

YOUNG SCHOLARS FORUM

CROSSING THE ATLANTIC: EUROPEAN DIMENSIONS OF AMERICAN HISTORY

Seminar at the University of Texas, Arlington, March 31–April 2, 2005. Co-sponsored by the GHI, the University of Texas, Arlington and the Dallas Goethe Center. Conveners: Thomas Adam (University of Texas, Arlington) and Christof Mauch (GHI).

Mentors: Kathleen Conzen (University of Chicago), Christiane Harzig (University of Winnipeg), Frank Trommler (University of Pennsylvania).

Participants: Ian Chambers (University of California, Riverside), Reto Geiser (ETH Zurich), Andrew P. Haley (University of Pittsburgh), Michelle Henley (University of Cambridge), Lauren L. Kientz (Michigan State University), Friederike Kind (Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung Potsdam), Pascal Maeder (York University), Alistair S. Maeer (University of Texas, Arlington), Adam Mendelsohn (Brandeis University), Paul Petzschmann (St. Anthony's College), Emily Pugh (City University of New York), Julia Schaefer (University of Düsseldorf), Udo Schemmel (University of Frankfurt am Main), Stephanie Lynn Trombley (University of New Hampshire).

From March 31 to April 2, 2005, the GHI, together with the History Department at the University of Texas at Arlington and the Dallas Goethe Center, convened this year's Young Scholars Forum in Arlington. In the past, Young Scholars Forums have been held at the facilities of the GHI in Washington, DC. This time, however, the conveners entered uncharted waters by bringing this international graduate student workshop to Texas. Fourteen students from Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States came to Arlington to discuss their doctoral research among themselves and with distinguished scholars. Arlington was chosen as the site for this conference in order to allow these scholars to experience the academic setting of an American university.

The topic of this workshop invited a large number of submissions from a broad spectrum of doctoral candidates who work on various aspects of what is becoming known as transatlantic history. Ian Chambers and Alistair S. Maeer discussed ways in which Europeans and Native Americans attempted to map their environment. This opening panel on space and history set the tone for the entire workshop. A spatial turn, the importance of space for the construction of identity and the difference

between space and place, were topics that reemerged throughout the lively discussions. Space, however, is not always something concrete, visible, and clearly distinguishable. For Chambers, space is not a geographical location but "a meeting place or encounter zone" between European settlers and Native Americans. Identities, still considered cultural constructs, receive a new infusion by adding a spatial dimension. Cultural history, as it became clear during the event, remains the dominant approach in historical investigation (Kathleen Conzen), although older questions, as for instance the question about class, resurface. Andrew P. Haley's paper on "foreign fixin's" and class formation in American cities is a case in point. Ethnic cuisine, as became clear from his investigation, certainly contributed to the diversification of Americans' diet, and at the same time allowed the growing middle class, which was "eager to find its cultural identity," to "colonize the foreign restaurant," and thereby "transformed it into an institution that catered to the middle class." Historical inquiry into class seems to be in vogue again, considering that Sven Beckert just published his major book on New York's upper class. This newer generation of historians seems to have embraced E. P. Thompson's famous dictum that class does not exist but that class simply happens.

A number of papers dealt with travel and migration between Europe and North America. Pascal Maeder discussed the role of European expellees in postwar Canada. He argued that they became a "third force" next to the presumed French and British founding nations. Adam Mendelsohn discussed aspects of European Jewish migration to America during the formative period of the mid-nineteenth century. Lauren L. Kientz discussed the European travel experience of African-Americans between 1820 and 1860. In the decades before the American Civil War, wealthy Americans traveled frequently to Europe to pursue an academic education and to absorb Europe's rich cultural and social life. For African-Americans with some means, however, European travel provided much more: It brought them into a world in which they felt liberated from racism. Far from home, they were able to "become a part of the intellectual and artistic elite." A closer investigation of Americans' travels to Europe during the nineteenth century might hold a couple of surprises for us. Wealthy Americans enjoyed aristocratic societies and felt at home in cities such as Dresden and Berlin. They often praised the well-educated and reasonable German aristocracy and thus behaved much more like noblemen than as citizens of a republic. For African-Americans to feel liberated in a monarchy seems to turn the idea of a democracy on its head.

More than half of the papers dealt with intellectual transfers within the transatlantic community. Julia Schäfer studied the crossing of borders

of *Arbeitswissenschaft* and Taylorism during the first half of the twentieth century, and Paul Petzschmann discussed the role of Weimar-era political concepts in the United States. Emily Pugh investigated the transfer of what was deemed to be American-style architecture to West Berlin during the 1950s. She focused on the architectural competition between East and West for the reconstruction of Berlin. West Berlin's Hansa District and the Interbau 1957 exhibition were to provide a countermodel to East Berlin's Stalin-Allee. Ironically, what was then perceived as American architecture had been deeply grounded in the Bauhaus tradition and thus provides an excellent example of transatlantic intellectual exchanges that worked in both directions. In a similar vein, Reto Geiser emphasized the two-way intellectual transfer of Sigfried Giedion's architectural theories and his professional standing in both Switzerland and the United States. Intellectual transfer and the idea of transatlantic identity were also at the core of papers by Friederike Kind and Stephanie Trombley. Both analyzed political and cultural exchanges during the Cold War period. Kind discussed transnational communication between journalists in Central Europe, Paris, and New York. Trombley argued that the postwar concept of "Atlantic identity" was a prerequisite for the United States and the "free world" to meet their ideological commitments and construct a new role for the Federal Republic of Germany around 1950.

Looking at a much earlier time period, Michelle Henley focused on the German-speaking settlers of Ebenezer, Georgia. Henley pointed out that transatlantic advice and support from sister-communities in Germany played a role in the social and religious guiding and in the forging of identity of this particular eighteenth-century religious community. Likewise, Udo Schemmel compared institutional structures and studied influences between protestant churches in Germany and the United States throughout the early modern period.

The fourteen papers discussed at this workshop represent the many aspects of transatlantic history. Like every space, the transatlantic community is a constructed world, as Frank Trommler pointed out. It is constructed by the people who move around in this world: by politicians who emphasize the common values of the transatlantic community when it serves their political goals, and by political scientists and historians who write the history of this community. The concept of transatlantic history is still a very "fuzzy" one (Christiane Harzig) with regard to the timeframe, the spatial definition of the transatlantic world, and its character. What becomes obvious, however, is that the nation-state is no longer the "right container" (Harzig) to understand the life experience of people in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, the collapse of Eastern European nation-states in the wake of the 1989/90 revolutions, European integration and globalization cause scholars to rethink the character and

importance of national borders in people's lives. Nation-states are artificial constructs that have provided a framework for the organization of political, social, cultural, and historical organization. This does not mean, however, that individuals accepted these artificial borders and lived their lives inside these borders. Although we speak of the "wall in the minds" of East and West Germans today, the opposite concept of minds in which artificial national borders did not matter might be something historians could consider for the nineteenth century. Many questions and challenges remain and will certainly stimulate further debates. How do we conceptualize the moving of people and goods (art, technology, ideas) within the transatlantic world? The investigation of cultural transfers will certainly change our understanding of European-American relations. However, we first need to develop a language to describe these processes analytically. How does the meaning of goods change in the process of transfer, and what does this tell us about the sending and the receiving society?

Thomas Adam and Christof Mauch