

14TH INTERNATIONAL
GRADUATE
CONFERENCE

July 1–2, 2021

Radical Possibilities!

PROTEST, CRISIS AND RESHAPING NORTH AMERICAN DEMOCRACIES



KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

REBECCA BRÜCKMANN
RUHR-UNIVERSITY BOCHUM

KHARY O. POLK
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John F. Kennedy Institute
for North American Studies

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GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF NORTH AMERICAN STUDIES

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

Radical Possibilities

Protest, Crisis and Reshaping North American Democracies

14th International Graduate Conference

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www.jfki.fu-berlin.de/gsnas2021

The past four years have seen repeated claims of “unprecedented times” in the United States and in North America generally.

Widespread protests over the police killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, growing far-right extremism, attacks on the institutions of democracy itself, and, of course, a pandemic have exposed and deepened societal divides. Yet, as with every crisis, it has also revealed the desire of the greater public to participate in and even radically alter the shape of political processes. The massive waves of social protests, the upswing in politically engaged art, and the intense debates that have dominated the media show that these divides have been taken up by the collective consciousness. Rather than deepening the divide, could this crisis offer radical possibilities?

While the election of Joe Biden and the premiership of Justin Trudeau might seem to foreclose the necessity of transformation in favor of reform, we are interested in exploring potential futures which go beyond a liberal common sense. From large-scale transnational activism for racial justice to smaller, community-based projects such as urban agriculture movements, possibilities for transformation seem to arise at all levels of North American society. How does crisis fuel these transformations? Is protest a necessary tool to apply pressure to stagnant institutions? How can the concept of democracy be adapted, or even reshaped, to account for the radical potential of these social movements? How can alternative visions be created through cultural and aesthetic practices, and what is their relationship to social change?

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THURSDAY, JULY 1

14:00

Opening Remarks by David Bosold, Managing Director of the Graduate School of North American Studies & Elizabeth Horst, Minister-Counselor for Public Affairs, US Embassy Berlin

14:15

Panel 1 – Who Speaks? Identities and Freedom in Public and Popular Discourse

Chair: Curd Knüpfer (Freie Universität Berlin)

- Naomi Smith (Birkbeck College, University of London): *Intersectional Identities & News Selection in US-based Television Newsrooms*
- Kristi Ulrike Schmidt (University of Groningen): *Caught in the Crossfire: Free Speech on Campus, the Negotiation between Rights and Values, and the Defense of a Legacy*

16:00

Panel 2 – Resistance and Reparations: Racial Justice and Democratic Futurity

Chair: Sebastian Jobs (Freie Universität Berlin)

- Selen Kazan (Technische Universität Dortmund): *A Transitional Justice Plan for the US: Truth and Reparations for African Americans*
- Anthony James Obst (Freie Universität Berlin): *“Without Force of Police”: Abolition(-Democracy) in W.E.B. Du Bois’s Black Reconstruction and Dusk of Dawn*
- Alexander Obermüller (University of South Florida/Universität Erfurt): *Raiford Brothers Protest: Prison Activism and Reform Debates in Florida*

18:30

Welcome Remarks by Frank Kelleter, Director of the Graduate School of North American Studies

Keynote 1 – Rebecca Brückmann (Ruhr-Universität Bochum): *#BlackLivesMatter: Historical Roots and Ruptures in the Black Freedom Struggle*

20:00

Networking Event

FRIDAY, JULY 2

11:00

Panel 3 – The Black Radical Imaginary: Afropessimism and Tempered Hope

Chair: Birte Wege (Freie Universität Berlin)

- Eva Puyuelo Ureña (University of Barcelona): *Hope as a Fatalistic Posture: Ta-Nehisi Coates and Afropessimism in the Black Lives Matter Era*
- Max Rhiem (Universität Tübingen): *“Shall a new civilization ... rise from the ashes?”: History, Hope, and Painful Progress in Charles Henry Holmes’s Ethiopia, The Land of Promise*
- Kristine Guillaume (University of Oxford): *“Toward Tomorrow”: Radical Revolution and Freedom Dreams in Assata Shakur and Ericka Huggins’ Prison Poetry*

13:00

Panel 4 – From the Ground Up: Community Organizing and the Remaking of Space

Chair: Myka Tucker-Abrahamson (Freie Universität Berlin)

- Marie Menard (Université Paris-Est Créteil): *Striking against the Odds: A North/South Comparison of Teacher Organizing in the USA (2012-2019)*
- Judith Keller (Universität Heidelberg): *We Not Moving!: Urban Social Movements and the Fight for a Place to Call Home*
- Yaakov Kobi Cohen (Freie Universität Berlin): *A Pipeline for Social Change: A Case for Environmental Struggles as Engines for Radical Native American Inclusion*

15:00

Panel 5 – The Use of Force: Rhetorics and Realities

Chair: Betsy Leimbigler (Freie Universität Berlin)

- Bohan Zhang (University of Oxford): *The John Birch Society: A Case Study of American Extreme-Right Politics*
- Marta Kobylska (University of Rzeszów): *Writing the 2019-2020 Persian Gulf Crisis: US Military Action against Iran*
- Natalia Botonaki (Universidad Carlos III Madrid): *Blue/Black: Considerations on Violence Based on 2020’s BLM Protests*

17:00

Panel 6 – Crossing the US Border: Spatial Limits and Liminalities

Chair: Tobias Jochum (Freie Universität Berlin)

- Julia Machtenberg (Ruhr-Universität Bochum): *Of Estrangement and Belonging: Reimagining US Space in Meena Alexander’s “Kabir Sings in a City of Burning Towers”*
- Paul Druschke (Technische Universität Dresden): *You Can Vote From Anywhere, Except: A Survey of Territorial Voting Rights in the United States*
- Debby Esmee de Vlugt (Leiden University): *“Black Panther Types on the Streets and Byways”: Transnational Black Power and the 1969 Curaçao Uprising*

19:30

Keynote 2 – Khary O. Polk (Amherst College): *Democracy, Fantasy, Race*

KEYNOTE 1



THURSDAY, JULY 1 | 18:30

Rebecca Brückmann:

*#BlackLivesMatter: Historical Roots
and Ruptures in the Black Freedom
Struggle*

Rebecca Brückmann is an assistant professor of North American history in its Transcultural Context at Ruhr-University Bochum. She completed her Ph.D. in modern History at the Graduate School of North American Studies at Free University Berlin in 2014 and has taught at the Universities of Cologne and Kassel. Her research focuses on North American sociocultural history, the history of the Black Freedom Struggle and white supremacy, and gender history in their entanglements. Her recent work includes articles on Black activism in the United States and white supremacist grassroots resistance, published in the South Carolina Historical Magazine and the European Journal of American Studies, and the monograph *Massive Resistance and Southern Womanhood: White Women, Class, and Segregation* (University of Georgia Press, 2021).

KEYNOTE 2



FRIDAY, JULY 2 | 19:30

Khary O. Polk:

Democracy, Fantasy, Race

Khary Oronde Polk is Associate Professor of Black Studies and Sexuality, Women's and Gender Studies at Amherst College. He is a cultural historian of the African American diaspora, a specialist in LGBTQ studies, and a scholar of race, gender, and sexuality in the U.S. military. Polk received his Ph.D. in American Studies from New York University, and teaches courses on race and the American imagination, military history, African American studies, Black European studies, Black sexuality, and queer theory. He is the author of *Contagions of Empire: Scientific Racism, Sexuality, and Black Military Workers Abroad, 1898-1948* (UNC Press, 2020). A child of an African American military family, his new book examines how the movement of Black soldiers and nurses around the world in the early-to-mid 20th century challenged U.S. military ideals of race, nation, sexuality and honor. *Contagions of Empire* was a finalist for the Organization of American Historians 2021 Lawrence Levine Prize, awarded to the best book in American cultural history. Polk also has written for the Studio Museum of Harlem, *The Journal of Negro History*, *Women's Studies Quarterly*, Gawker, and the journal *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*. He has also contributed essays to a number of queer of color anthologies, including *If We Have To Take Tomorrow*, *Corpus*, and *Think Again*. Polk is a member of the African Atlantic Research Group, and recently held a visiting professorship at the JFK Institute for North American Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin.

PANEL 1 – WHO SPEAKS?

Naomi Smith

Intersectional Identities & News Selection in US-based Television Newsrooms

The discrepant identities paradigm originates in post-colonial archaeological studies. It argues that individuals within a society experience and react to the process of being colonized in differing ways, depending on their “discrepant identities” – which we might call intersectional identities – such as their race, gender identity, sexuality, etc. Using broadcast news selection practices as a case study, this paper argues that a corollary to this theory might be that individual journalists in broadcast television newsrooms will experience doing journalism and working within their specific medium very differently, depending on their own intersectional identities. For example, Meyers and Gayle (2015) found that African American women journalists use “a variety of strategies to resist normative constructions of race to provide positive Black images and voices in the news”. The recent politicization of journalistic gatekeeping by the Trump administration, among others, renders the understanding of how decision-making processes function at a granular level at broadcast news institutions in the United States a worthy pursuit for media studies. Identifying how news selection practices differ throughout the newsroom, and the potential impact of an individual’s identities, may provide a basis for researchers to develop a more nuanced model for understanding the relationship between news selection and race, and/or other intersectional identities.

Naomi Smith is a journalist, writer and MPhil/PhD student at Birkbeck, University of London. Her research looks to examine the potential impact(s) of the individual identities of decision-makers in newsrooms on story selection processes, while taking into account the interactions between identity and organisational, societal and professional imperatives in the shaping and implementation of these processes. She holds a BA in Archaeology and Ancient History from Durham University, and a Master’s in Investigative Reporting from Birkbeck. Naomi was recently elected Student Leader in Birkbeck’s Students’ Union, where she is a member of the Board of Trustees and was previously elected Women’s Officer.

PANEL 1 – WHO SPEAKS?

Kristi Ulrike Schmidt

Caught in the Crossfire: Free Speech on Campus, the Negotiation between Rights and Values, and the Defense of a Legacy

On February 1st, 2017, right-wing provocateur Milo Yiannopoulos was invited to speak at U.C. Berkeley by a conservative student association. Yiannopoulos is known for his frequent use of racial, misogynistic, and outright hateful commentary. His anticipated speech at the historically liberal public college sparked violent protests that resulted in destruction of public and university property and led to Yiannopoulos's speech being called off. The cancellation was heavily criticized and debated by First Amendment scholars, educators, and then newly inaugurated President Trump. The debate, which focused on the scope and importance of the First Amendment right to free speech was shaped through at least three distinct (ideological) lines of argument. First Amendment scholars underlined the importance of an open, unfettered dialogue that can only be assured by adhering stringently to the First Amendment, even when hateful speech is involved. Academics and education scholars argued that the First Amendment takes on an interrelated position on public college campuses, resulting from its constant negotiation with a university's primary purpose of furnishing effective academic research. Civil rights and social justice scholars problematized the notion of guaranteed equal access to free speech and criticized that intentionally hateful speech directly opposes the creation of a safe, inclusive learning environment. My research critically assesses a selection of these three lines of argument to argue that the First Amendment, as it is legally enforced within public universities today, compromises the institution's commitment towards academic freedom and its moral responsibility to offer an inclusive, diverse learning environment, particularly in regard to furnishing an accessible, dignified dialogue between equal citizens. The university's responsibility to abide by the First Amendment and thus also protect hateful and offensive speech, limits its flexibility in responding to changing student and faculty demands relating to diversity and inclusion.

Kristi Ulrike Schmidt is both a Bachelor and Master graduate in North American Studies from the University of Groningen. After spending two years during and after her German secondary education studying and working in the United States (Michigan and Massachusetts), she realized she felt a deep fascination with U.S. culture, history, and particularly socio-political topics. Both her BA and MA theses were concerned with analyzing political speech, particularly populist and polarizing rhetoric used by politicians, provocateurs, and the like. She is interested in the ideological meaning, the legal use of, and the practical limits to free speech in the United States, within different environments and by different speakers. Currently we are experiencing the challenging interplay between a rise in right-wing, populist rhetoric and likewise the sophistication of a powerful counterculture of students, activists, and politically left-leaning progressives. How both sides use their constitutional right to free speech to negotiate their cause and their relationship with one another interests her.

PANEL 2 – RESISTANCE AND REPARATIONS

Selen Kazan

A Transitional Justice Plan for the US: Truth and Reparations for African Americans

Truth and reparations are means to reconcile a nation's past, restore justice, and give victims and survivors the chance to speak up about their experiences and enhance their (socio-)economic situations. Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) can also be used in democratic states to deliver (historic) justice. The paper looks at the possibility and necessity of a transitional justice plan in the US based on the need for reconciliatory measures and internal US politics concerning African-Americans. The current political landscape demands a change to restore and establish justice for its minorities, mainly the African-American population, highlighted by the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM). Court proceedings alone cannot address the manifold, long-lasting injustices resulting from the unaddressed history of black people's treatment. For this, the paper will look into why a transitional justice plan is needed, observing closely the effects of slavery on Black Americans' situation today and how reparations could be a suitable means of redress.

Further, recent US initiatives and hindrances for a US transitional justice plan will be highlighted. Examples from other transitional justice plans with TRCs will be used, such as the Canadian, South African, and the Greensboro US TRC, to learn from their expertise. The author recommends using a TRC in the broader spectrum of a transitional justice plan that includes reparations, which African-American scholars have suggested extensively. A transitional justice plan for the US can lead to a justice discourse and understanding within the general public regarding reconciliatory measures.

Selen Kazan is a PhD candidate and a research associate at the TU Dortmund Institute for Political Science and Philosophy. Her PhD project focuses on the use of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions and their impact with a special focus on the Canadian TRC. Before she has worked at the University of Göttingen at the Chair for International Criminal Law. Other stations included internships at the International Nuremberg Principles Academy as well as the German Bundestag. She will conduct a research visit in Canada at the University of Toronto's Law Faculty as of September 2021. Selen Kazan's research interests are International law, International criminal law, political theory, and the use of TRCs in democratic countries.

PANEL 2 – RESISTANCE AND REPARATIONS

Anthony James Obst

*“Without Force of Police”: Abolition(-Democracy) in W.E.B. Du Bois’s
Black Reconstruction and Dusk of Dawn*

The radical possibilities of reshaping U.S. democracy constitute a fundamental concern of W.E.B. Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935). In his groundbreaking study, Du Bois develops the notion of abolition-democracy as one of “two theories of the future of America” that “clashed and blended just after the Civil War” (182). While abolition-democracy insisted on the creation of new institutions that could extend the abolition of enslavement beyond its formal enshrinement in law, the other, I propose in this paper, can productively be understood as a modified continuation of the racial capitalism already embedded in the chattel slavery regime. This has far-reaching implications: As racial capitalism persists today, so too, then, does the project of abolition-democracy remain unfulfilled. As Angela Davis has suggested (2005), reading Du Bois in this way has deep resonances for prison and police abolition today.

With this paper, I suggest to add another dimension to the resonances between Du Bois’s abolition-democracy and abolition today, directing my focus to his autobiographical text *Dusk of Dawn* (1940): This text, I argue, articulates its critique of European and American democracies by showing their reliance on military and police force to maintain the hierarchies of the racial capitalism that sustains them. The socialist economy of democratic consensus that Du Bois outlines as an alternative model in the text is one in which abolition-democracy also means governing “without force of police” (220). While my paper is situated in the field of cultural history, it raises relevant questions for thinking about radical possibilities for reshaping North American democracies today. How can Du Bois’s abolition-democracy enrich our collective imagination for drawing connections between abolition, anti-capitalism and anti-fascism? Is abolition another term for communism?

Anthony James Obst is a PhD candidate at the Freie Universität Berlin’s Graduate School of North American Studies. His dissertation project examines Black radical retrospective texts from the 1930s for their affective relations to temporality. After completing his B.A. in American Studies and German Literature at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin in 2011, Anthony worked for seven years as a music journalist in Berlin and New York. His M.A. thesis on literary representations of the Haitian Revolution in 1930s literature received an honorable mention for the John F. Kennedy Institute’s Willi Paul Adams Prize.

PANEL 2 – RESISTANCE AND REPARATIONS

Alexander Obermüller

Raiford Brothers Protest: Prison Activism and Reform Debates in Florida

This year marks the semi centennial of the iconic Attica uprising. And although anniversaries present a welcome opportunity to reflect on the meaning of historical events, current hot-button issues like defunding the police, abolition, and racial justice make revisiting prison activism even more pressing. While the Attica protest has risen to prominence, incarcerated people in New York were neither the only nor the first ones to protest in 1971. In February of 1971, months after George Jackson's prison-manifesto, *Soledad Brother*, had galvanized incarcerated people all across the country, 1,200 Brothers engaged in a hunger strike in a rural Florida prison at Raiford. Guards ultimately subdued the protesters, who had battle-tested the tactics that would be brought into the national limelight six months later in upstate New York. A week of unrest ended with more than 70 injured men. I situate the Raiford uprising in the context of an emerging movement that rallied around demands for parole reform and better facilities from prisons like Soledad, California, to Attica, New York, and Raiford, Florida. Activists on the inside and on the outside not only called for reforms but abolition. Black prison organizers resorted to the language of Black Nationalism to call attention to racism's deep running roots. By protesting all over the country, incarcerated people moved their concerns from the margins to center. Their protests, fueled by an overcrowding crisis and cruel prison conditions, spoke of radical possibilities – a prison-less society. Resorting to newspapers, government reports, activist literature, and prison writing, I trace legal battles, shifts in punitive policy, and excavate a nationwide network of prison organizers. And while the latter achieved considerable victories, prison reformers co-opted activists' demands, which in turn yielded a sanitized prison system ready for the age of mass incarceration.

Alexander Obermüller earned his M.A. from the University of Vienna, focusing on contemporary history. A Fulbright scholarship allowed him to join the University of South Florida's history program. He graduated from USF in May 2021. In his thesis Alexander traces prison organizing efforts inside and outside of Florida prisons. The 1971 Raiford uprising serves as a lens to discuss the broader issues of prison reform and activism six months before the iconic Attica protest. In February 2021 Alexander joined the University of Erfurt, where he works on identity politics and conservatism. His research interests include 19th and 20th century cultural (US-)history, medical humanities, prison organizing, women's and gender history, and memory.

PANEL 3 – THE BLACK RADICAL IMAGINARY

Eva Puyuelo Ureña

Hope as a Fatalistic Posture: Ta-Nehisi Coates and Afropessimism in the Black Lives Matter Era

Framed as a letter addressed to his 15-year-old son, Ta-Nehisi Coates's seminal memoir *Between the World and Me* (2015) records the vast array of discriminatory practices that "land, with great violence, upon the [black] body" (14) with so much diligence and fierceness that, months after its publication, the book earned a spot amongst the most important texts documenting racial bigotries ever published; and Coates was appointed as the best writer on racial issues of the last centuries (Smith 2013). The memoir was not met with universal approval though, and some commentators reproached Coates for being skeptical, hopeless, or plainly defeatist (Smith 2017). Indeed, it is several times in the text that Coates tempers his son's expectations about foreseeing an end to racial conflicts as he tells him that "I do not believe that we can stop [racists], Samori, because they must ultimately stop themselves" (151). Far from being regarded only as an attack against black agency (Chatterton Williams 2015), Coates's negativity has also been interpreted as being symptomatic of living in a society "where one's murder is required for others' peace of mind" (Sexton 2016). It is my contention that Coates's negativity conceals in fact a galvanizing dimension. By emphasizing the futility of hopefulness, which for Coates traps black individuals in an "unending pursuit" of progress (Warren), and by acknowledging that the pessimism that tinges his book is product of an unprecedented moment in history, Coates provides his readers with several alternatives to confront the rampant racism that still pervades the U.S. nowadays.

Eva Puyuelo Ureña is a lecturer and predoctoral researcher at the Research Center for Theory, Gender, Sexuality, at the University of Barcelona (Spain). Since 2016, Eva has been working on her PhD dissertation, which explores the ways in which Ta-Nehisi Coates's representation of racial violence can be considered a violent act in itself. Her interests include African American literature, intersectional feminism, and violence and (its) representation, and among her most recent publications are "Overpoliced and Underprotected: Racialized Gendered Violence(s) in Ta-Nehisi Coates's Between the World and Me (2015)", "Vessels of Flesh and Bones: Policing and Racial (Dis)identifications", and "Between Hopelessness and Despair". Eva is also a member of the research project funded by the Spanish Government "Troubling Houses: Dwellings, Materiality, and the Self in American Literature" (FFI2017-82692-P MINECO/AEI/FEDER, UE).

PANEL 3 – THE BLACK RADICAL IMAGINARY

Max Rhiem

“Shall a new civilization ... rise from the ashes?": History, Hope, and Painful Progress in Charles Henry Holmes's *Ethiopia, The Land of Promise*

The anti-black violence of 2020 marred hopes of racial progress and showed that the “stubborn conditions” of American racism prevail to this day (Winters 4). This stubbornness is nothing new but has been frequently addressed in African American speculative fiction. While traditional notions of hope and progress seldom feature in these texts, they are by no means hopeless. Instead, they give rise to a different kind of hope, particularly manifest in Charles Henry Holmes's novel *Ethiopia, The Land of Promise* (1917). *Ethiopia* tells the story of Allan Dune and the so-called Decemvirate of Ethiopia, who collectively strive to establish an African American nation-state amid racist turmoil. This story, I argue, constantly oscillates between what Davidson identifies as the “forward-looking hope” and “back-ward looking glance to the catastrophes of the past” permeating African American speculative thought (384). In so doing, the novel serves as a counter-memory to contemporaneous racist texts and gives testament to the painful history of African Americans. I show how the protagonists' constant engagement with this painful history compels them to embrace a hope for a better future and push back against racial oppression. And yet, even these instances of “forward-looking hope” contain the potential for violent failure: In the end the protagonist is lynched, himself becoming part of history. This continuous juxtaposition of suffering and (political) action underscores that “dissonant attachments—to traumatic events [and] unfinished struggles ... are necessary to challenge ... configurations of power” (Winters 6). Ultimately, these attachments enable us to think of crises not as a cause for despair but as prisms that enable us to see radical possibilities. Looking through this prism, the novel is able to close with the defiant question: “Shall a new civilization ... rise from the ashes of the funeral pyre ... ?” (129).

Max Rhiem is part of the collaborative research center 923 “Threatened Orders” at the University of Tübingen. As part of an interdisciplinary team, he is writing a dissertation on alternatives to the racist societal order in the United States envisioned in African American speculative fiction of the late 19th and early 20th century. He is especially interested in the pessimist undertones of many of these texts and how these pessimistic inclinations complicate received Eurocentric notions of hope and progress. Most recently, he co-authored an article on the topic of cognition and cognitive science in contemporary debates in literary studies with Manuel Paß, published in Literaturtheorie nach 2001 (Matthes & Seitz 2020).

PANEL 3 – THE BLACK RADICAL IMAGINARY

Kristine Guillaume

“Toward Tomorrow”: Radical Revolution and Freedom Dreams in Assata Shakur and Ericka Huggins’s Prison Poetry

This essay examines revolutionary dreaming in the prison poetry of Assata Shakur and Ericka Huggins through examining their respective prison writings: *Assata: An Autobiography* (1982) and *Poems from Prison* (1971). Shakur and Huggins, both Black women activists who were incarcerated during their involvement in Black radical groups, incorporated poetry into their prison writings that evokes the language of dreaming to devise new conceptions of Black feminist futurity and envision the transformation of social relations through love-politics. This essay applies Robin D. G. Kelley’s study of “freedom dreams” in the Black radical imaginary to writing in the prison—a site of political transformation in the African American literary tradition. I argue that Shakur and Huggins’s poetry demonstrates how revolutionary dreaming becomes the project of the prison-writer as they combat the technologies of social control and violence in the carceral state. In this essay, I first explore how poetry, informed by Shakur and Huggins’s Black feminist politics, becomes a means of both individual survival and collective liberation for the two revolutionaries during their periods of captivity. I investigate how they use the power of poetic imagination, as theorized by poets like Audre Lorde and Aimé Césaire, to disrupt oppressive power structures, and explore possibilities for futurity. Then, I examine specific forms of poetry in Shakur and Huggins’s work, primarily the elegy, to discuss the significance of their insistence on community in their project of freedom dreaming for a world beyond prison walls. This section on poetic form reveals how Shakur and Huggins use poetic traditions to assert that revolutionary dreaming is an imperative, iterative, and collaborative project designed to empower the people to determine their own destinies, strategize for social transformation, and build a collective futurity grounded in radical love-politics.

Kristine Guillaume is a M.St. candidate in English and American Studies at the University of Oxford, where she is a Rhodes Scholar. She will pursue the M.St. in Intellectual History in the 2021 academic year, during which she hopes to study the history of prison abolition. She graduated in May 2020 from Harvard University with an honors degree in History and Literature and African American Studies, where she conducted research on mass incarceration and prison writing under the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship. At Harvard, she served as the first Black woman president of The Harvard Crimson, the university’s independent daily newspaper.

PANEL 4 – FROM THE GROUND UP

Marie Menard

Striking against the Odds: A North/South Comparison of Teacher Organizing in the USA (2012-2019)

My presentation stems from my PhD dissertation at the University Paris-Créteil. This ongoing research analyzes the wave of teacher strikes that occurred in the US between 2012 and 2019 and successfully improved teachers' labor conditions. In order to understand the different dynamics at play in a very polarized country, my work proceeds from a comparison between two strikes: Chicago's (Illinois) and Oklahoma City's (Oklahoma). Whereas Chicago is the historical heart of teacher unionism and started the strike wave that spread nationally in 2012, Oklahoma belongs to the South, a largely conservative and anti-union territory where teachers are scarcely unionized (57%), rank at the bottom of national teacher salary and where teachers had to break the law to go on strike. To understand how teachers overcame this local anti-union environment, my study seeks to define the material and symbolic "capitals" (Matonti, 2004) mobilized by teachers to lead the strike, through or outside unions. Starting from those capitals, and taking into account the political and cultural contexts of these two cities, particularly during Trump's presidency, I compare the two activism strategies to highlight similarities, differences or even exchanges. Union and activist networks, collective and individual narratives of these events and their use of social media are critical to my study. Their identity (gender, race and social background, particularly) are also accounted as determining criteria within the mobilization, for I argue that these strikes are inextricably inscribed in the recent renewal of radical organizing –Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, Fight-for-15– for female and racial minorities are overrepresented among education's unionized workers. This socio-historical study adopts a qualitative methodology by combining historical material (archives, data compilation) and sociological semi-structured interviews conducted with unionized and non-unionized teachers from Oklahoma-City and Chicago.

Marie A. Menard is a PhD Candidate at the University of Paris-Est. A graduate from la Sorbonne in American Studies and Sociology, her dissertation "Strike in Dixie: a comparative analysis of teacher strikes in Chicago and in Oklahoma City", aims at studying the renewal of teacher unionism. Through the example of the teacher strike wave of 2012-2018, she adopts a socio-historical approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data, to explore the transformations of teacher unionism, the redefinition of education as a "common good" and the renewal of labor movements in general. As gender, race and class are crucial in analyzing education in the US, her work will rely on critical theory and take into account the recent social movements that determined the American political landscape (BLM, #MeToo etc.) and impacted the conversation around public schools.

Judith Keller

We Not Moving!: Urban Social Movements and the Fight for a Place to Call Home

For many social justice advocates, the hope was that in times of the pandemic new actions would be taken to match the discussion of the housing crisis the U.S. has been facing over the past decade. Even before the pandemic, the number of Americans struggling with high rents and mortgage payments was increasing. Studies show that half of all American households are cost burdened. Having to forgo rent payments to meet other basic needs and as a result being evicted has long been part of the reality of many people living in urban America. At the same time, public housing is torn down while few investments are going into affordable housing units. When in the spring of 2020, stay-at-home orders were released, it became visible how many people in the U.S. are unhoused or precariously housed and therefore without proper protection. This paper looks at how the pandemic put a spotlight on housing disparities and what measures have been taken on the local level. Drawing from a case study in Washington, D.C., where the housing situation has been especially grave, we will see how federal and city orders seldom match the discussions in the streets where many grass-roots organizations campaign for rent forgiveness, preservation of affordable and public housing, and access to urban infrastructures. Those urban social movements do not only fight to adequately house people, but thereby also redefine urban citizenship and the right to the city.

Judith Keller is a doctoral researcher in the graduate program Authority and Trust (GKAT) at the Heidelberg Center for American Studies (HCA), funded by the German Research Association (DFG). In her PhD project, Judith Keller analyzes the shifting meaning of trust at a time when urban America is facing a severe housing crisis. As a social and urban geographer, she focuses on urban social movements and questions of social justice such as access to housing, education, health services, supermarkets, and urban infrastructures. Judith Keller studied Geography and English in Heidelberg and Tiffin, Ohio, and was a 2019 participant of the Abigail Adams Summer Seminar at Harvard University. You can get in touch with her on Research Gate or via e-mail (judith.keller@uni-heidelberg.de).

PANEL 4 – FROM THE GROUND UP

Yaakov Kobi Cohen

A Pipeline for Social Change: A Case for Environmental Struggles as Engines for Radical Native American Inclusion

The growing awareness among the American public, in recent years, of the importance of environmental issues, offers a unique opportunity for Native land rights activists to deliver their messages to wider audiences. In light of an escalating global climate crisis, a steadily increasing number of Americans seeks to learn from the experience of peripheral communities who had to fight for the protection of their natural homes. Yet, this openness to listen to Native experiences poses the risk of strengthening existing stereotypes, and falling back to problematic notions of Native Americans as romantic figures that are a not-quite-human element of American nature. The current literature on Indigenous rights activism in an environmental context, focuses almost entirely on the juxtaposition of Native American communities on the one hand, and the US government and corporate apparatus on the other. There is a pronounced lack of research into joint, large-scale collaborations between Indigenous rights activists and environmental organizations, or the ways in which different marginalized communities in the US can build sustainable collaborations in order to support each other in environmental struggles. How are modern-day Indigenous land struggles different from those of the past? Could today's intersection of those struggles with wider environmental issues, and the potential collaborations they offer, help pave the way for solving some of the major issues that plague rural Native American communities, such as skyrocketing rates of suicide, opiate abuse and sexual assaults? In this talk, I'll explore how the lessons from the fight against the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the legacy of the 1971 *Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act* (ANCSA), shape the way that current Native American activism is perceived.

Yaakov Kobi Cohen is an MA student at the John F. Kennedy Institute for American Studies at the Freie Universität in Berlin. He earned a Bachelor's degree in History and Political Science from the University of Haifa in Israel, where he is originally from, and he is currently working on completing his MA thesis, which looks into the relationship between members of the Lomaland Theosophical community and its neighbors in California during the first half of the twentieth century. Kobi's research interests include the role of religion in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century American life, nineteenth-century American esotericism, and the struggles for political recognition of marginalized groups.

Bohan Zhang

The John Birch Society: A Case Study of American Extreme-Right Politics

The John Birch Society (JBS) is a long-lasting American extreme-right organization starting from the period of anti-Communist climax in the early Cold War. At present, the influence of JBS is far less than the peak in the 1960s, but it is still an important part of American extreme-right politics and represents the basic trend of the US extreme-right ideologies. Since its establishment, the JBS has represented a group of patriots underrepresented by the two parties who believed that America was in danger from enemies within. The adjustment and transformation of the JBS during and after the Cold War typically reflect the development and evolution of American extreme-right identity. By reviewing the development of the JBS and analyzing the changes of its core programs, the source and performance of its attraction, my essay explores the characteristics of the JBS as an extreme-right organization and JBS members' constant search for a common extreme-right identity. Through anti-Communist, anti-social moral degradation, anti-globalization, and the construction of the grand conspiracy, JBS actively adjusts its programs to adapt to the changes of the times. In the general trend of the "turning right" of contemporary American politics, the commonalities among the JBS, the alt-right parties, and the Trump government are becoming prominent. By studying the rise and fall of the JBS, we can form a better understanding of the evolution of American extreme-right politics and the changing identity of extreme-right supporters.

Bohan Zhang is from Beijing, China. He graduated from Tsinghua University with a BA in History, and is currently a master's candidate in US History at the University of Oxford. His academic interest lies in modern American political and presidential history, as well as the history of Sino-US relations. After graduation, he will continue to pursue a degree in international relations at the University of Chicago.

PANEL 5 – THE USE OF FORCE

Marta Kobyłska

Writing the 2019-2020 Persian Gulf Crisis: US Military Action against Iran

This paper focuses on how President Donald J. Trump constructed rhetorical action in the 2019-2020 Persian Gulf crisis in a persuasive manner. It is guided by the question: what was involved when Trump explained the reasons for the use of force in the crisis? Paraphrasing the opening question of Kenneth Burke's seminal work, *A Grammar of Motives*, the paper asks how the president used language to carry out his military agenda and what his use of language revealed. Two aspects of the question are addressed. The first refers to Trump's approach to the use of force. It asks how the president defined and interpreted crisis, how he persuaded the audience to accept and support the rationale for military action, and what motivated his behavior. A second aspect relates to whether Trump shared or differed in his definition and interpretation of crisis and approach to the use of military solution? Did he use same or different than his predecessors rhetorical forms to present his policy? Did the rhetorical forms reflect his personality or did he rely on a rhetorical formula upon which past presidents relied? The material for the analysis are Trump's January 3, 2020 remarks on Iran and related statements. The paper is influenced by the works of Burke and his concept of dramatism. It examines how the agent, the act, the agency, the scene, and the purpose that fall within the rhetoric were defined. It considers the five terms and the relationships between and among them, together with corresponding philosophy and terminology, to find which aspect of the situation the president considered most meaningful, what interpretation of the situation he chose to share, and what motivated his choice.

Dr. Marta Kobyłska is affiliated with the University of Rzeszów. She earned her Master's in English Studies and completed her doctoral dissertation in American Studies at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland. Her research focuses on rhetoric and the American presidency, especially post-Cold War presidents' foreign policy.

PANEL 5 – THE USE OF FORCE

Natalia Botonaki

Blue/Black: Considerations on Violence Based on 2020's BLM Protests

This paper will be examining the mass of protests which occurred in spring and summer of 2020 in the United States as a result of the numerous killings of Black Americans by police officers, focusing on the reporting of and emerging debates on violence during the protests by different types of media (i.e. newspapers, television channels, social media, independent news organizations/platforms). Placing these protests within the context of the history of Black American struggle – specifically looking at the Civil Rights movement onward – it will focus on non-violence as strategy in order to highlight the complex connotations of it and problematize the legacy it has left on the media narrative and common sense. Using Slavoj Žižek's distinction between subjective and objective violence this paper aims to highlight endemic bias within media discourse and suggest that they are occasions of epistemic injustice, or even epistemic violence (Spivak). Aspects of rhetoric on and around violence will be traced to rhetoric on anger and its relation to democracy. After demonstrating some paradoxes in the considerations of anger - particularly when its subjects are also subjects of inequality or oppression – the paper will suggest that similar paradoxes can be observed in the rhetoric on violence, particularly from mainstream media. Its aim is to demonstrate the need for a dismantling of certain narrative biases in the way Black American protest violence is treated, to urge the foregrounding of more nuanced conceptualizations of violence, and to highlight other areas in which the same can be applied.

Natalia Botonaki is a pre-doctoral investigator in the Department of Humanities: Philosophy, Language and Literature of University Carlos III, Madrid. She holds an MA in Cultural Theory and Critique from the same university and a BA in Drama and Theatre Studies from Trinity College Dublin. The early stages of her academic and professional career were focused on the study and practice of alternative models of education, with a particular interest on how these contribute to the creation of a more engaged and communitarian society. Gradually she began investigating different modes of organisation – social movements – focusing on the affective and aesthetic aspects of these. Her doctoral thesis will be an investigation on the types of passions which move people and sustain or distract from mobilization, and the narrative devices used to construct the mythos of movements, particularly how these differ when the narrative is generated by the movements, by mass media or by alternative/allied media outlets.

PANEL 6 – CROSSING THE US BORDER

Julia Machtenberg

Of Estrangement and Belonging: Reimagining US Space in Meena Alexander's "Kabir Sings in a City of Burning Towers"

My paper argues that in her poetry, Indian American poet Meena Alexander re-envisioning US space as transnational borderlands on whose grounds interrelated histories and experiences of trauma may be reconfigured. I use Norma Élia Cantú and Aída Hurtado's definition of borderlands as spaces "in which antithetical elements mix, neither to obliterate each other nor to be subsumed by a larger whole, but rather to combine in unique and unexpected ways" (6). My paper shows how Alexander blurs national and geographic boundaries within and outside the US by means of a poetic "traumatic awareness" (284) that revolves around the recognition of humanity's common vulnerability to suffering. Despite this blurring of boundaries, Alexander constructs US-space as a traumatic site of estrangement. While there are efforts to process traumatic experiences within this space, she never represents these efforts as entirely successful, thereby upholding differentiations between distinct kinds of traumas. Hence, I argue that Alexander's reconfiguration of US-space as transnational borderlands promotes a dissolution of human-made divisions while at the same time maintaining that distinct experiences of suffering must be recognized and renegotiated within this space. Alexander's poetry reimagines national crises as point of departure for the development of a broader and more inclusive perspective on human vulnerability without erasing specific experiences of suffering. In this manner, Alexander's re-envisioning of US space as transnational borderlands urges us to reconsider the ways in which human vulnerability – and ultimately, human life – is recognized within US space.

Julia Machtenberg is a PhD student at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum (RUB). Julia received their BA in German and Anglophone Studies from the Universität Duisburg-Essen in 2017 and their MA in English and American Studies from the RUB in 2020. After exploring representations of trauma in their master's thesis "Towards a Re-envisioning of U.S. Space: Meena Alexander's Raw Silk," Julia's current project examines representations of vulnerability in US-American poetry. Next to vulnerability and trauma studies, Julia is particularly interested in gender and queer studies.

Paul Druschke

You Can Vote From Anywhere, Except: A Survey of Territorial Voting Rights in the United States

Service members stationed abroad, citizens living overseas, and even astronauts on board the ISS can participate in federal elections. Meanwhile, U.S. citizens residing in the five permanently inhabited Territories of the United States are constitutionally barred from making their voices heard, regardless of their place of birth. As such, territorial residents are not eligible to vote for their commander in chief. This adds more than three million people to the list of disenfranchised citizens, almost all of which are members of racial or ethnic minorities. As non-sovereign entities, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands are dealing with a limited degree of self-government, and also a limited degree of political representation in the bicameral legislature of the United States. This presentation targets the territorial voting rights issue as one of the many social, political, and economic disadvantages the U.S. Territories are facing under their government by the Congress. For decades, locals, advocates, and civil rights organizations have stood up for equal voting rights, albeit without much success. Granting residents of the Territories full suffrage would not only further their equal citizenship. It would also change the electoral map for upcoming federal elections. A survey of the history and the status quo of territorial voting rights will lay the foundation for an analysis of the possible development they will undergo in the 117th Congress and beyond. The presentation will also track the progress of house-introduced bills such as the 2019 and the 2021 *For the People Act* to discuss their proposed establishment of a congressional task force to report on impediments to full and equal voting rights for territorial residents as well as recommended changes.

*Paul Druschke (*1997) is an early-career academic researching the Territories of the United States. He graduated from Technische Universität Dresden in Germany in General Education, English and American Studies, and Geography. With increasing self-determination throughout his course of studies, Paul specialized in North American Studies and Social Geography. Parallel to his teacher training at a secondary school, he continues working and researching at the Chair of Human Geography at TU Dresden, where he is writing his doctoral thesis about Guam specifically. He intends to do his part in bringing the U.S. Territories back on the map by connecting with a diverse set of local agents and interest groups and hopefully initiating socioeconomic and legislative change. His goal is to work together with academics in these regions, fostering the representation of both territorial geography and territorial geographers in the academic world.*

Debby Esmeé de Vlugt

“Black Panther Types on the Streets and Byways”: Transnational Black Power and the 1969 Curaçao Uprising

On 30 May 1969, thousands of black Curaçaoans took to the streets of Willemstad to protest against racial, colonial, and economic oppression in the Netherlands Antilles. Although their protest had arisen from a labor conflict at the Shell refinery on the island, the crowd soon turned its anger towards the white and light-skinned elites of Curaçao. The protest was disrupted by the Dutch Navy before the day was over, but despite its short duration the uprising would long be remembered as one of the most influential and significant in the history of the Dutch Caribbean. In trying to find an explanation for the destructive and largely unexpected disturbances of 30 May, Antillean politicians and security services feared that the uprising had been provoked by members of the American Black Power movement. They saw many similarities between contemporary ‘race riots’ in urban centers in the United States and the antiracist uprising of their own black population, who had attacked numerous white passers-by during the protest and shouted things like “Kill the whites!” In this paper, I will discuss the connections between the Curaçaoan crisis of 1969 and the rise of the transnational Black Power movement. I will explain that the ideology of the movement played a significant role in the lead-up to the uprising and also directly inspired Antillean activists to set up a local Black Power organization in its aftermath. In trying to overcome the problems that 30 May had made clear, this organization aimed to explore the radical possibilities that the African American movement offered to them and other decolonizing peoples in the world.

Debby Esmeé de Vlugt is a third year PhD candidate at the Roosevelt Institute for American Studies and Leiden University in the Netherlands. Her dissertation explores the transnational history of the Black Power movement, in which she specifically focuses on the movement’s ideological influence on Black radicalism in the Dutch Caribbean between 1968 and 1973. She is also editor-in-chief of the Netherlands American Studies Review and a board member of the Netherlands American Studies Association.

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