

Wittenberg Symposium: Women in U.S. Politics: Historical and Contemporary Perspective, Sept. 25-27, 2017 (Leucorea, Lutherstadt Wittenberg)

Paper Abstracts

"Elizabeth Spencer and Her Political Decision to Avoid Politics"

Marcel Arbeit, Palacký University, Olomouc, Czech Republic

Elizabeth Spencer is a southern writer born in Mississippi, who has turned ninety-four this year. One of her relatives is John Sidney McCain III, a former U.S. presidential candidate. Even though Spencer always held him in great esteem, she did not hesitate to display an "I ♥ Obama" sticker on the bumper of her car during the 2008 presidential election. When she decided to leave the South in the mid-1950s to spend thirty-three years abroad, first in Italy and then in Canada, it was a political decision reflected in her 1956 novel *The Voice at the Back Door* —she left because in the desegregation battle she could not side even with some of her kin, while on the other hand her friends at the University of Mississippi, who supported the rapid speed of the desegregation process, were ostracized from the community. In the late 1980s, when she left Montréal to go back to the South, this time North Carolina, she did so because the political atmosphere in francophone Canada, full of desire for independence, reminded her of the political situation in the South before the secession and the consequent Civil War. My paper will explore the political aspects of the reluctance (and even the refusal) of southern women (not only Spencer, but also her characters) to be involved in political struggles of the particular time, as rendered in her autobiography *Landscapes of the Heart*, as well as in her fiction.

"From Union Square to Rome: Revisiting the Religious Radicalism of Dorothy Day (1897–1980)"

Hans Bak, Radboud University, Nijmegen

In my paper I will revisit the religious radicalism of Dorothy Day (1897–1980), one of America's most influential Catholic women (currently considered for sainthood), whose lifelong commitment to public activism was marked by an uncompromising pacifism, a rejection of urbanization and industrialism, and an unwavering belief in practising voluntary poverty and the works of love and mercy. Best known as a major inspiring force behind the *Catholic Worker*, the radical newspaper first launched in 1933 on Union Square, and a leading figure in the attendant Catholic Worker Movement, she sought to combine her Catholic faith with her activist impulse towards establishing social justice, a politically progressive stance that brought her into conflict with authorities both in the Catholic Church and the U.S. government. In my paper I will trace her humanitarian radicalism back to her early days in Greenwich Village, when, a consort of Eugene O'Neill and Mike Gold, she worked for the socialist *Call*, *Masses* and *Liberator*, picketed the White House in anti-war and suffragist protest in 1917 (and suffered her first political imprisonment). Radically pacifist in her writings and public stances, and a strong supporter of unions and strikes, she clashed with church and state during the Spanish Civil War, the Second World War, and the Cold War. During the Civil Rights movement she sided with the interracial

community of Koinonia in Georgia, refused to pay taxes to support the Vietnam War, and in the 1970s was again imprisoned for siding with the United Farm Workers led by Cesar Chavez. Conjointly with her writings and public speaking tours throughout the U.S., she visited her soul's companion Mother Teresa and, encouraged by the stance taken by Pope John XXIII on Christian-Marxist encounter, made several trips to Rome, becoming involved with the international Pax Christi peace movement.

"A vitally necessary war measure': Woodrow Wilson and Woman Suffrage"

Manfred Berg, University of Heidelberg

As a Southern Democrat and a man deeply rooted in the gender conventions of his times, Woodrow Wilson was no natural ally of the American woman suffrage movement. Still, in September 1918 the President supported the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment as "a vitally necessary war measure." Although his appeal had no direct impact on the U.S. Senate, suffragists retrospectively acknowledged Wilson's support as crucial. In my paper, I will trace Wilson's "education" on the suffrage question, probe his views on gender relations and the public role of women, and assess his contribution to the success of the suffrage amendment.

"'Yes She Can'? Das Hillary-Paradoxon und amerikanische TV-Serien"

Carmen Birkle, University of Marburg

Die Überraschung war groß am 9. November 2016: Hillary Clinton war nicht knapp, sondern relativ deutlich ihrem Gegenkandidaten in Bezug auf die Zahl der Wahlmänner und Wahlfrauen unterlegen, obwohl die eigentliche Stimmzahl mit ca. zwei Millionen mehr zu ihren Gunsten ausfiel. Nicht nur war wieder einmal ein möglicher Erfolg der Demokratischen Partei dem amerikanischen Wahlsystem zum Opfer gefallen, sondern diesmal eine Frau, die politische Erfahrung, Wissen und Können eingebracht hatte. Die Ursachenforschung hat u.a. auch die Geschlechterfrage als ein zentrales Phänomen des Wahlkampfes und des Abstimmungsverhaltens thematisiert, das als Hillary-Paradoxon bezeichnet und in diesem Vortrag näher untersucht werden soll. Ausgehend von der Präsidentschaftswahl 2016 steht die Bedeutung von Geschlecht bei der Darstellung von Karrierefrauen in traditionellen Männerberufen in U.S.-amerikanischen TV-Serien im Zentrum meiner Analyse. Politikerinnen in Serien wie *Commander-in-Chief*, *Veep* und *House of Cards*, Medizinerinnen in *Dr. Quinn* und *Strong Medicine* und Polizistinnen bzw. Rechtsanwältinnen in *Rizzoli and Isles* und *How to Get Away with Murder* sehen sich Gender-Stereotypen gegenüber, mit denen sie in kreativer Weise umgehen, um erfolgreich agieren zu können. Wenn die Ärztin Elizabeth Blackwell, die erste Frau mit einem medizinischen Studienabschluss (1849) in den USA, 1895 in ihrer Autobiographie *Pioneer Women* schreibt: "A hundred years hence women will not be what they are now" (201), so hat sie sicherlich Recht. Wie Frauen zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts wahrgenommen und welche Bilder medial vermittelt werden, auch im Wahlkampf 2016, soll dieser Vortrag diskutieren. Amy Kaplans Konzept der "Manifest Domesticity" soll dabei ebenso herangezogen werden wie die Intersektion von Postfeminismus und Backlash-Theorien und Deutungen von Familien-

konstruktionen und Ermächtigungsstrategien. Die ausgewählten TV-Serien werden jedoch nicht als einfaches Abbild der politischen und gesellschaftlichen Realität betrachtet, sondern in einer sich gegenseitig beeinflussenden Wechselbeziehung gelesen, die die Rezeption von Frauenbildern in der öffentlichen Wahrnehmung und ein entsprechendes Handeln (z.B. bei den Wahlen) maßgeblich prägt. Der von Marianne Heiß in Anlehnung an Barack Obama geprägte Slogan "Yes She Can" scheint noch nicht zum Durchbruch durch die gläserne Decke zu führen.

"Michelle Obama and the Power of Representation"

Eva Boesenberg, Humboldt University Berlin

The office of the First Lady of the United States—or FLOTUS, as insiders and journalists sometimes abbreviate it—is not formally invested with specific powers, yet the responsibilities it entails are so comprehensive that it can be regarded as a full-time occupation. The business of the First Lady is representation—but representation of what? Of her husband's policies and agendas? U.S. American women? The nation as a whole? All of the above? And how come there are quite a few commentators who suggest the former First Lady should run for president herself in 2020?

In my discussion of Michelle Obama's tenure in the White House, I will focus less on her policy initiatives—support for army veterans, advocacy for a healthy diet and exercise with a particular focus on children, etc.—than on questions of style, her sartorial and hairstyles in particular. Controversies around her fashion choices, especially her custom of wearing sleeveless dresses and baring her arms, I will argue, reveal her deft navigation of gendered and raced discourses that limit a First Lady's freedom of expression. The way she positioned herself vis-à-vis the constant scrutiny of her body and her wardrobe demonstrates her thorough understanding of the media as well as social and cultural hierarchies in the U.S. It is particularly her performance as a wife and mother, i.e. her speaking from what has historically been considered a 'private' position, that has made her so popular. Whether such distinctly gendered strategies might be effective in a presidential bid is much less clear, however.

"The 2016 Election: Post-truth, Post-feminist, or just Post-Clinton?"

Philip John Davies, De Montfort University Leicester; Director of the David and Mary Eccles Centre for American Studies at the British Library in London

Using the lens provided by the 2016 election this lecture will address some matters highlighted by the contest and will revisit other long-standing concerns. Nothing disguises the fact that this election was unusual in the way it unfolded, but it provides an opportunity to tease out the outrageous (for example Trump's various statements about women) from the plausibly expected (American electorates have only once voted for the same party at presidential level for three successive elections since 1948). In past campaigns observers have lamented the growth of negative campaigning, in 2016 the earth was so scorched that the topic seemed hardly worth considering. Was the election driven by the rise of massive white resistance in the face of too much political correctness and the perceived neglect of traditional constituencies, or

did it swing on strategic mistakes in a ground game where a shift of about 100,000 of the 2.5 million vote surplus held by Clinton would have changed the result? Peering through the dust stirred by the election and its result, what is the general position of women in contemporary U.S. elections? In the immense concentration on the federal government and the presidential election enormous political changes have been going on at state and local level without much comment. The talk will attempt to integrate the story of the 2016 presidential campaign with a broader review of female representation in U.S. politics.

"Male Politicians in Women's Clothes: Reflections on a Visual Narrative in the Early Republic"

Volker Depkat, University of Regensburg

Drawing on a rich selection of primary materials taken from the archives, and growing out of my current research project on the visual invention of the American presidency, the presentation will analyze the visual grammar and communicative functions of political cartoons featuring men in women's clothes. Such visual representations were omnipresent in the antebellum period, and the paper will reflect on the multiple meanings that this visual crossing of gender boundaries had in a republic that was rapidly becoming more and more diverse and democratic.

"Images, Words, and Politics: Sally Mann's *Hold Still*"

Jerzy Durczak, Maria Curie Skłodowska University, Lublin

Sally Mann's autobiography *Hold Still* is an account of the famous photographer's life and her artistic career, as well as an interesting guide to Mann's thoughts on photography and its social role. Mann became known to the general public with her 1990 exhibition *Immediate Family*. The exhibition and the follow up album included black and white photographs of her three prepubescent children, often nude, enjoying their life on the Mann's farm. The photographs, published in what was considered to be a very conservative decade in American history, created a major controversy with the artist being accused of exploiting her children and actually coming dangerously close to child pornography. Mann's photographs provoked a fierce discussion which focused on moral and political issues rather than on the artistic ones, thereby making Sally Mann a public figure. The controversy must have astonished and hurt the author, as in her autobiography she often resorts to irony and speaks with a kind of artist's superiority when responding to those who implied that she was a heartless, immoral manipulator rather than an artist. The paper examines the photographer's response to her critics' accusations and discusses social and political aspects of her photography.

"Female Politicians in Contemporary American Television Series"

Brigitte Georgi-Findlay, Technical University Dresden

The 2010s have seen an increasing number of successful U.S. television series about American politics and politicians in which women are occupying central roles as participants in the

political process, whether as political leaders or as partners of leaders. This begs the question why these series are so popular at the present moment (is this just the 'Hillary Clinton effect?'), while earlier programs fantasizing about a female American president, such as *Hail to the Chief* (ABC, 1985) and *Commander in Chief* (ABC, 2005) were dropped after just one season. By focusing on such series as *Scandal* (ABC, 2012–present), *Veep* (HBO, 2012–present), and *Madam Secretary* (CBS, 2014–present), this paper will explore the following questions: What happens to the representation of Washington politics when women are seen involved as political leaders? How do these series engage with the American political process and which politics do these series seem to pursue? And why does this seem to work now?

"Refugee Blues: Hannah Arendt, Statelessness, and the Concept of Liberal Democracy"

Andrew Gross, Georg-August University Göttingen

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt argues that declaring human rights universal strips them of any meaningful jurisdiction: "The Rights of Man, supposedly inalienable, proved to be unenforceable—even in countries whose constitutions were based upon them—whenever people appeared who were no longer citizens of any sovereign state" (293). Her first-hand experience of statelessness led her to agree with Edmund Burke in his preference for the rights and prerogatives established through sovereign traditions over abstract notions of humanity which, in her opinion, were too easily perverted into "the abstract nakedness of being nothing but human" (300). Arendt's work can be understood as an attempt to define the conditions under which it is possible to preserve the "juridical person" within a framework of legal traditions (451). This involves naturalizing the refugee but also making it possible for the citizen to act in meaningful ways in the public sphere. Arendt's thoughts along these lines would inspire a new understanding of liberalism as a form of symbolic action or communication. However, they also resonated with the postwar emergence of conservative thinking, particularly the Burkean revival, which criticized some forms of liberalism as bureaucratic, abstract, and utopian. My paper will look to Arendt's arguments about statelessness as a key factor in the postwar theoretical debates over liberal traditions and traditionalism. The debates were staged, in part, within and about universities, but they also turned to literature and involved literary figures, such as W.H. Auden, whose poem "Refugee Blues" is cited in my title, in their invocation of law as a form of social memory (465). Law, according to an analogy often drawn at the time, opens spaces for meaningful public action in the same way genre conventions open spaces for literary production. I will explore the consequences of this argument for anti-avant-gardism in literature and traditionalism in governance, arguing that it contributed to the growing distrust of the so-called liberal establishment, which still plays a role in politics today.

"Charmian K. London's *Our Hawai'i*"

Alfred Hornung, University of Mainz

One year after Jack London's premature death in 1916, his second wife Charmian Kittridge published a journal of the couple's common stays on Hawai'i. In this 400-page life narrative Charmian presents the female side of her husband's Hawai'ian encounters with the indigenous

population, multi-ethnic immigrants, and the lepers on Molokai. In her auto/biographical recollection of the three extensive stays (1907, 1915, 1916) she reflects the demise of the Hawai'ian monarchy and the political appropriation of the islands by way of American missionaries and sugar planters. The couple's *Our Hawai'i* is both a celebration of indigenous wisdom and a critique of the annexation of its Territory in 1898.

"Feminism and Populism: Odd Bedfellows in Contemporary U.S. Politics"

Rob Kroes, University of Amsterdam

Hillary Clinton's attempt at breaking through the glass ceiling in U.S. politics, although close to eventual success, failed due to an array of populisms that rallied against her. My paper proposes to look at the current face of American populism in light of earlier manifestations in 20th century political history. It will raise the question whether feminism as projected by Hillary Clinton in her recent electoral campaign constituted a new ingredient in the traditional mix of populist-inspired U.S. politics.

"Inclusion and Equality in the German and American Political System: Jane Addams and Angela Merkel"

Ursula Lehmkuhl, University of Trier

Pioneer American settlement activist and reformer, public philosopher, and leader of the women's suffrage and world peace movement Jane Addams argued that a solution to the severe social problems produced by "new immigration" and growing social inequality needed a female perspective. Angela Merkel reacted to the humanitarian problems created by the massive refugee crisis in 2015 by arguing "Wir schaffen das!" and by underlining the political necessity to help families and children fleeing war and its atrocities. Both women had to deal with questions of inclusion and with social resistance to growing diversity. In both cases, their own position as political leaders and their capability to politically manage social problems was questioned and produced resistance. The paper analyzes this dual perspective on inclusion and equality in the German and American political system by historically situating and comparing two important female political figures at the beginning of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century.

"The Personal and the Political in Selected African American Congresswomen's Memoirs"

Gabriele Linke, University of Rostock

Although the American book market abounds with auto/biographies, including many politicians' memoirs, the autobiographical narratives of African American women in politics have not (yet) taken center stage in it. Like other women in the political arena, African American Congresswomen had to decide to what extent they would emphasize or de-emphasize 'women's issues' and which routes to influence they would pursue. In this study, published

autobiographies by African American Congresswomen from different generations will be discussed with regard to the narrative strategies they employ to represent their lives as African Americans and women in politics, and in Congress in particular. The analysis will draw on texts such as Shirley Chisholm's *Unbought and Unbossed* (1970), Barbara Jordan's *A Self-portrait* (1979), and Barbara Lee's *Renegade for Peace and Justice* (2008).

"Mapping 'Rosies': Intermedial Approaches to an American Female Icon"

Frank Mehring, Radboud University Nijmegen

Before Norman Rockwell popularized the image of "Rosie the Riveter" in his iconic cover drawing for the *Saturday Evening Post* on May 29, 1943, and J. Howard Miller produced for Westinghouse Electric the inspirational drawing "We Can Do It" with a self-confident young lady wearing a red bandana covering her dark, curly hair, making one hand into a fist with her sleeves pulled back, "Rosie" had become a staple in sheet music. In 1942, literary critic and writer Samuel Sillen left no doubt in the *The New Masses* what was the best way to fight the axis powers: "We need songs not corn. Songs that make us burn and hate against the Fascist enemy. Songs that make us cheer the heroism of our armed forces. Songs of dignity and hope and courage. Fighting songs that rouse and rally." (Smith 2015, 74). Indeed, 25 hitherto largely neglected songs produced between 1942 and 1945 to acknowledge and celebrate the work of women in the U.S. American war machine have not been systematically put into context gendering the war effort and what Tom Brokaw called "the greatest generation." In my presentation I am interested in mapping the different media framings of "Rosies" between the attack on Pearl Harbor and the end of WWII with a particular focus on intermediality (arguing with W.J. Mitchell and G. Rippl that media do not exist disconnected from each other) asking about the interplay between music and other art forms such as photography, film, and—since the 200s—memorializing the female war effort. I will critically engage in an intertextual, inter pictorial and intersonic reading investigating how we can critically analyze, map, and evaluate the nexus between sights, sites, and sounds in different media and genre to better understand the changing functions of "Rosie" as a key American female icon in national and transnational contexts.

"The Literary Politics of Southern Women's Civil War Diaries"

Julia Nitz, University of Halle-Wittenberg

Stephen Prince in *Stories of the South* (2014) impressively demonstrated how Southerners' ability to claim authorship and authority over the Southern question in the post-Civil War period enabled them to regain political and economic power. Within this context of postwar white supremacist actions, my paper illustrates how Confederate women diarists contributed to postbellum race ideology and politics, by introducing grand pro-slavery narratives in their Civil War journals. Their diaries' original narrative discussions of slavery—its benevolence, slave-master intimacy, racial hierarchy, and the common victimhood of Southerners and former slaves—proliferated in late 19th-century Southern discourse. Their autobiographical accounts

eventually helped Southern women gain stature as experts on race, a status that allowed them to perpetuate white supremacy. Women bound to the fragile Southern home interacted in a world of intertextual discourse through newspapers, books, pamphlets, speeches, and conversations. Therefore, their worldview relied largely on literary precedents. I argue in my paper that the Civil War reading and writing activities of Southern women was formative of their post-war participation in cultural discourses on the nature of Southern society at large and racial hierarchies in particular. Elite Southern women's memoir writing at the turn of the century played a key role in regaining interpretative power over the nation's collective memory of the war and antebellum period. In some measure, the diarists in this study tried to answer the Southern question, that is, who and what the South is in the late nineteenth century, by continuing their intertextual negotiations where they had left off at the end of the war, successfully spinning their own idiosyncratic tale of empowerment at the expense of the basic human rights of African Americans.

"'Stronger Together'? The Seriality of Feminism, the Gender of Misogyny, and the 'Case' of Hillary Clinton"

Sabine Sielke, University of Bonn

All over the globe female political leaders in highest offices have ceased to be an exception. Why then has the United States—a culture that gave rise to an influential women's movement and crucial impulses to feminist activism and theory—not yet managed to inaugurate a female president? And why has the U.S. presidency remained a male domain even as women have consistently been elected into exposed political offices during the last forty years? This seeming contradiction can in part be explained by the very institution of the presidency, dominant conceptions of leadership, the dynamics of presidential rhetoric, and the media coverage of electoral processes. And yet, the 2016 presidential election also foregrounded and affirmed the persistence of a contempt for women that a majority (of voters) seems to accept, if not applaud. Accordingly, while many observers mistakenly believed that political experience and professional competence will secure Hillary Clinton's victory, we instead witnessed an electoral race during which misogyny and sexual aggression became socially presentable again—just as the presidency of Barack Obama ushered back in explicit and outspoken racist remarks on a large scale. Given the fact that neither is this tendency limited to U.S.-American culture nor misogyny a 'male thing' exclusively—what do we make of a public discourse that tolerates, if not hails, the continuous discrimination and violation of women? Taking the historical defeat of Hillary Clinton as an exemplary case, my talk explores how the seriality of feminism—a democratic movement that has had to repeat its main arguments and critique for over two hundred years—, accompanied by a discourse of misogyny, is part of the legacy of a compromised American democracy; it is these compromises with regard to gender (as well as race and ethnicity) that now drive current attacks on democratic values.

"Gender, Narrativity and Architecture in Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*"

Theodora Tsimpouki, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

This essay explores the conjunction of literary realism, gender, and architecture in Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*. Against the prevailing conception that Wharton employs her realist voice to faithfully represent the web of social relations at a moment of societal change, this essay suggests that she grants a significant agency in architectural design to empower her female characters to take control of the space they inhabit. The essay examines Wharton's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel in the context of her work on decoration and the art of fiction (*The Decoration of Houses* and *The Writing of Fiction*) in order to argue that architectural design intervenes in socially embedded networks to challenge them and potentially to transform them. In *The Age of Innocence* to take only the most succinct example, Ellen Olenska transforms a plain, unremarkable apartment into an exotic place which becomes a testimony to her own sense of selfhood.

"Women Barred in 18th-Century Politics, but with Influence"

Marianne S. Wokeck, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis

In North America, Women could not become officially active in politics until the twentieth century. Their legal status prevented them from becoming politicians in their own rights. In the eighteenth century, when the British colonies coalesced into the United States, women played influential roles, leading from behind in circles defined by their fathers, brothers, and sons. This essay explores the social, economic, and cultural circumstances that allowed some women to have impact well beyond their traditional domestic spheres. Since activities of women are infrequent and scattered in the written records on which historians rely, the exemplary women portrayed here stand for only a fraction and their sample is neither systematic nor representative. Instead, the focus of the inquiry is on the kind of risk-taking and drive that propelled some women in early America to take on responsibilities and set their sights on goals that would have found involvement and actions in politics in a later century.