

Closing Speech

To wrap up this conference, I'd like to start with a quote by Woodrow Wilson: "My own ideals for the university are those of a genuine democracy and serious scholarship. These two, indeed, seem to go together." In this vein, our graduate student conference "Between Global Village and Global Dump: Placing America in a Transnational World" set out to explore the role of the Americas in a global setting. We wanted to read "America" in a transcontinental context, investigate the different perspectives of the world either as a "global village" or as a "global dump," and thus explore the difficulties and advantages that a transnational world entails for individuals, nation-states, and the global community.

In this endeavor, we were privileged to have the support of so many young, international colleagues: Graduate students from all over the world responded to our call for proposals, we received submissions from Romania and the US, from Turkey and Great Britain, from Poland and Italy, from Slovenia and from Germany. In the end, nineteen young academics came together in Leipzig for two days to discuss the ramifications of an increasingly connected world and the role the Americas will come to play in it.

To get us started, we were privileged to have Sheila Lalwani as our keynote speaker, who shared her vast knowledge on engaging with Iran, Pakistan and the Muslim world as a US-American journalist; through her eyes, we saw the importance of soft power, lasting relationships, engaging with other cultures, giving others the opportunity to be heard, and the importance of people-to-people interaction. However, we also learned about the importance of asking hard questions and creating a new language to tackle such complex issues as the role of the US within a global framework.

Following the keynote speech, over the next two days, we discussed the effects of a transnational world on perceptions of the home and contested national identities, we learned about conflicts in the Americas and the "victims" of globalization, we were confronted with transatlantic perceptions and influences, and were introduced to aspects of globalizing media,

culture, and identity. We engaged with the ambiguities of spaces and constructions of home, and discussed the productivity of science fiction and its critical engagement of media-produced representations; and one or two Trekkies might have found a theoretical justification for their existence. Furthermore, we questioned US-American policies and considered the right to trade drugs, learned about Brazilians sticking it to the man and rethought our appreciation of the Schwarzenegger state. We also learned about the need for European officials to attend late-night shows in the US, were confronted with tourism gone military and developed a craving for “Yes Pecan!”

On the second day, we discussed whether popular culture really understands prostitutes, how a movie as popular culture can criticize the over-consumption of popular culture, and we applied a healthy sense of irreverence to the inherent contradictions of the good consumer. Furthermore, we took a negative, if not dystopic, look at theories of hybridity, third space, and mestiza consciousness, engaged with lexical exhibitionism, and came to the conclusion that while more people are being heard, less are being understood—hopefully not a conclusion of this conference in general. In our last session, we were confronted with the confessions of a geek and finally got to watch some Oprah while discussing the emotionality of all of us—even that of the geeks.

In the end, I think we can all attest to the productivity of this conference, in which MA-level graduate students for the first time came together in Leipzig to discuss transnational issues on the Americas. Clearly, an event such as this will foster transnational relationships within European American Studies, laying the groundwork for many productive cooperations to come. I hope you will all leave Leipzig with new insights, productive ideas for future research projects, and maybe a good memory or two; we will certainly never forget this special conference, and already look forward to meeting you again at a future event.

However, all of this would not have been possible without the help of several very important people: First and foremost, Prof Garrett has been seminal in the organization of the

whole conference, guiding us with his insightful advice, helping us with bureaucratic obstacles, unfamiliar fundraising, and some very helpful anecdotes from his “feel-good” folder. Dear Prof Garrett, thank you for your constant support! Furthermore, we would like to thank our support staff, all the ASL students who have been unceasingly making coffee for two days now--without them, there would have been a lot more grumpy faces in the morning and a lot more sleepy faces in the afternoon. Finally, this conference could not have been possible without the generous support of several foundations: the US Consulate General in Leipzig, the university’s Förderer und Freunde Association, the Fulbright Commission, and the Hobbie-Mancke family. Thank you again for supporting this interdisciplinary and international graduate student conference that provided a space for young scholars to engage in the type of education John Dewey imagined.

With the memories of these two unforgettable days still fresh on our minds, I would like to bring this conference to a close. We hope you found your stay in Leipzig to be a rewarding and inspiring one. And with all the best wishes for your future we would like to thank you for your participation, and hope to see you again, if not at ASL’s 2011 conference then maybe somewhere else in Europe, in Poland, in England, in Turkey, in Romania, or in some other German city. Thank you.