

14th Annual International Graduate Student Conference on Transatlantic History

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The Fourteenth Annual International Graduate Student on Transatlantic History took place in Arlington, Texas on October 25–26, 2013. The conference was organized by Nicole Léopoldie, The University of Texas at Arlington/Université Paris Diderot, Isabelle Rispler, The University of Texas at Arlington/Université Paris Diderot and Bryan A. Garrett, The University of Texas at Arlington and was financed by The Transatlantic History Student Organization, The Barksdale Lecture Series, The History Department and The College of Liberal Arts at The University of Texas at Arlington.

Like current trends in world history, which seek to examine global patterns of human connectedness, transatlantic history examines the circulation and interaction of people, goods, and ideas between and within any of the four continents surrounding the Atlantic basin from the first contact in the fifteenth century to the present. Centered in the Atlantic, though not limited to it, its methodologies are rooted in transnational history, comparative history, entangled history, and also extend to methodologies of bordering disciplines such as anthropology, art history, sociology and political science. This interdisciplinary conference, therefore, aimed to explore and further establish shared terminology, methodologies, and defining parameters as they pertain to this growing field. Finally, because a productive conversation is only possible from all sides of the Atlantic, this conference also sought to serve as an intercontinental and multilingual meeting place where such ideas could converge into one common discussion.

Within the field of transatlantic history, north-south interactions are just as valuable

to scholarship as established studies on east-west connections, just as the legacies of colonialism, and the „cultural inheritance“ of the myriad Atlantic communities. The conference panels reflected this wide-ranging number of topics and emphasized the study of the slave perspective in the Atlantic system of forced labor, the impact of imperial legacies on indigenous peoples in the Americas, north-north and north-south power dynamic negotiations, the role of bureaucrats and laborers in South America and Africa, changing interpretations of imperial spaces in South America, the challenge of teaching, the entangled nature of revolutions and revolutionaries, leisure class, and travel writing.

The first panel addressed what some call „the most transatlantic of all themes“ – the Atlantic system of slavery. By examining the slave ship as a principal space rather than a means of transportation, MICHAEL AYTEN-FISU (Edmonton, Canada) argued that processes that were thought to occur during *slave seasoning* in the Americas actually took place on the slave ship. SEAN MOREY SMITH (Houston, Texas) further examined this process by examining the way that we understand slave seasoning. Through a deeper analysis of the tension between racial and humoral ways of thinking, he pointed to contemporaries' non-racial ways of conceptualizing bodies. He argues that racialized slavery provided a point of understanding between both slavery advocates and abolitionists. Finally, NEAL POLHEMUS (Columbia, South Carolina), in his examination of the expansion of British transatlantic slave trade showed how the interconnectivity of trading ports reflected larger shifting relationships in the wider Atlantic world. Paying particularly close attention to smaller English trading ports, Polhemus argued that these historically neglected ports not only contributed to the expansion of the slave trade, but also represented significant diversification of Atlantic slave trading activities.

Panel two focused on indigeneity in the Atlantic world. AMANDA KENNEY (Columbia, Missouri) analyzed Khipu – a system of recordkeeping, encoding information through the use of a series of knots on string – in colonial Peru. Kenney portrayed how

the *kipu* itself was transformed by its use in a colonial context. ANTJE DIETERICH (Berlin, Germany) compared evolving definitions of indigeneity and discussed indigenous spaces in Los Angeles, looking at discursive power by analyzing interviews with a local band. Contrasting global discourses with local uses, she concluded that indigeneity is not a racial but a political category. ROBERT CALDWELL (Arlington, Texas) discussed territoriality in defining the Choctaw-Apache of Ebarb along the Louisiana-Texas borderlands. He aimed at countering essentialist notions of indigeneity. „Territoriality“ took into account shifting borders and the displacement of the community. Overall, the panel concluded that the impact of European colonization and settlement in the Americas still represents a rather understudied aspect of transatlantic history.

The third panel focused on power dynamics between various agents and societies across the North-North and North-South Atlantic axes. Analyzing United States-European relations, G.H. JOOST BAARSEN (Dortmund, Germany) argued that each took turns at being considered the cultural, symbolic, or natural „child“ of one another as discourses changed over time. The metaphor expressed a renewed demarcation between center and periphery. DAVID M. WATRY (Arlington, Texas) gave a historical account of Anglo-American diplomacy behind the Suez Crisis. According to him, Great Britain faced an American-made economic catastrophe that forced British Prime Minister Anthony Eden's resignation. In his case study on fisheries and British-American relations during the War of 1812, THOMAS BLAKE EARLE (Houston, Texas) advocated combining environmental and diplomatic history and called for the historicization of the Ocean itself.“ GABRIEL SCHIMMEROTH (Berlin, Germany) examined how transatlantic experts in Switzerland, Germany and the US discussed the boycott of Nestlé in 1984. He claimed transnational action groups practiced a „colonization of the consciousness“ by advocating essentialist ideas of western concepts of motherhood.

JORGE CANIZARES-ESGUERRA's (Austin, Texas) keynote address on hybridity in the Atlantic concluded the first

day of panel discussions. He proposed envisioning the Atlantic as a hybrid space in order to challenge older paradigms that have tended to focus on static notions of nation or economic modernization. Cañizares-Esguerra challenged historians to move beyond nation-centered representations of the Atlantic, which also reinforce racial and economic stereotypes that certain regions and empires were more or less developed than others. Moreover, historical analysis must (and can) transcend teleological renditions of the past that ultimately terminate in nation-centered histories. The keynote punctuated these statements with examples including Venezuela and Jamaica, places that should be considered less constituent parts of the Spanish and British Empires respectively, and more as intersections or points of contact for people and capital from throughout the Atlantic.

In panel four, ADOLFO POLO Y LA BORDA (College Park, Maryland) confronted both the limitations and benefits of viewing the Spanish Empire through an Atlantic lens. While the Atlantic connected imperial officials, historians continue to divide the Spanish empire along asymmetrical axis. A „cosmopolitan“ alternative recognizes the „polycentric“ nature of the Spanish Atlantic and how local administrators overwhelmingly responded to local concerns while maintaining connections to the monarchical center other localities. THEODORE ROSE (Chicago, Illinois) discussed the motivations for colonizing African recaptives in Sierra Leone, taking into account the intersection of humanitarianism with free-market labor. These forces collided with long-standing Atlantic tropes of „ransom“ and „redemption,“ when forced laborers were purchased to become skilled apprentices. ANDRÉ LUIZ LANZA (São Paulo, Brazil) presented statistics indicating how migrant workers from Italy, Spain and Portugal disproportionately outnumbered local workers in Argentina and Brazil. Half of these migrant workers returned to their sending societies, suggesting that mobile laborers – rather than static populations of workers – fueled industrialism in South America.

The fifth panel consisted of both English and Spanish-language presentations. ERIC

MCDONALD (Houston, Texas) aimed at illuminating early Guiana's transnational foundations by placing it within a broader Atlantic context. Guyana's information networks were a contested space between Dutch, Spanish, English and Native Americans who crossed cultural boundaries. In her contribution, MARIA JULIANA GANDINI (Buenos Aires, Argentina) successfully restored the biographical unit of the explorer and governor Cabeza de Vaca. The presenter posited that understanding the full process of these two phases of his life allows for a better understanding of the program of the Spanish Empire. ROBERT OJEDA PÉREZ (Bogotá, Columbia) presented on his project of teaching transatlantic history to high school students. He chose two case studies, using primary sources and paleography. He strongly advocated the use of primary sources in high school education. One result has been a student co-authored journal article.

In panel six, PABLO MARTINEZ (Buenos Aires, Argentina) proposed to move beyond the extant Iberian view and Atlantic perspective of Spanish empire with an alternative third model based on *letrados* (public writers). *Letrados* were „cultural translators“ (from European knowledge to local circumstances) and mediators of public opinion. After 1801, periodicals emerged as a new type of text. Martínez argued that the nations were a product rather than a cause of the revolution and the myth of the revolution created „something new.“ ROSS MICHAEL NEDERVELT (Miami, Florida) addressed and described the effects of the American Revolution on the British Bahamas. NICOLE LÉOPOLDIE (Arlington, Texas) argued that „revolutions,“ alongside „nation-states,“ were analytical cages and historians' constructions. She proposed to apply the methodology of tracing „intercultural transfers“ to the Haitian Revolution in order to stress simultaneously the agency of French actors within the empire and to provide a transnational perspective on interimperial movement at the moment of state formation.

During panel 7, „Leisure Class and Travel,“ KATHARINA BEIERGRÖSSLEIN (Stuttgart, Germany) offered an updated textual analysis of German travel writing documents that

were published as accurate portrayals of migrant experiences in North America. She suggested alternatives to these documents' intent and authenticity. TAO WEI (New York, New York) traced the life and times of the transatlantic merchant and slave owner Henry Laurens across time and space. WILLIAM B. ROKA (New York, New York) examined the growth of ocean liners and middle-class transatlantic travel through the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Shipbuilders designed gargantuan vessels in an effort to reconstruct opulence in floating mansions on the Atlantic to accommodate increasingly mobile elite travelers. All three panelists attest to the lasting influence of the Atlantic as a complex interconnected space made up by the movement of people, goods, and ideas centuries before the academic emphasis of transnational crossings.

The final panel placed contemporary American thought into a wider transnational context. ROBERT WHITAKER's (Austin, Texas) attempt to move beyond Eurocentric narratives of international police cooperation shifted the focus to the initiatives of the United States. He argued that their International Police Conference provided a platform for police around the Atlantic to exchange ideas surrounding intentional crime. LESLEY WOLFF's (Tallahassee, Florida) examination of the film *Stormy Weather* revealed the film's transatlantic consciousness through an emphasis on duality or double consciousness of the black performer as both object of American gaze and subject of African Diasporic traditions. By connecting the film's choreography with African and Haitian dance tradition and African identity, her decoding of visual texts, showed how African-American intellectuals mediated a culture which was not their own while also selling it to the public.

Overall, the conference accomplished its aim of bringing together graduate students and young scholars from six countries throughout the Atlantic. Next year's conference organizers have made it a goal to have graduate students from Africa join in on this ever-expanding academic conversation. While the majority of scholars present during the 2013 conference were historians, the overarching theme benefited from the contri-

butions of an anthropologist, an art historian and a literary critic as well. The interdisciplinary aspect will also be expanded in the future by specifically having specialists from three or four different disciplines converse about the same topic. The number of bilingual panels has continually expanded over the past two conferences, an aim that will be built upon in subsequent years. As the above panels attest, transatlantic history allows for a wide array of possibilities in studying and understanding the complex connections and interactions between people, cultures, ideas and objects across time and space. Transatlantic history takes nothing for granted. It questions supposedly immutable academic terms and concepts. As such, it includes the experience of indigenous populations and other hidden peoples in unraveling their complex and hybrids pasts. It allows for a more inclusive and comprehensive view on history and the interpretation of past events and experiences.

Conference Overview:

Panel 1: The Atlantic System of Slavery

Commentator: John D. Garrigus (The University of Texas at Arlington, USA)

Neal D. Polhemus (University of South Carolina, USA), „The Right Sort of Negroes:“ Managing the Contours of the Eighteenth-century British Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

Sean Morey Smith (University of Houston, USA), The Medicine of Slave Seasoning: Environment, Slavery, and Bodies in the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic

Michael Aytenfisu (University of Alberta, Canada), The Slave Ship's Agency in Slave Seasoning

Panel 2: Indigeneity in the Imperial Periphery

Commentator: Alexander Hidalgo (Texas Christian University, USA)

Amanda Kenney (University of Missouri, USA), Encoding Authority: Negotiating the Uses of Khipu in Colonial Peru

Antje Dieterich (Free University of Berlin, Germany), The Construction of Indigeneity in Urban Spaces – Local Adaption of a Global Idea?

Robert Caldwell (The University of Texas at

Arlington, USA), Exploring Choctaw-Apache Territoriality along the Louisiana-Texas Borderlands

Panel 3: Negotiating Power Dynamics

Commentators: Patrick Babiracki / Pawel Goral (The University of Texas at Arlington, USA)

G.H. Joost Baarsen (TU Dortmund University, Germany), „Sucking on America's Tit:“ Metaphorical Dimensions of the Family in Conservative American Discourses on Europe

David M. Watry (The University of Texas at Arlington, USA), Economic Brinksmanship: The Fall of Anthony Eden

Thomas Blake Earle (Rice University, USA), Natural Enemies: Environmental Crises and Diplomatic Disputes in the Northwest Atlantic

Gabriel Schimmeroth (Free University of Berlin, Germany), Transatlantic Concepts for the Third World: The Nestlé Powdered-milk-debate in the 1970s and 1980s as Catalyst for Western Concepts of Consumer Identity, Motherhood and Paths to Development

Keynote Address

Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra (The University of Texas at Austin, USA), „Hybrid Atlantics“

Panel 4: Mobile Bureaucrats, mobile Laborers

Commentator: Stanley Palmer (The University of Texas at Arlington, USA)

André Luiz Lanza (Universidade de São Paulo (PROLAM), Brazil) / Maria Lúcia Lamounier (Universidade de São Paulo (FEA/RP), Brazil), Immigrants for the Industry: The Case of Brazil and Argentina in the Period of 1870 to 1930

Theodore Rose (University of Chicago, USA), Human Rights Redemption as Problem of Labor Mobility on the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic

Adolfo Polo y La Borda (University of Maryland, College Park, USA), The Connected Worlds of the Spanish Royal Officials: Imperial Mobility, Cosmopolitanism, and the Making of the Spanish Empire

Panel 5: Imperial Spaces in the Spanish Atlantic

Commentator: David LaFevor (The University of Texas at Arlington, USA)

Eric J. McDonald (University of Houston, USA), *El Dorado and the Atlantic World: Transnational Space in Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Century Guiana*

María Juliana Gandini (Universidad de Buenos Aires/CONICET, Argentina), *Fuerzas locales, espacios atlánticos, horizontes globales: Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca conectando mundos*

Robert Ojeda Pérez (Universidad de La Salle, Bogotá, Colombia), *Enseñanza de la Historia trasatlántica del siglo XVIII en la educación secundaria. Relato de un Naufragio y El Taller del Conquistador*

Panel 6: Entangled Revolutions

Commentator: Lester Langley (University of Georgia, USA (professor emeritus))

Pablo Martínez (Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina), *Atlantic or „Iberian“?: Marginal Notes about Competing Views on Spanish American Revolutions*

Ross Michael Nedervelt (Florida International University, USA), *Chaos at Home, Chaos Abroad: The American Revolution's Impact on Bahamian Colonial Politics*

Nicole Léopoldie (The University of Texas at Arlington, USA / Université Paris Diderot, France), *„Vivre français ou mourir:“ The Transfer of the French Revolutionary Question to Saint Domingue, 1789-1794*

Panel 7: Leisure Class and Travel

Commentator: Thomas Adam (The University of Texas at Arlington, USA)

Katharina Beiergrößlein (Stadtarchiv Stuttgart, Germany), *Fact or Fiction? Die Amerikareise der Eberhardine Christiane Lotter (1786/87)*

Tao Wei (SUNY at Stony Brook, USA) *„This Voyage to London Should Polish Me and Make Me Quite Polite:“ Metropole, Colony and the Colonial Encounters of Henry Laurens in the British Atlantic World, 1744-1765*

William B. Roka (Independent Researcher, USA), *Building the Titanic for Mr. Morgan: How the Rise of the American Economy in the*

Early Twentieth Century Created a Travelling High Society that Spurred the Development of the North Atlantic Superliner

Panel 8: Circulating Impressions/Expressions

Commentator: Oliver Bateman (The University of Texas at Arlington, USA)

Robert Whitaker (The University of Texas at Austin, USA), *The Joyriders: The International Police Conference and Transatlantic Policing, 1922-1938*

Lesley Wolff (Florida State University, USA), *Shango's Ballet: Diasporic Consciousness in Stormy Weather*

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