

## Call for Proposals

# URBAN AMERICA: MEDIATING CITY SPACE AS PLACE

Fifth American Studies Leipzig Graduate Conference  
April 2, 2016 - Deutsches Literaturinstitut Leipzig

*“Place is space that has been given meaning and borders, and so a location with a human-created ensemble of features.”<sup>1</sup>*

Not only can space be seen as an entity or as a point on a map but it can also be turned into a place whenever an individual or a group assigns meaning to it. Due to its interdisciplinary approach, American Studies is an ideal framework to examine the construction, mediation, and representation of urban spaces as places in the US. From topics such as gentrification and the development of ethnic neighborhoods to the representation of cities and urban spaces in literature and culture—in TV series (*Mad Men*, *Treme*) or novels (Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie*, Teju Cole’s *Open City*)—urban spaces and places have gained relevance and recognition in the academic world and thus require continued inquiry.

With the Fifth American Studies Leipzig Graduate Conference “Urban America: Mediating City Space as Place,” we will explore the cultural, social, and political production of spatial realms and places in an interdisciplinary framework. Possible topics to examine the construction, mediation, and representation of urban spaces and places can be located in literature, culture, history, sociology, and politics. While we welcome proposals from any of these fields, we encourage presenters to analyze “urban place-making processes”<sup>2</sup> across disciplinary boundaries. Potential research questions could include but are not limited to the following:

- In what ways are identities and meanings of urban spaces constructed and negotiated, for example in literature and/or film?
- What is the function of American cities as political agents on a transnational level?
- How do concepts such as gender, race, class, religion, age, and/or migration influence the construction of personal and collective identities in urban spaces and places?
- To what extent do cities in particular lend themselves to an analysis of larger social conflicts?
- How can the dynamics of subcultures and/or gentrification, for instance in particular neighborhoods (suburban or inner-city areas), be interpreted and theorized?

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<sup>1</sup> Mahoney, Timothy R., and Wendy J. Katz. “Introduction.” *Regionalism and the Humanities*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska, 2008. x. Print.

<sup>2</sup> See Warnke, Ingo H., and Beatrix Busse, eds. *Place-Making in urbanen Diskursen*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014. Print.

- How are metaphorical and literal borders mediated in cities and metropolitan areas?
- How are cities influenced by language and communication, for example urban slang or advertising?
- In what ways can tourism shape the representation of cities as specific places?
- How do feelings and affects manifest themselves in urban geographies and vice versa, e.g. with regard to architecture or infrastructure?

As a platform to discuss the complex representations of urban spaces and places, our conference invites all interested graduate students and professionals in the field of urban research. Within this unique forum, participants will have a chance to present their work to an international audience, which will also allow for excellent networking opportunities.

Please submit your proposal (ca. 300 words) for a 20-minute presentation including your name, current level of graduate study, research interests, affiliated university or current occupation, and email address to [asl-gradconference@uni-leipzig.de](mailto:asl-gradconference@uni-leipzig.de) by **January 8, 2016**. We will notify all contributors by **January 25, 2016**.

A limited number of travel grants may be available on a case-by-case basis.

For more information please refer to <http://americanstudies.uni-leipzig.de/asl-gradconference-2016>, contact us via email, or find us on Facebook under "Urban America - American Studies Grad Conference 2016."