



German Historical Institute
Washington, D.C.

“Representing Poverty: American and European Perspectives”

Conference at the German Historical Institute, Washington, DC

March 13 - 14, 2009

Organizers: Anke Ortlepp (German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C.), Christoph Ribbat (University of Paderborn, Germany).

This conference invites historians, literary and cultural critics, and journalists to discuss representations of poverty in contemporary North America and Europe. The focus rests on the United States and Germany, two societies marked by – albeit very specific – forms and discourses of poverty in recent years. The conference organizers hope to establish a dialogue between academic perspectives on the subject and contributions by writers, filmmakers and photographers.

The guiding questions of the project concern a central issue in American and German cultural history: the problems and the potential of documentary work on the poor since the 19th century. A number of significant studies have analyzed the narratives of the poor critically. Scholars have exposed both the problematic ideologies underlying photographic and journalistic representations and the complex theoretical questions raised by the rhetoric of authenticity.

This conference suggests a more pragmatic approach to poverty and its representation. How effective, this project asks, are visual and verbal narratives of poverty in triggering social reform and/or cultural change? What possibilities and strategies exist, for photographers and journalists, to alert audiences to the issue of poverty? What can literary and cultural history contribute to the field? In how far do global perspectives challenge the very concept of poverty in the United States and Germany? The conference, the organizers hope, will establish a multi-faceted context for conversations of central importance in the contemporary US and in Germany.

Please send a proposal of no more than 500 words and a brief CV to Bärbel Thomas at B.Thomas@ghi-dc.org. The deadline for submission is August 31, 2008. Participants will be notified by the end of September 2008.

The conference will be held in English and focus on the discussion of pre-circulated papers of about 5,000 to 6,000 words (due by January 30, 2009). Cost of travel and accommodation will be covered.

Please send inquiries to one of the conveners: Anke Ortlepp (ortlepp@ghi-dc.org) and Christoph Ribbat (ribbat@mail.upb.de).