BOSCH FOUNDATION ARCHIVAL SUMMER SCHOOL FOR YOUNG HISTORIANS 2015: AMERICAN HISTORY IN TRANSATLANTIC PERSPECTIVE

Archival Summer School in Chicago, Madison, Boston, and Washington DC, September 7-18, 2015. Co-organized by the German Historical Institute Washington, the University of Chicago’s Department of History, and the Newberry Library, Chicago. Made possible with the financial support of the Robert Bosch Stiftung. Convener: Mischa Honeck (GHI Washington). Participants: Wendell Adjetey (Yale University), Florian Braun (European University Viadrina), Stefanie Büttner (University of Erfurt), Tunde Cserpes (University of Illinois, Chicago), Annette Karpp (Free University Berlin), Nadja Klopprogge (Free University Berlin), Marvin Menniken (Free University Berlin), Simon Ottersbach (University of Giessen), Florian Wöltering (Technical University Aachen).

The Bosch Foundation Archival Summer School for Young Historians convened for the third and final time in September 2015. Once again, the tour spanned four cities (Chicago, Madison, Boston, and Washington DC), and the nine participants from Germany and the United States were introduced to the holdings and policies of a broad spectrum of American archives and research libraries. The goal of the seminar was to prepare doctoral students from both countries working in diverse fields of American history for their prospective research trips; to teach them how to contact archives, use finding aids, and identify important reference tools; and to help them gain a greater appreciation of the various kinds of archives and special collections located in the United States.

The Bosch Foundation Archival Summer School 2015 began with a historic walking tour of downtown Chicago on Labor Day, September 7. The following day was spent at the University of Chicago, where the participants convened for the traditional thesis workshop. The seminar participants, grouped into five transatlantic tandems consisting each of one German and one American student, commented on the work of their respective partners, exposed their projects to academic scrutiny, and received valuable feedback from their peers. On Wednesday, September 8, the Seminar met with Bradford Hunt, the new Vice President of the William M. Scholl Center of American History and Culture at the Newberry Library, for a day-long introduction to the Newberry’s collections as well as
for a general overview of American archival policies and practices. Among the topics discussed were the purchase of rare books, how to browse manuscript collections, the relevance of maps for historical research, and the opportunities and pitfalls of digital research. On Thursday morning, before the group departed for Madison, Wisconsin, the Bosch Archival Summer School 2015 visited the Cook County Court Archives. Archivist Phil Costello pulled a selection of spectacular items from the Court’s archival collections to demonstrate the breadth of legal sources that can be used to do all kinds of history.

On September 11, our first destination in Madison was the Wisconsin State Historical Society. Chief archivist Michael Edmonds welcomed the Summer School’s participants and spoke about the institution’s history and holdings within the broader context of American state historical societies and impressed the students with the Wisconsin State Historical Society’s dedication to accessibility and public education. After that, time was set aside for individual research before the group reassembled at the local University of Wisconsin history department for a roundtable talk with UW faculty members Adam Nelson, Al McCoy, and John Hall on the place of empire in U.S. history. The participants weighed in on the question to what extent imperial, transnational, and global perspectives mattered to the writing of American history, making all kinds of connections to their own work.

On Saturday evening, September 12, the group arrived in Boston, the third stop on our itinerary. On the following morning, participants got a chance to witness public history in action with a guided tour of the Freedom Trail. The rest of the day was free for recreation and individual explorations. On Monday, September 14, the Summer School resumed at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library at Columbia Point. Enjoying a two-and-a-half hour tour of the museum and library archives under the supervision of Stephen Plotkin, the group benefited from staff presentations on audiovisuals, declassification, and the library’s manuscript collections and oral history program. The day continued with a visit to Harvard University in the afternoon. Our first stop was Schlesinger Library, one of the leading U.S. research facilities for women’s history. Head librarian Ellen Shea showed and explained letters, pamphlets, books, and visual material related to topics ranging from domesticity and black women to the women’s suffrage movement. Then the group moved on to the
Widener and Houghton libraries, where Peter Accardo walked the group through the library’s precious Early Americana collections and gave valuable advice on how to use them for various research agendas. The time in Boston concluded the following day with a visit to the Massachusetts Historical Society. Public Relations Director Kathleen Barker and other staff members acquainted the students with the wealth of the Society’s holdings, which touch upon almost every issue pertaining to the history of the state from colonial times to present-day America.

Arriving in Washington, DC in the late afternoon of Tuesday, September 15, the Summer School resumed the following day at the Library of Congress. A guided tour of the Jefferson Library was followed by a presentation from archivist Lewis Wyman, who spoke to the participants about the breadth of manuscript collections available through the Library of Congress Manuscript Division. The group then put in a stop at the Prints and Photographs Division, where Sara Duke and her coworkers showcased illustration samples related to the participants’ individual projects, underscoring the significance of visual material for historical research. Next, Special Projects Coordinator Emily Swafford hosted a brown-bag lunch for the group at the Washington headquarters of the American Historical Association (AHA). She drew the students into a vibrant debate over the ethical stakes involved in the study and teaching of history, touching on issues of plagiarism, civility, access to sources, trust, and truth-claims. Following this fruitful discussion, the group visited the Smithsonian’s National Museum for American History. Craig Orr, one of the museum’s veteran curators, spent time with the students to talk about ways in which everyday objects from the realms of technology to fashion can enrich historical research.

On Thursday, September 17, the group met Ida Jones, curator at the Howard University’s Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, who introduced the participants to the Center’s remarkable array of collections on African American history and culture. In the afternoon, the Summer School put in a final stop at the Center for Legislative Archives at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA I). Historian Richard McCulley welcomed the group and introduced them to the structure of the National Archives and ways to access source material pertaining to the different branches of government. Time was set aside on Friday for individual research until the group met in the afternoon for a wrap-up discussion at the German
Historical Institute. The farewell dinner that evening concluded a successful Summer School. All participants were grateful for the useful information, contacts, and prospects for future collaboration the program had opened up for them.

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