

Interdisciplinary and International Conference:

**“Encampment, Confinement, and Community:  
Camps in U.S. American Media”**

Co-organized by Julia Faisst, Lena Gotteswinter, and Katharina Röder

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Amidst increasingly frequent and violent ICE raids on migrants and U.S. citizens alike and (even lethal) altercations with resisting, often cellphone-wielding protesters, media reported in February 2026 that the Department of Homeland Security plans to further expand far-reaching confinement through growing its holding spaces and purchasing vast warehouses (cf. Hollingsworth, Strickler and Ainsley). This not only further marks a recent shift in immigration policy towards a more visibly repressive agenda; it also epitomizes the dehumanization and objectification of detainees. While the envisioned detention facilities are currently creating media attention and public outrage, they stand in a long tradition of camps, holding spaces, and institutions of confinement throughout U.S. history.

Forced labor camps, Guantánamo, ‘Alligator Alcatraz,’ or migrant cages: the U.S. government has a long history of forcibly detaining people in institutionalized forms of encampment and confinement. This conference understands camps as spaces of enforced collective confinement with a distinctive set of hierarchical structures and social rules of submission, which are frequently enforced via physical or psychological violence. They are (often temporary and even makeshift) liminal spaces legitimized by ideological goals—such as assertions of power and supposed protection—which curtail a broadly or narrowly defined group’s rights and mobility and isolate detainees. Speaking of “immigrant detention centers and war prisons [as well as] domestic warehouses of mass incarceration,” Caleb Smith identifies institutions like these as “spaces where the boundaries of legal personhood and cultural identity are contested” (195). Even though there are marked differences between individual historic instances of confinement and oppression, as Michelle Alexander argues, they highlight how “systems of racialized social control have managed to morph, evolve, and adapt to changes in the political, social, and legal context over time” (14-15)—and continue to shape the American socio-political and cultural landscape.

This interdisciplinary and international conference investigates representations, structures, and functions of the spatial and temporal processes and experiences of encampment, confinement, and community within the U.S. We invite contributions dealing with media such as literature, photography, film, architecture, (digital) art, music, journalism, murals, memoirs and memorials, social media, video games, theatre and performance, fashion, and other forms of popular culture, which examine camps as sites of violent governance, exploitation, capitalism, and labor, but also of community, care, and solidarity among inmates and in exchange with the outside world. From the plantation economy and Indigenous boarding schools, Japanese internment and refugee camps, prisons and detention centers, to religious and military boot

camps, various accounts and depictions of encampment bear witness to systemic inequalities in U.S. political, social, and cultural life and show how civil liberties are undermined. While camps utilize strategies addressed in Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, such as social control via surveillance, they, at the same time, foster forms of resistance against violations of human rights.

Especially the spectacular/ized visibility of encampments has prompted forms of defiance, which often coalesce in communal coherence, solidarity, and activism, for instance via protest(s), online or offline. Although social media and other online spaces have in themselves become subject to limitations of freedom of speech, the Internet has also spawned communities of resistance, whose goal it is to mediatize and publicly critique repressive camp structures in the U.S. and beyond.

In order to explore how encampments have been constructed, legitimized, and contested in U.S. mediascapes, we aim to bring together scholars from literary and cultural studies, race and ethnic studies, media studies and journalism, history, sociology, pedagogy, psychology, political science, architecture, geography, art history, the law, and related fields. We are especially interested in work that interrogates questions of racialization and racism, white supremacy, gender, sexuality, intersectional inequalities and violence, agency, citizenship, community, sovereignty, ecology, (in)justice, protest, and resistance.

Possible topics include, but are not limited to, depictions of:

- Plantation economies, forced labor camps, chain gangs, convict leasing systems
- Mobile encampment and confinement (e.g. slave ships, deportation flights)
- Tortured bodies, humans-as-property, disappearing people
- Points of contact and interaction (both destructive and productive) between detainees and camp employees
- Indigenous boarding schools and settler colonial camp structures
- Japanese American relocation and internment
- Migrant, refugee, and asylum camps
- The prison-industrial complex, mass incarceration, and the police state
- Physical, psychological, legal, and economic effects of camp confinement and social repercussions of the “prison label” (Alexander 14)
- Border internment sites, detention centers, and regimes of confinement
- Family separation, residential family ‘shelters’, child prisons
- Aesthetics of encampment(s) (e.g. Bovino’s ‘NS coat’)
- Architecture, infrastructure, design, and logistics of camps
- Development/destruction/preservation of camp sites
- Economization of camps and detention centers
- The role of Border Patrol/ICE and evasion of political oversight
- Spectacularization of encampment(s) and structures of confinement
- Camps as spaces of resistance, community, care, solidarity, and survival (e.g. riots, hunger strikes, art projects, usage of humor, activism)

- Legal frameworks, human rights, and reparations
- Public policy and the work of NGOs on behalf of migrants and inmates
- ‘Hard’/‘soft’ forms of confinement, geared towards spiritual and physical ‘improvement’ (e.g. military camps, youth camps, religious camps, ‘fat camps’)
- Conversion camps and their impact on queer lives
- Visions of future encampments in space (e.g. on Mars)
- Memory, memorialization, and public history of camps
- Transnational perspectives (e.g. Abu Ghraib, CECOT)

Please submit a 300-word abstract and a short biographical statement to the conference co-organizers, Julia Faisst ([julia.faisst@tu-dortmund.de](mailto:julia.faisst@tu-dortmund.de)), Lena Gotteswinter ([lena.gotteswinter@tu-dortmund.de](mailto:lena.gotteswinter@tu-dortmund.de)), and Katharina Röder ([katharina.roeder@tu-dortmund.de](mailto:katharina.roeder@tu-dortmund.de)), by April 15, 2026.

For questions, please don’t hesitate to contact the co-organizers. Updates and additional information will be shared on our conference website: [anglistik.kuwi.tu-dortmund.de/camps/](http://anglistik.kuwi.tu-dortmund.de/camps/).

Travel and hotel accommodation for the speakers will be covered.

The conference will result in an edited essay collection with a leading academic press.

### Bibliography:

Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow. Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colourblindness*. Penguin, 2019.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*. Penguin, 2020.

Hollingsworth, Heather. “Immigration Officials Plan to Spend \$38.3 Billion to Boost Detention Capacity to 92,000 Beds.” *AP News*, 14 Feb. 2026, [apnews.com/article/ice-detention-facilities-expansion-warehouses-c61c3e23c4246e94a760b4d979cb9c48](https://apnews.com/article/ice-detention-facilities-expansion-warehouses-c61c3e23c4246e94a760b4d979cb9c48).

Smith, Caleb. “Prison.” *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, edited by Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler, NYUP, 2020, pp. 195-98.

Strickler, Laura, and Julia Ainsley. “ICE Plans to Build Mega Warehouses for Immigration Detention Spark Growing Concern.” *NBC News*, 5 Feb. 2026, [www.nbcnews.com/politics/immigration/concerns-grow-ice-plans-build-mega-warehouses-immigration-detention-rcna257454](https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/immigration/concerns-grow-ice-plans-build-mega-warehouses-immigration-detention-rcna257454).