

Follow the Yellow Brick Road? Challenging Approaches to Progress in North America

Graduate School of North American Studies, Freie Universität Berlin, June 7-8, 2018

Notions of progress have remained pivotal to North American identities and academia. Discussions range from how “progress” may be evaluated empirically to whether the concept is a useful theoretical tool at all. In practice, visions for social and economic change are generally coupled with the idea of progress. Particularly in North America, competing perceptions of progress remain a driving force behind public and political discourses. Across the political spectrum, current debates often hinge on appropriations or differing interpretations of progress. These debates have intensified against the backdrop of technological innovation, sociopolitical upheavals, and programmatic schisms in progressivist movements.

The 11th Graduate Conference hosted by the Graduate School of North American Studies at Freie Universität Berlin will explore interdisciplinary ideas of progress and consider their relevance across numerous fields of research. How is progress framed in various academic dialogues? What functions do concepts of progress and progressivism fulfill in North American societies? To what extent have American values promoted or obstructed progress? Which counternarratives exist? What are the contested theories and methods by which progress can be measured, if it can be measured at all?

As an interdisciplinary institute, the Graduate School welcomes abstracts for individual 20-minute papers from political science, history, economics, literature, cultural studies, and sociology, as well as related fields of research. Graduate students (M.A. & Ph.D.) and early career scholars are especially encouraged to apply.

Proposals may explore, but are not limited to, the concept of progress in the following contexts:

- Progress and American Exceptionalism
- Progress in the colonial imagination and practices of “writing back”
- Religions as catalysts of change
- Whose progress? Social justice and activism
- Definitions of progress in progressivist movements since the 19th century
- Progress in a “post-fact” society
- Digital transformation and the future of work
- Representations of progress, regress, and stagnation in popular culture
- Teleological understandings of progress
- Utopian and dystopian art, film, and literature
- The future of remuneration and minimum basic income
- Visions of innovation, technology, and development
- Gendered and racialized notions of progress
- The rise of economic nationalism in the age of globalization

Abstracts should be limited to 300 words and include the author's name, e-mail address, institutional affiliation, discipline(s), and a short biography. The deadline for submissions is February 1st, 2018. The conference committee will confirm the receipt of abstracts via e-mail and will notify the selected researchers by the end of March 2018.

Please submit all abstracts and questions to gsnas.conference2018@gsnas.fu-berlin.de. The conference will be held in English. For further information go to www.gsnas-conference2018.de.