

**¿Postethnicity?
North American Theories and Literary Practices in and outside of
German Multicultural Classrooms**

**Joint Student Workshop of the American Studies Program (Barbara Buchenau) and the
Teaching Methodology Program (Carola Hecke)**

**Invited Mentor: Nicole Shelton,
Professor of Psychology, Princeton University**

**Sunday, June 24, 2007
9 am – 6:30 pm
Department of English
Käte-Hamburger Weg 3
Medienraum**



Mural of the Millikan Middle School, California

Szenario:

According to *Time* magazine's 1993 computer simulation, "the new face of America" is feminine, beautiful, and 'transracial'. *Time's* science fiction of a new national icon evades all attempts at racial and ethnic classification. Read in the context of the hotly debated issues of diversity and integration of the last fifteen years, it also marks the rise of a public distrust of multiculturalist agendas and their emphasis on difference. The 1990s saw various endeavors to move beyond "shape and color," to target the culture wars and their essentialized "ethno-racial pentagon" (David Hollinger), and to unsettle or redefine Affirmative Action measures. More recently, however, imagery that celebrates racial blending has undergone renewed challenges, since whiteness and interracial anxiety have remained too virulent to be ignored in hopes for a postethnic nation.

Our Project:

In this workshop students of American Studies and students of Teaching Methodology investigate US-American Multiculturalism and its challenges from related, but distinct perspectives. In accordance to their respective disciplinary training, they also read literary texts for somewhat different reasons. Carola Hecke's course "Teaching American Landeskunde [American Culture and Institutions]" prepares students for their future work as teachers of English in German high schools. The German school curriculum emphasizes intercultural learning in its foreign language classes. Ideally speaking, engagement with US-American language, literature and culture should enable students in high school to develop a better understanding of both the USA and Germany in the course of their studies. It should also enable them to move beyond their own perspective, to see the world through somebody else's eyes, and thus to challenge their own assumptions. Intercultural learning is expected to do two quite distinctive things: to provide students with an elementary basis to understand the behavior of US-American individuals and to draw conclusions for the interaction with people of any different cultural background. Within this dialectic logic, future teachers are trained to use their teaching material to foster understanding on the cognitive, the affective-social, and the didactic levels. Many authors of Teaching Methodology argue that literary texts are among the best venues towards intercultural understanding, though there is still debate as to why fictional worlds are so particularly prone to make students review both their own world and the new one they encounter.

Barbara Buchenau's course "Postethnic America? Progressive Identity Politics in Recent American Literature" traces debates of diversity and integration in a framework that seeks to avoid the pitfalls of the 'us vs. them' rhetoric of recent German readings of the US-American 'Culture Wars.' The divisive rhetoric has too often led to insufficiently reflected embraces of postethnic visions and demises of identity struggles. The course seeks to train its participants in a kind of critical reading and critical thinking that investigates how texts establish meaning, how they shape opinion, why they can lead us astray and how they make us believe them. From this perspective of textual criticism, literature emerges as a major player in public debates. Its use for intercultural training is important, but requires tremendous care: Which texts do lend themselves to enlightening changes of perspectives? How do we approach texts that foster intercultural misunderstanding on one or more of their textual levels of narrative transmission? Possibly, our workshop can lead students of American Studies and students of Teaching Methodology to jointly address this nexus between textual worlds and the perpetuation or dispersal of our prejudices and stereotypes.

Our Learning Targets:

- to train effective presentation and discussion skills
- to practice professional behavior
- to demonstrate and (re-)evaluate academic insights

Learning Targets - American Studies:

- to assess a set of particular multicultural theories and their related, yet distinct conceptualizations of identity, culture, and diversity
- to take 'identity politics' seriously, especially in relationship to European endeavors at "colorblindness"
- to analyze literary interventions into multicultural theory and its politics
- to understand literature as a field in which stereotype and prejudice are played out
- to interrogate the powerful connections between literature and a society's contested goals
- to develop a sense of our own biases

Learning Targets - Teaching Methodology:

- to see how literary texts portray aspects of the life of minorities in the USA
- to realize with the help of literary texts how experiences shape personality
- to learn about the results of recent research on diversity in the USA
- to learn about US-American society, the shaping of identity, and the consequences of discrimination
- to gather and test ideas for the teaching of US-American literature (e.g. choice of material, thematic focus) in German EFL classrooms
- to comment on the presentations referring to the goals of intercultural learning

Our Mentor:



Nicole Shelton

nshelton@princeton.edu

The mentor for the current work-in-progress presented at our conference is Nicole Shelton, Associate Professor of Psychology at Princeton University; an expert of the dynamics of interracial and interethnic social relations.

Professor Shelton received her PhD in Social Psychology from the University of Virginia at Charlottesville. She was a Postdoctoral Fellow of the Research Center for Group Dynamics at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research for two years, before she moved on to Princeton University in 2000. Since then, she has also worked at the Russell Sage Foundation in New York (2002-2003) and at the Research Institute of Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity of Stanford University (2004-2005). Funding for her work comes from the Ford Foundation, the National Institute of Mental Health, the National Science Foundation, and the Russell Sage Foundation. Numerous honors and awards from the University of Virginia and Princeton University underline Shelton's cutting-edge contributions to research and teaching in the fields of social interaction, group dynamics, prejudice and racial identity.

Since it is our project to study the capacity of multicultural theories, literary texts and educational practices to address and to challenge racial and ethnic barriers in the United States and (to a lesser extent) in Germany, we are extremely honored to have Prof. Nicole Shelton as our mentor. She will share with us her insights into the impact of stereotypes and prejudices concerning social interactions in a multicultural society.

Program:

9:00 am: Barbara Buchenau (American Studies, Göttingen), „Introduction: Theorizing, Imagining, Teaching Diversity“

9:15 am: Nicole Shelton (Psychology, Princeton University), "Divergent Attributions, Divergent Experiences: Whites and Ethnic Minorities in Interracial Interactions"

10:00 am: session 1, chaired by Olga König (American Studies)
Katharina Henning, Eva Holdack-Janssen, Miriam Tyra (American Studies): "Avoiding Identification in Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*: Choice, Chance, and Perception"

11:00 am: coffee break

11:15 am: session 2, chaired by Johanne Truthe (American Studies)
Benjamin Walter (Teaching Methodology), "Learning Targets of Intercultural Learning in Germany"
Adrian Giersch (Teaching Methodology), "The Meaning of the Third Space"
Sara Aktas (American Studies), "Edward P. Jones' *The Known World* and the Project of Multicultural Germany: Optional Identity Revisited"

12:30 pm: lunch

1:30 pm:
Patricia Schiller (Teaching Methodology), "Teaching Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" (chaired by Helga Güther, Teaching Methodology)

2 pm: session 3, chaired by Katharina Schwarz (American Studies)
Tao Xu (American Studies), "Liberation by Fiction – Historical Data in Edward P. Jones' *The Known World*"
Verena Schmidt (American Studies), "Social Conventions in Edward P. Jones' *The Known World*"
Andreas Blümel (American Studies), "Socio-cultural Hierarchies in Edward P. Jones' *The Known World*"

3:30 pm: coffee break

3:45 pm:
Annika Krüger (Teaching Methodology), "Dealing with Stereotypes in Your Teaching Material" (chaired by Helga Güther, Teaching Methodology)

4:15 pm: session 4, chaired by Anne Grothe (American Studies)
Stefan Stuparek (American Studies), "Education in Edward P. Jones' *The Known World*"
Friederike Macke (American Studies), "Family Relations in *The Human Stain*"
Maria Hesse (American Studies), "Conceptions of the Normal and the Abnormal in *The Human Stain*"

5:45 pm: Carola Hecke (Teaching Methodology), Platform for Feedback

6:00 pm: a drink for us all

Organizer:

Dr. Barbara Buchenau, American Studies Program
Tel: +49-551-3919626
e-mail: bbuchen@uni-goettingen.de

Co-Organizer:

Carola Hecke, English Teaching Methodology Program
Tel: +49-551-395840
e-mail: carola.hecke@phil.uni-goettingen.de

Department of English
Georg-August-University
Käte-Hamburger Weg 3
37073 Göttingen

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