Call for papers

October 22 – 25, 2009

Beyond the Racial State
Conference at Indiana University, Bloomington
Co-organized by Indiana University and the German Historical Institute Washington DC

Conveners: Devin Pendas, Boston College (pendas@bc.edu), Mark Roseman, Indiana University (marrosem@indiana.edu), Richard F. Wetzell, German Historical Institute Washington DC (wetzell@ghi-dc.org)

Rationale
Over the last fifteen to twenty years, an increasingly rich and diverse scholarship has identified the importance of racial thought in shaping the policy and practice of the Third Reich. Historians of diverse forms of social policy have emphasized the degree to which racial conceptions and categories came to complement or supplant existing norms and models. The emphasis on racial categories has also opened up awareness of different kinds of victims, most notably the mentally and physically handicapped and those whose allegedly “asocial” behavior the Nazis ascribed to innate weaknesses that threatened to undermine the Aryan race. Historians’ recognition of the discursive power and administrative reach of racial hierarchies has led them also to think about racial categories in the popular imagination, and to demonstrate ways in which the attitudes and outlook of ordinary Germans – be it as reproducers of healthy German babies, as foremen over racially inferior conscript workers or as perpetrators of Nazi violence – responded to and were refashioned by Nazi policy and propaganda.

Whilst the fruits of this approach have been significant, the dissemination of the notion of race has begun to be problematic, and to obscure the nature of the Third Reich as much as it illuminates it. The “racial state” paradigm risks reifying an epistemological category while losing sight of the instrumental and strategic function of much racial discourse. It suggests a cohesion and consistency to racial thought that was absent even on core questions. It blurs the distinction between specifically racial thinking and broader traditions of empire and nation-building that retained their force and acquired merely a racial discursive gloss. Nazi social policy sought to address general problems of social organization and class relationships that were being faced by other modern capitalist economies in this same period. Recent challenges to Foucauldian notions of biopolitics in
work on the welfare state in the Kaiserreich and the Weimar Republic are also challenging some of the claims of intellectual continuity that analyses of Nazi racial policy have relied on. Similarly, the emphasis on the racial state has a hard time connecting with what happened after 1945. The speed with which a whole body of racial ideas was discarded makes little sense if we really believe that a consistent and uncontested ideology was sincerely applied and implemented across the board in the 1930s and 1940s. Above all, there is a risk that the notion of the “racial state” paints a portrait of the Third Reich that is too coherent, homogenous and intellectually driven to be fully persuasive.

In short, it is time to revisit the notion of the racial state and to identify the limits of its explanatory power as a model for analyzing state policy, as a description of the Nazi intellectual universe, and as a way of describing the outlook and interrelationships of different social groups.

**Structure**

This conference will bring together established scholars from the United States, Germany and elsewhere with younger researchers in the field. Whilst the final outline will depend on the applications received, provisional section headings include:

- Race, ethnicity and nation in early 20th Century Europe
- Social policy and biopolitics from the Kaiserreich to the Third Reich: continuity and change
- Racial theory and racial policy: Jews + Mischlinge
- Racial theory and racial policy: crime and deviance
- Gender, race and class
- Racial ideas and practices of violence
- Race, *Volk* or nation?
- The strange death of race after 1945

**Process**

The organizers hope to cover travel and lodging for all participants. It is expected that an edited collection will follow the conference, which will not be a conference proceedings, but take as its starting point a selection of the papers. The organizers plan to work with the authors to produce a distinctive and coherent collection.

Please send a proposed paper title, an abstract (max 250 words/ 1 page) and a short (max. 2-page) CV by email to the three organizers listed above. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions. **Please submit your proposal by 15 September 2008.**