

Editorial

**Caroline Heller, Diane Bélisle-Wolf, Melanie Hanslik,
Nele Sawallisch, Nicole Poppenhagen, and Xiuming He**

Within the German Association for American Studies, the Postgraduate Forum and its annual conference offer a space for young scholars to meet and network with colleagues from different universities, to exchange information, and to present their current research to their peers. As such, the PGF has long become an indispensable element within the larger institution. In 2014, at the conference in Mainz, we celebrated the PGF's 25th anniversary and acknowledged the work of all former organizers from the late 1980s until today.

We consider the online journal *Current Objectives of Postgraduate American Studies (COPAS)* as the voice of the PGF. It extends the possibilities for exchange as it provides a forum for written contributions that not only reflect the various current research interests in the field of American Studies in Germany but also test the boundaries of established scholarship. Dedicating an issue to the PGF's conference each year, *COPAS* encourages young scholars in their first attempts to publish and to make their research available to a larger audience.

The present issue of *COPAS* is thus a reflection of the PGF conference at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, which took place from October 10-12, 2014. The issue gives an insight into the diversity of contributions that were organized into eight thematic conference panels: (1) Discourses in the Nineteenth Century; (2) Transnational Perspectives; (3) Masculinities and Gender Representations; (4) Obama and Politics; (5) Narration and the Visual; (6) Representations of Class, Poverty, and Race; (7) Native American Appropriations—Appropriating Native American Culture(s); and (8) African American and Black Perspectives.

To celebrate the foundation of the Postgraduate Forum in 1989, the PGF conference in Mainz also included a special panel discussion entitled "The PGF at 25: Challenges and Opportunities for Young Scholars of American Studies in Germany." We invited four representatives of previous PGF teams as well as a representative of *COPAS* to look back at past developments of the PGF and to envision the future of this forum for young scholars. Karsten Fitz (Passau), Anna Thiemann (Münster), Janina Rojek (Marburg), Monika Sauter (Erlangen-Nürnberg), and Katharina Fackler (Regensburg/*COPAS*) shared their PGF experiences with the conference participants in a fruitful and lively discussion.

Along with the selected articles, this issue of *COPAS* also features texts by Sabine Sielke (Bonn) and Karsten Fitz. Both contributions contextualize the PGF's development from its very beginnings into the vital platform that it is today. Furthermore, they underline the wide range of PGF activities and its increasing recognition by the larger institution.

As guest editors, we are proud to present the following contributions to the current issue of *COPAS*:

Monia Dal Checco's article on "*Crusade for Justice* and the Question of Authenticity in African American Autobiography" reads Ida B. Wells's autobiography (1928) as a transition work between slave narrative and political memoir of the post-Emancipation period.

Paula von Gleich offers a close reading of selected passages from Angela Davis's *Autobiography* (1974). Based on a Black Studies perspective on captivity and fugitivity narratives, she engages with the text through a 'post-slavery' theoretical approach.

Jasmin Humburg reflects upon the representation of poverty on American TV, focusing on the documentaries *Down and Out in America* from 1985 and *American Winters* from 2013. She discusses how visual rhetoric and narrative forms shape the continuous imbalance of power in cross-class documentary representations.

Denijal Jević's article analyzes the spoken word poetry of the Palestinian-American author Suheir Hammad. He argues that Hammad attempts to deconstruct dichotomies between Arabs and Americans and to create a concept of transnational humanness by humanizing Palestinians, renegotiating Americanness as related to Islam and Arabs, and opening up denationalized spaces of comparison.

Sarah Makeschin analyzes the German media discourse on Obama from 2008 to 2014. She examines how Obama has been perceived as changing the transatlantic relationship and his role as an imaginative projection surface in the negotiation of a "Eurotopian" narrative of self and self-confidence.

Florian Tatschner's article "Ghosts in the Archive: Re-Vis(ion)ing Transnational Perspectives with Anna Lee Walters's *Ghost Singer* and Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire*" challenges current notions of transnational scholarship by negotiating concepts of Western

and Native American epistemologies and examining their implications for transnational American studies.

Laura Vorberg highlights the importance of the presidential TV debates during the election period despite the extensive use of various internet platforms for the candidates' campaigns. She argues that the political system is still dependent on the mass media system because it appeals to society as a whole.

Finally, we would like to extend our words of gratitude to a number of individuals and groups without whom both the PGF conference and this issue of *COPAS* would have been impossible:

For making PGF 2014 such a success, we would like to thank

- the Embassy of the United States and the German Association for American Studies; Dr. Herzer and the Spezielle Promotionskollegs at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz; the American Studies division and our student helpers; the publishing houses Peter Lang, Universitätsverlag Winter, and Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier (WVT) for their financial and personal support;
- Professor Carmen Birkle (Marburg) and Professor Alfred Hornung (Mainz) for their opening addresses at the conference;
- all participants, speakers, and panel chairs at the PGF in Mainz as well as all panelists for their contributions, valuable insights, and constructive discussions.

For *COPAS* 16.1, we would like to thank

- all contributors to this *COPAS* issue for their insightful contributions;
- Professor Sabine Sielke and Professor Karsten Fitz for offering their perspectives on the history of the PGF;
- last but not least, the *COPAS* team—Nathalie Aghoro, Katharina Fackler, Johanna Heil, Sascha Pöhlmann, and Klara Stephanie Szlezák—for their invaluable support and expertise, and for giving us the opportunity to work with them in putting this issue together.

Working for and with the PGF has been a rewarding experience for us and will remain unforgettable. We were proud to host its 25th anniversary and are happy to be handing over to the next team, who will take on the organization of this American studies platform. We

are very much looking forward to the next conference and wish the team every success in hosting this year's PGF conference for young scholars in Germany and beyond.

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Mainz, May 2015