

CALL FOR PAPERS

Annual Conference of the Historians in the German Association of American Studies Remembering and Forgetting in American History

February 8-10, 2019, Franken-Akademie Schloß Schney, Lichtenfels

Organizers: Andreas Etges and Michael Hochgeschwender (University of Munich)

Memory studies have become a prominent field among historians as well as other cultural studies scholars. That coincides with what historians like Jay Winter have described as a "memory boom" in the last half century, "partly driven by "national political imperatives and the growth of identity politics" generating a "memory industry." Among their "products" are an ever-increasing number of historical museums, memorials, bestselling history books, popular documentaries and historical film blockbusters, historical computer games, and the like, which are created and consumed by a "generation of memory."

But memory can never be separated from "forgetting." Recent studies by Canadian neuroscientists at the University of Toronto have emphasized that forgetting is not just a natural function of human brains, but that it is elementary in order to act and make intelligent decisions in a complex world. Remembering – and forgetting – the past has also been used to make "sense" of the world, a nation's, group's, community's or individual history. Forgetting has often been associated with the exclusion of unpleasant, violent and darker histories often connected to those of minorities and marginalized groups.

Scholars like Aleida Assmann have distinguished different and sometimes interrelated forms of forgetting like selective forgetting, repressive forgetting inflicted upon others (memoricide), defensive forgetting to protect perpetrators, a complicit silence of society, but also a constructive forgetting in order to facilitate reconciliation or a new start.

All of these forms can be observed in the United States, where dealing with the history and legacy of slavery and racial segregation as well as the forced removal and killing of Native Americans has been especially contentious. Not until the mid-1990s did the National Park Service (NPS) include the issue of slavery in the narrative of its many prominent Civil War battlefields like Gettysburg. While Martin Luther King was honored with a federal holiday in 1983 and a memorial on Washington's National Mall in 2011, the National Museum of African American History and Culture was only opened in 2016. Many sites and museums in the American South now memorialize the civil rights struggle, but for Bryan A. Stevenson the founder and executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative, there is still a "reign of silence" regarding racial terrorism perpetrated on African Americans in the United States from the end of the Civil War until the 1950s. The Equal Justice Initiative's National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, the "lynching memorial," is an attempt to break that silence. The controversy about Confederate monuments also shows that the debate about America's racial legacy and violence is far from over.

Recognizing and publicly remembering the history of Native Americans in the United States has been equally slow and evasive, though there have been some visible successes. Since 2004 the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington DC has been celebrating the fact the "we are still here." It is the only "memorial" regarding Native Americans on the National Mall. With the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site the NPS in 2007 finally put some focus on the suffering of Native people.

A National Women's History Museum, however, is still far from being realized, and since the Enola Gay exhibit in Washington's Air and Space Museum that was cancelled in 1995, curators at many of the Smithsonian museums have become cautious with regard to exhibits on controversial issues. While Ken Burns and Lynn Novick produced a 17+ hour-long documentary series about the Vietnam War, no museum has dared to curate a major exhibit on the still controversial war. At the same time, several dozen museums and sites in the United States are devoted to the Holocaust.

We invite papers – also from other disciplines as well as those using a comparative approach – that look at how Americans have remembered their past, what they have remembered, what they have excluded and forgotten in museums and exhibitions, monuments and memorials, in Hollywood films, TV series and documentaries, in historical debates, government policies and public commemorations, as well as in other ways and expressions.

Our main keynote speaker will be Lonnie Bunch, the director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington.

Please send a short CV and a proposal of up to 500-words to the conference organizers Michael Hochgeschwender (michael.hochgeschwender@lrz.uni-muenchen.de) and Andreas Etges (etges@lmu.de) by **October 1, 2018**.