

POLISH ASSOCIATION FOR AMERICAN STUDIES

2018 Annual Conference

Challenging America, American Challenges. Culture, Society, Politics

held and hosted by the Department of American Studies and Mass Media,

University of Łódź, Poland,

24 - 26 October 2018.

The past is never dead, it is not even past.

— William Faulkner

“How are you going to be a revolutionary if you’re such a traditionalist?” reads a quote from a 2016 picture *La La Land*, grasping the peculiar ambiance of contemporary American context. For the past several years, especially in the aftermath of the recent economic crises and politics of austerity in the United States, we have been witnessing a swing towards the past. An all-encompassing nostalgic sentiment has come to infiltrate American landscape, morphing into a larger socio-cultural predicament. This has consequently triggered a revisionist approach towards the traditional image of America, provoking heated debates and dialogues on the place and role of the US and its values in the world. The foundations of the house of America have been questioned and challenged on multiple levels from various geolocations, stimulating reminiscence in thinking about the present and future of the United States. Intimately likened to the idea of home, the prevailing nostalgic attitude expresses a symptomatic condition of transience and a fleeting journey driven by a desire to return to a safe and stable space. All of this inspires different disciplines to address and reconsider an understanding of American identity and community. Thus, the conference aims to focus on the complex challenges that these sentimental feelings towards the past pose to America in various spheres of existence and activity. Papers exploring anthropological, literary, sociological, political, historical, filmic and theatrical accounts of nostalgic tendencies and experiences are welcome. We invite submission of abstracts for 20-minute talks addressing, but not limited to, the following areas:

History, politics, security

As a global power, the United States is currently facing many foreign policy disputes all over the world (e.g. free trade agreements, relations with Russia and Middle East, Korean crisis etc.). Its leading position on the international arena as well as the manners US engages in these arguments are the subject of fierce discussions. The omnipresence of threats and challenges to the global and American security, both classical military conflicts and high-tech cyberattacks, increases people’s desire for a strong and reliable American leadership. Yet, current administration appears to be the great unknown, not only to the world, but above all, to the nation. Importantly, the nostalgia for the bygone America framed Donald Trump’s election campaign and has ever since informed his political communication. We invite papers investigating the intricacies between, and vicissitudes of, the past and current situation of

American politics as well as the role of (post)memory in the contemporary (re-)shaping of American past.

Society and communication technologies

Migration, demographic changes, aging population, transformation of the welfare state, fragmentation of healthcare and employment instability are challenging American society and its public policy. The egalitarian idea and praxis of multiculturalism are undermined by digital political economy of globalization that contributes to as diverse processes as demotion of the middle class, mounting anger of the masses that remain still local as opposed to global elites, and criminalization of the poor. This generates a sense of insecurity propelling people to nostalgically invoke and rely on tested scripts. The limits of adequacy and potential risks of such solutions are evidenced, for instance, by digital technology that in connecting isolates, and the social media that cause individualism lurch into mindless narcissism. Papers that inspect the above and other turbulences of the American society are welcome.

Culture, literature and visual arts

The present tumultuous era of political and economic changes, which engenders fractured culture and legitimates a regime of the spectacle, motivates people to turn to and draw on the past as a reservoir of potential visions of the future. This necessitates critical rethinking of the values and norms constituting contemporary American society. How have those recent challenges impacted and transformed American artistic sensibility? What novel yet nostalgic tendencies and phenomena have emerged in American cultural landscape? We invite papers analyzing American paradigms and their nostalgic re-workings and re-imaginings in art, cinematic and literary texts that address the changing dynamics and politics of individual values, social structures and roles as well as collective identities in such fields as ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, etc.

Deadline for Submission of Abstracts: March 31, 2018.

Please submit a proposal of up to 250 words for each individual presentation. For panels, include an abstract for each presentation. Please specify in your abstract the title of your paper or panel, your name, affiliation, email, and any requirements for technology that you anticipate to use. Please send your abstracts and all queries to the following e-mail paas2018@gmail.com.

Information about the Conference will also be published and regularly updated at: www.paas.org.pl.

Conference Secretaries:

Grażyna Zygałło, Ph.D.

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