultimately changed the mission. Like Apollo 13, the "crisis of humanities" has been pointing us to problems where lives and minds and the future of many missions are at stake. Showcasing Houston as a global city, this conference answers the moment of historic challenge with aspirations to engineer not just a safe return from peril but with a mission to build the future differently.

To navigate the future of WLA and U.S. West Studies, the conference invites work that addresses where peoples, places, and histories continue to be the foundation of humanistic study: the arts. These arts include literature but so too the visual arts, music, cinema, television, architecture, and photography. Anywhere cultural producers ask us to wonder about the world or encourage us to ask questions about our shared environment can bring new knowledges. Those communities most vexed by the issues of the day shed light on the imagination as a site of hopefulness, a broad space to be more than the sum of our disputes, disagreements, disappointments.

To take on the mission of Engineering the Future of US West Studies, WLA 2027 welcomes proposals that reflect both the gravity of our times but also aspire toward a better world to come. We encourage proposal for papers, panels, roundtables, lightning rounds, structured conversations, and other formats that explore any of the themes listed above or on the following topics.

—The New Silent Majority: Feminists and Feminist Solidarities

—Indigenous cultural production and activism in conservative states

—After a Day Without a Mexican What Comes Next?

—What if Juneteenth was celebrated every day, starting in Texas?

—Imagining queerness and queer spaces post-MAGA

—Emerging pedagogies on reproductive justice

—Any aspect of the public arts in the US West that challenge settler imaginaries

—New or experimental forms of literary expression that expand notions of self and environment

—Narrative in any medium that chronicle climate awareness through extreme events

—Community solidarity through activist protest, witnessing, reporting, testifying

—Re-engineering the classroom in an era of A.I.

—Book clubs as insurgent sites of knowledge production alongside Citizen Readers

—Data Centers, Library Closings, and Book Bans

—Reimaging humanist education as separate from the corporate university

—Redefining what separates the urban from the rural in the US West

—The Moon, Mars and beyond: The challenges/opportunities of the next Space Frontier

—ICE, Immigration, and Brownness

—Joy and Counter-Cultures 2.0