



UNIVERSITY OF GRAZ
Graz School of Interdisciplinary
Transnational Studies



CALL FOR PAPERS

Camps, Belonging, and Abolition Democracy

The 3rd Graz/Puerto Rico International Conference on Human Rights
from an Inter-American Perspective

June 4-7, 2026

University of Graz, Austria

(Deadline for Abstracts: January 19, 2026)

The international conference “**Camps, Belonging, and Abolition Democracy**,” which is co-sponsored by the **Center of Inter-American Studies** (of the Graz School of Interdisciplinary Transnational Studies) at the **University of Graz** and the **Institute of Caribbean Studies and the Department of English** at the **University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus**, offers a forum for graduate students, scholars, writers, practitioners, human rights advocates, as well as formerly incarcerated people, to come together to consider the relationship between questions about belonging and the use of various types of camps and related sites of enclosure in conjunction with restrictions of rights and movement. Special attention will be given to the ways in which scholarly inquiry and creative work in the Humanities, Social Sciences, and legal studies can contribute to the formation of a productive framework that problematizes carceral technologies and assists in protecting human rights and liberties.

When W.E.B. Du Bois first used the term “abolition democracy” in his work *Black Reconstruction*, he reimagined the period immediately following slavery in the United States and urged readers to envision radical new social order that could be achieved through a reliance on a host of democratic institutions. More recently, Angela Y. Davis has engaged his work as a grammar for radical change in works such as *Abolition Democracy; Beyond Empire, Prisons, and Torture*, and in doing so identified three distinct forms of abolition: abolition of slavery, abolition of the death penalty, and abolition of the prison.

With an eye on reconfiguring assumptions about bondage and carcerality, the arguments of both of these scholars assist in navigating connections between past, present, and what can be. They underscore the need of critiquing social, cultural, and economic practices as well as ideological dispositions, in order to better understand and respond to the logic of camps and

the realities that people subjected to confinement in camps and similar spaces have often experienced, such as fear, loss, isolation, dispossession, structural racism, deportation, solitary confinement, torture, physical and mental abuse, the denial of due process, and the ravages of war.

The concerns centered here traverse events such as the confinement of people of African ancestry in barracks, indentured servitude and other forms of forced migration, Japanese internment in the U.S., the Viet Nam War, U.S. military operations at Guantánamo Bay, the detention of asylum seekers in Cuba and Puerto Rico, the corporatization of migrant detention, the detention of migrants on ships, and the construction of camps at the U.S. southern border, *among many others* which remain under-documented. In light of recent events associated with the criminalization, detention, and deportation of migrants to serve political optics, disrupt lives, and shake up geopolitical orders, the insights of Dubois, Davis, and other scholars stand out as a bridge that can stimulate the imagination at the same time that it helps to forge pivotal and necessary connections.

Race, gender, and their intersections are also relevant to the dialogues and types of exchange that this conference seeks to cultivate, as they operate as aspects of identity and personhood that make people, including those who are already marginalized, subject to what Ruth Wilson Gilmore refers to as “aggressively punitive” forms of government that target people internationally. This is clear in the history of the Americas where numerous groups have been confined in camps and identified as illegal, non-belongers, or threats to security. In response to this and similar dynamics, the conference embraces what the Caribbean scholar Rinaldo Walcott, one of the confirmed keynote speakers and author of *The Long Emancipation*, calls “a new humanism.” Observing that emancipation is not freedom, Walcott offers a forward-looking argument that the attainment of freedom for Black people will transform the human experience globally.

Our generous lineup of keynotes includes not only academics, but also writers and award-winning human rights leaders. Graz is an opportune setting for this type of exchange given its status as the first Human Rights City in Europe and consistent support for initiatives that pursue social justice. In the first two conferences in this series, former detainees from Guantánamo Bay and Manus Island discussed their experiences in detention camps, their emergence as human rights advocates, and the memoirs and other works that they have written about their experiences. This third iteration of the conference will build on these contributions, featuring some familiar faces alongside those of additional artists, researchers, writers, and, of course, poets.

While proposals from all fields are welcome, the organizers anticipate ample participation from the following fields: Inter-American studies, Caribbean studies, literary studies, cultural studies, legal studies, critical prison studies, critical discourse analysis, sociocultural analysis, history, anthropology and sociology. Participants are encouraged to frame their work as critical interventions that assist others in better understanding camps, carcerality, and the present social order at the same time that they contribute to envisioning, describing, and building new networks, structures, and modes of thinking and creation. The planning of an array of activities

that will enrich the experience of participants is underway. These will be posted on the conference website (www.campsconference-graz.com) as they are confirmed. Publication opportunities will be announced shortly after the conference.

Abstracts of 200-350 words for 20-minute presentations or panel proposals consisting of three to four participants should be submitted to camps2026@uni-graz.at by **January 19, 2026** along with a biography of 100 words or less. Proposals for presenting poetry, art, film, and other creative work will also be considered. The languages of the conference are English and Spanish, and abstracts are welcome in both languages. Topics suggested for discussion include but are not limited to:

- Solidarity, dialogue, and the reconstruction of institutions
- Education, creative writing, and testimony in camps, jails, and prisons
- The past and present of Guantánamo Bay's camps and migrant detention operations
- Language of (non)belonging, the homeland, and political discourse
- Race, prison literature, and human rights law
- Expressive culture in the context of encampment, captivity, and movement across borders
- ICE, due process, and citizenship
- Abolitionism, the politics of care, freedom, and legal personhood
- Camp-based resistance (art, hunger strikes, writing, legal action)
- Borders, biometrics, biopolitics, security, and media representations
- Filmic representations of Guantánamo Bay, the War on Terror, and deportation
- Prisoner of war, migrant, and refugee camps in the Caribbean
- Mass incarceration's genealogical links to slavery, war, and empire
- Migrants outside camps and shifting dynamics of criminality and persecution
- Memoirs, essays, and poetry by former detainees, prisoners, immigrants, and activists
- Past and present sites of inclusion, sanctuary, and refuge
- Public memory projects and archives of witness and abolition
- Truth and reconciliation commissions in the Americas (and global context)

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