BOSCH FOUNDATION ARCHIVAL SUMMER SCHOOL FOR YOUNG HISTORIANS 2013
AMERICAN HISTORY IN TRANSATLANTIC PERSPECTIVE

Archival Summer School in Chicago, Madison, Boston, and Washington DC, September 1-13, 2013. Co-organized by the German Historical Institute Washington, the University of Chicago’s Department of History, and the Newberry Library, with the generous support of the Robert Bosch Foundation. Convener: Mischa Honeck (GHI). Participants: Gregg French (University of Western Ontario), Marco Härter (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich), Peter W. Lee (Drew University, New Jersey), Karin Hagen (Jacobs University, Bremen), Russell McKenzie Fehr (University of California, Riverside), Victoria Tafferner (Free University Berlin), Kyle T. Mays (University of Illinois), Ana Maric (Augsburg University), Nicolette Rohr (University of California, Riverside), Julius Wilm (University of Cologne).

Formerly known as the “Archival Seminar,” the Bosch Foundation Archival Summer School for Young Historians convened for the first time under its new name in September 2013. Once again the tour spanned four cities (Chicago, Madison, Boston, and Washington DC), and the ten seminar participants from Germany and the United States were introduced to the holdings and policies of a broad spectrum of American archives and research libraries. The goal of the seminar was to prepare doctoral students from both countries working in diverse fields of American history for their prospective research trips; to teach them how to contact archives, use finding aids, and identify important reference tools; and to help them gain a greater appreciation of the various kinds of archives and special collections located in the United States.

The Bosch Foundation Archival Summer School 2013 began with a walking tour of downtown Chicago on Labor Day, September 2. The following day was spent at the University of Chicago, where Professor Kathleen Neils Conzen hosted the traditional thesis workshop once again. The seminar participants, who had been grouped into five transatlantic pairs consisting each of one German and one American student, commented on the work of their respective partners, exposed their projects to academic scrutiny, and received valuable feedback from their peers and present faculty members. On Wednesday, September 4, the Seminar met Daniel Greene, Director of the William M. Scholl Center of American History and Culture at the Newberry...
Library, for a daylong introduction to the institute’s collections as well as for a general overview of American archival policies and practices. Among the topics discussed were the purchase of rare books, how to browse manuscript collections, the expedience of maps for historical research, and the opportunities and pitfalls of digitalization. On Thursday morning, before the group departed for Madison, Wisconsin, the group visited the Chicago Historical Museum. Archivist Peter Alter pulled some spectacular items from the museum’s archival collections to demonstrate the breadth of sources that can be used to do urban history.

Our first destination in Madison was the Wisconsin State Historical Society. Chief archivist Michael Edmonds welcomed the participants in the morning hours of September 9. He spoke about the history and holdings of their institution within the broader context of American state historical societies and impressed the students with the Wisconsin State Historical Society’s dedication to accessibility and public education. After that, time was set aside for individual research before the group reassembled at the local University of Wisconsin history department for a roundtable talk on the relationship of historical research and political intervention. Under the guidance of Professor Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, the participants weighed in on an innovative subfield, the study of emotions in history, making all kinds of connections to their own work. There was a general agreement that human feelings drive actions and impact decisions, although many voiced reservations as to how one could gain access to the emotional constitution of a specific historical subject beyond what is conveyed through language.

On Saturday evening, September 7, the group arrived in Boston, the third city on our itinerary. The following morning gave the seminar participants a chance to witness public history in action with a guided tour of the Freedom Trail. The rest of the day was free for individual exploration. On Monday, September 9, the Bosch Archival Summer School 2013 resumed at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library at Columbia Point. Enjoying a two-and-a-half hour tour of the museum and library archives, including the Ernest Hemingway Collection, under the supervision of Stephen Plotkin, the group benefited from staff presentations on audio-visuals, declassification, and the library’s manuscript collections and oral history program. The day concluded with a visit to the Baker Library Archives at the Harvard Business School. Katherine Fox, Associate Director of
Public Services, acquainted the students with the wealth of the Baker Library’s holdings, which touch upon almost every issue pertaining to the country’s economic development from an agricultural society to an industrial and postindustrial superpower. The Bosch Seminar returned to Harvard University the next morning. Our first stop was Schlesinger Library, one of the leading U.S. research facilities for women’s history. Head librarian Ellen Shea showed and explained letters, pamphlets, books, and visual material related to topics ranging from domesticity and black women to the female suffrage movement.

The final destination on our Boston schedule was Houghton Library, where Peter Accardo walked the group through the library’s precious Early Americana collections and gave valuable advice on how to use them for various research agendas.

After reaching Washington DC in the late afternoon of Tuesday, September 10, the Summer School continued the following day at the Library of Congress. A guided tour of the Jefferson Building was followed by a presentation from archivist Lewis Wyman, who spoke to the participants about the breadth of manuscript collections available through the Library of Congress Manuscript Division. The group then stopped at the Prints and Photographs Division, where Sara Duke and her coworkers had worked hard to gather illustration samples related to the participants’ individual projects, thereby underscoring the significance of visual material for historical research.

In the afternoon, the group was welcomed by Matthew Wasniewski from the Office of the Historian of the House, who gave the seminar participants a tour of the U.S. Capitol and explained the work of his office, which provides information on the history of Congress, as well as congressional documents and legislation, and chronicles its composition and individual members.

On Thursday, September 12, the group visited the Center for Legislative Archives at the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington DC. Historian Richard McCulley welcomed the group and introduced them to the structure of the National Archives and ways to access source material pertaining to the different branches of government. Next, Executive Director James Grossman and Interim Special Projects Coordinator Julia Brookins hosted a lunch for the group at the Washington bureau of the American Historical Association (AHA). They drew the students into a lively debate over the ethical stakes involved in the study and teaching of history, touching on issues of plagiarism, civility, access to sources, trust, and claims.
of truth. Following this fruitful discussion, the group met Ida Jones, curator at the Howard University’s Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, who introduced the participants to the Center’s remarkable array of collections on African American history and culture.

On Friday, September 13, the Bosch Archival Seminar 2013 put in a final stop at the Smithsonian’s National Museum for American History. Craig Orr, one of the museum’s veteran curators, spent time with the students to talk about ways in which everyday objects from the realms of technology to fashion can enrich historical research. In the afternoon, the group met for a wrap-up discussion at the German Historical Institute. They were greeted by Deputy Director Britta Waldschmidt-Nelson, whose presentation focused on the institute’s work, research projects, as well as the many fellowship and networking opportunities. The farewell dinner that evening concluded a very successful seminar, whose participants were extremely grateful for the useful information, contacts, and prospects for future collaboration that it opened up for them.

Mischa Honeck (GHI)