

## **Presentation & Panel Abstracts for American Philosophical Society April 2026 General Meeting**

### **A Global Perspective on the Health of Democracies**

**Thomas Carothers**

*Director, Democracy, Conflict, and Governance Program*

*Harvey V. Fineberg Chair for Democracy Studies*

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Democracies worldwide are grappling with rising illiberalism, alienated citizens, and uncertain political futures. Why are so many different democracies across highly varied regions suffering in similar ways? A close look at the global political landscape reveals a complex causal picture, with economic, technological, and socio-cultural forces mixing with new political ideologies and methods. Although certain overarching causal factors exist, regional and national particularities are of equal importance.

### **The “Re-Declaration” Project**

**Johanna Drucker**

*Distinguished Professor and Breslauer Professor Emerita, Department of Information Studies*

University of California Los Angeles

How can the Declaration of Independence be re-imagined in a 21st century context? This talk describes the challenges posed by this question in the course of developing the concept, design, and implementation of the “Re-Declaration Project” included in the APS exhibit commemorating the 250th anniversary of this founding document. Included are details on the graphic research, the printing of an edition in the same dimensions as the John Dunlap 1776 original, incorporating elements from Mary Katherine Goddard’s 1777 version, and hand-drawing a frame inspired by John Binns’s 1817 steel engraving. The talk concludes with discussion of the reworking of the text through the use of conceptual writing practices.

### **A Complicated Heritage: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the 1848 ‘Declaration of Sentiments’**

**Lori Ginzberg**

*Professor Emeritus of History and Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies*

Penn State University

Elizabeth Cady Stanton was the founding activist-intellectual of the 19<sup>th</sup> century movement for women’s rights. Her analysis of the wrongs done to women ranged broadly – including the denial of their personhood and rights in education, marriage,

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politics, law, and religion – but she has come to be known, in part through her own doing, for the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention and its “Declaration of Sentiments.” “All men and women are created equal,” she declared, thus embracing the nation’s most sacred text and insisting that women had been excluded from its promises. But Stanton’s insistence that the nation live up to its stated ideals by including women had its less radical, hopeful side, which Stanton suggested long before the Daughters of the American Revolution, a patriotic organization of the lineal descendents of Revolutionary soldiers, declared itself the legitimate heirs of the nation’s founding generation. Nativism, elitism, and racism pervaded Stanton’s earliest claims to full membership in the nation, reflecting the complicated nature of national belonging itself.

### **Lincoln and the Declaration**

**Allen C. Guelzo**

*Professor of Humanities*

*The Hamilton School of Classical and Civic Education*

University of Florida

For Abraham Lincoln, the American Revolution was the central event of American history as he knew it. The Declaration of Independence became the primary element in his understanding of the Revolution, and he began deploying it in his speeches and writings from 1854 onwards, after the national embarrassment of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. It remained the fundamental authority to which he appealed time and again during the Civil War. He was less successful in reconciling the Declaration with the Constitution, especially since the Civil War pushed him into a number of legally-dubious executive actions. Lincoln struggled with an even greater measure of uncertainty concerning the author of the Declaration, Thomas Jefferson.

### **Darwinism And The Making Of Modern Mexico**

**Rosaura Ruiz Gutiérrez**

*Head of the Ministry of Science, Humanities, Technology, and Innovation*

Government of Mexico

The nineteenth century transformed not only biology but the temporal structure through which societies understood themselves. Evolutionary thought displaced teleological explanations of life and established a secular conception of historical change. This lecture explores how that transformation reshaped political imagination in modern Mexico.

## **Presentation & Panel Abstracts for American Philosophical Society April 2026 General Meeting**

From the positivist reception of Darwinism in the 1870s to revolutionary and postrevolutionary state-building projects, evolutionary categories structured debates over hierarchy, progress, race, and social reform. Adaptation, fitness, and improvement became tools for conceptualizing both stability and transformation. Competing political actors mobilized the same vocabulary to justify divergent visions of national development.

The persistence of evolutionary language across ideological ruptures demonstrates that Darwinism operated as a conceptual framework of modernity rather than as a fixed doctrine. Scientific categories became instruments for organizing political legitimacy within a secular historical framework.

The Mexican experience invites broader reflection on how scientific theories shape collective temporal imagination and participate in the construction of modern nationhood.

### **Science In The Era Of AI: An Evolutionary Perspective**

**James C. Liao**

*President of Academia Sinica, Taiwan*

*Distinguished Professor Emeritus*

University of California Los Angeles

AI has evolved from rule-based systems to deep neural networks and large language models, marking a shift from quantitative scaling to qualitative transformation. By compressing iteration cycles, scaling to billions of parameters, and integrating intentional design with reinforcement learning, AI accelerates evolution beyond natural processes. This lecture argues that AI constitutes a new evolutionary force reshaping science and society, and that its development must be guided not only by technical rigor but also by empathy, ethical alignment, and enduring human values.

### **Interpreting the Revolution in 2026**

**Cynthia MacLeod**

*Retired Superintendent of Independence National Historical Park*

National Park Service

How to make "history" interesting to a broad audience; how to engage successfully with the public? Independence National Historical Park strives to connect its place-based stories with visitors and provoke curiosity at least 360 days every year. Scholars, writers,

## **Presentation & Panel Abstracts for American Philosophical Society April 2026 General Meeting**

and actors craft exhibits and tours that are designed to bring to life the people and events of the American Revolution, and they consistently earn high satisfaction from the public. Ironically, however, more media attention has been drawn to an exhibit that was removed from the park in January 2026 than when the exhibit was opened to the public in 2010. The President's House Site exhibit was born out of a controversy of how to interpret the site and has risen in this Semiquicentennial year to be a flashpoint in how to interpret the complex history of the founding of the nation.

### **Promoting Knowledge From Learned Societies Across The World Sir Paul Nurse OM CH FRS**

*President*

The Royal Society, London

*Honorary Life President and Principal Group Leader*

Francis Crick Institute

Science shares many common characteristics wherever it is practised in the world, including the need for reliable coherent evidence, rational thought and courteous debate. But the 'flavour' of scientific inquiry, the topics studied, and the emphasis on discovery or application, can vary from country to country and in different cultures. There are benefits in this variety, which can be enhanced to everyone's advantage by international interactions that can be promoted by Learned Societies and Academies.

### **Science Before and After the Rupture Sudip Parikh**

*Chief Executive Officer*

American Association for the Advancement of Science

*Executive Publisher*

*Science Magazine*

The disruption of the international framework over the past two years has been described by Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney as a "rupture not a transition." That description could just as easily describe the last two years in American science and how it relates to the world. Though an incredible engine of discovery, innovation, and prosperity the scientific enterprise was not perfect before the rupture. Scientists, policymakers, and the thoughtful public have much to gain by ensuring that what comes next continues to improve the lives of Americans and the world. This will not be easy and there are many risks, but learned societies have an important role to play.

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April 2026 General Meeting**

**We The People 250 Years Later: A National Conversation On Freedom And  
Equality**

**Scott Rasmussen**

*President*

RMG Research

*Founder*

Napolitan Institute

**Spencer Baim**

*Head of Brand, Creative, and Marketing*

Jigsaw

At a time of deep passion and conflicting narratives in America's body politic, the Napolitan Institute and Google's Jigsaw partnered together to discover how AI might help 2,500 Americans have a conversation in which all voices could be heard, considered and listened to at the same time. By creating a digital space designed for deep personal reflection and productive deliberation, The *We the People* project challenged the prevailing narrative that we are a nation hopelessly divided by irreconcilable differences. The Napolitan Institute founder Scott Rasmussen and Jigsaw's Spencer Baim discuss what they learned by bringing together Americans from every congressional district in the country into a conversation around Freedom and Equality.

***Wheelock Variations***

**Charles Shadle**

*Senior Lecturer, Composition & Theory, and Music History*

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

**Alexander Lassa**

Guitar

Guitarist Alexander Lassa and composer Charles Shadle present *Wheelock Variations: The Choctaw Hymn Tradition in a Contemporary Context*, a concert that celebrates both musicians' tribal identity as enrolled members of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

The central work on the program is Shadle's *Wheelock Variations*, a 25-minute work for solo guitar, commissioned by Lassa, that is based on "Vba Isht Taloa 139" (Choctaw Hymn 139). The title of *Wheelock Variations* references the historic Wheelock Academy near Millerton Oklahoma/Choctaw Nation, and the nearby Wheelock Church. Both bear

## **Presentation & Panel Abstracts for American Philosophical Society April 2026 General Meeting**

the name of Eleazar Wheelock (1711–1779), Congregational minister and founder of Dartmouth college, and an important advocate for the education of Native American people. Wheelock Academy was established by the respected early missionary to the Choctaws, Alfred Wright (1788-1853), who founded the school in 1832. He and his congregation built the stone Wheelock Church in 1845–46. Very much in the severe style of the New England country meeting house, it is the oldest church building in Oklahoma. It has recently been returned to the ownership of the Choctaw Nation.

In part, Wheelock Variations memorializes this event, while also engaging, through musical means, with the complex history of the place and its people. Wheelock Variations can be heard as an act of cultural preservation that understands that the past, in order to stay viable, must be continually reimagined, so that it remains accessible to both Choctaw and non-Choctaw listeners.

### **Angry Populist Politics: Why it is Happening and What to Do About It Ian Shapiro**

*Sterling Professor of Political Science and Global Affairs*  
Yale University

The explosion of populist politics across the democratic world over the past decade is rooted in (i) structural economic changes that have been underway since the 1970s, most importantly wage stagnation and the disappearance of long-term employment security; (ii) geopolitical changes, most importantly the disappearance of communism as a serious threat to capitalism; and (iii) decisions made by leaders of mainstream political parties, most importantly in response to the financial crisis of 2008 and its aftermath. Shapiro will elaborate on these causes and discuss the implications for rescuing and revitalizing democratic politics going forward. The talk draws on Shapiro's forthcoming book [\*After the Fall: From the End of History to the Crisis of Democracy. How Politicians Broke our World\*](#) that will be published by Basic Books in May, 2026.

### **Will America's Constitutional Democracy Survive? Rogers Smith**

*Christopher H. Browne Distinguished Emeritus Professor of Political Science*  
University of Pennsylvania

In 1976, Professor Robert Bork addressed the American Philosophical Society on the topic, "Will American Democracy Survive?" Fifty years later, the nation's deep divisions have raised that question again, as well as fears that American may become a kind of

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April 2026 General Meeting**

“populist” democracy, unconstrained by constitutional limitations. Professors John Yoo and Rogers Smith will bring contrasting conservative and liberal perspectives to the question of the future of American constitutional democracy, seeking both to clarify differences and identify any common ground.

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