

Call for Papers

Symposium: African American Worldmaking in the Long Nineteenth Century (University of Potsdam, October 11 and 12, 2019).

Organizers: Verena Adamik, Hannah Spahn, and Nicole Waller

4 Presentation Slots for Early-Career Scholars: Work in Progress Presentations

This symposium brings together early-career scholars (doctoral researchers or researchers in an early postdoc stage) with established scholars and community historians to discuss the many ways in which African Americans in the long nineteenth century conceptualized the world in imaginative and material modes, in theory and in practice. Confirmed speakers include Niya Bates (International Center for Jefferson Studies), Michael Drexler (Bucknell University), Judith Madera (Wake Forest University), Ifeoma Nwankwo (Vanderbilt University), Erik Redling (Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg), Nele Sawallisch (Obama Institute for Transnational American Studies), Chet'la Sebree (Bucknell University), and Winfried Siemerling (University of Waterloo). In addition to presentations by these speakers, the symposium offers four presentation slots explicitly reserved for early-career scholars in the field, who are invited to present from their work in progress (20 minutes presentation, 40 minutes discussion) and will receive feedback from the symposium participants. Scholars applying for a presentation of their work in progress are eligible for a small stipend to cover travel and accommodation.

We understand worldmaking in various senses of constructing a world and one's place in it. In the words of Nelson Goodman, "worldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already on hand; the making is the remaking." Scholars in postcolonial studies have differentiated between worlding as an act of colonization (the colonial mapping of the globe as a possessive and interpretive act) on the one hand, and conceptions of planetarity (an awareness of our planet as unknowable and vulnerable, as well as a sense of human connectedness) on the other (Said, Spivak, Gilroy). In world literature debates, there is an attempt to differentiate capitalist and neocolonial modes of controlling the globe from worldmaking as the literary conception of multiple alternative worlds in the process of becoming (Cheah). Our symposium will trace how worlds were made and remade in the historical contexts of diaspora, enslavement, and segregation in North America. How did people of African ancestry map their world in the long nineteenth century? Which networks and connections did they envision and create? Which genres and modes did they employ to conceive of their place in the cosmos? What kind of worldviews did they create, discuss, or dismiss? How did they relate to debates on cosmopolitanism? We invite presentations from various perspectives (history and public history, literary and cultural studies, and other fields) that address some of these questions. We specifically encourage presentations that theorize possible approaches to African American worldmaking: Which factors (such as identity, character, race, cultural belonging, gender, religion, enslavement, economics, mobility, territory, community, nation, diaspora, pan-Africanism, cosmopolitanism, etc.) are useful for this analysis? Which new approaches and paradigms may we need to develop?

Applications for work in progress presentations should contain a short abstract (450 words) and bio. Please email the application to Nicole Waller at niwaller@uni-potsdam.de by July 15, 2019.