

## Call for Papers

**“Authority and Trust: Comparative and Interdisciplinary Perspectives”**

**June 25–27, 2020**

**Heidelberg Center for American Studies**

The DFG-funded research training group “Authority and Trust in American Culture, Society, History, and Politics” invites proposals for an international conference that will explore the emergence and transformation of authority and trust in American politics, society, religion, literature, and culture from the nineteenth century to the present.

In recent decades, American society and culture have become increasingly polarized. Economic inequality, social and spatial segregation, and a decaying infrastructure have undermined trust in the fairness and efficiency of political processes, while the general public appears to have become more susceptible to anti-establishment sentiments, populism, and conspiracy theories. Police brutality has reinforced a deep-seated distrust of authorities among minorities. The crisis of authority and trust has also affected U.S. leadership in world politics and the global economy. Authority and trust arguably do not simply decline or disappear but are subject to constant change. We thus conceive of authority and trust as dynamic and complementary concepts: authority pertains to the tension between power and legitimacy and implies the ability to induce voluntary obedience; trust, by contrast, often connotes personal and intimate relationships among equals. Trust also extends to larger impersonal entities and institutions, and authority, as a social relationship based on voluntary compliance, seeks the trust of those who are asked to comply.

We seek papers that investigate different elements of authority and trust within the U.S. context and how the sources, functions, and manifestations of authority and trust have changed over time. Contributions should speak to one or several of the three thematic areas below (the examples given are by no means to be considered exhaustive). The division between these areas provides a starting point for a larger interdisciplinary discussion between history, political science, geography, literature, linguistics, cultural studies, media studies, and religious history. Papers that cut across thematic, historical, geographical, and disciplinary boundaries are especially encouraged.

### *(1) The Authority of the Modern State and Trust in Public and Social Institutions*

- popular and legal notions of legitimate self-defense
- the impact of America’s gun culture on state authority and social trust
- racial discrimination and the criminal justice system
- patterns of trust in and authority of experts, expert bodies, the media, parties, advocacy groups, governmental and/or educational institutions
- the U.S. global leadership role and shifting patterns of international authority
- trust in the use of hard, soft, and smart power, and of public diplomacy

## *(2) The Urban Dimension of Authority and Trust*

- everyday life practices and discourses
- power relations and governance of different actors in urban development and planning (such as the state, the private economy, or civil society)
- polarization and growing inequalities in cities as a consequence of authority and trust
- reactions to authority and trust at different urban scales (such as the neighborhood, the street corner, etc.); resistance against discrimination and the segregation of particular ethnic, racial, economic and social groups
- cities and intersectional identity formation - new freedoms and/or constraints
- the authority of “high culture” in urban environments
- metrolingualism and superdiversity
- the symbolic power of semiotic (re-)presentations in/of the city

## *(3) Authority and Trust in Culture, Literature, and Religion*

- the relationship between authority, trust, and cultural institutions (e.g., publishers, the academy, literary magazines); the production of literary-aesthetic authority or trust in the context of identity questions (“recognition”) and questions of social equality (stigma, elitism)
- ways in which literary or cultural artifacts register the shifts and tensions between religious and cultural authority; ways in which they conceptualize and problematize trust, its conditions, expressions, and challenges
- new forms of religious authority that responded to the challenges and problems of an individualized and democratized religion since the nineteenth century
- charismatic authority in new religious movements and non-Christian spiritualities; or mystical authority and female agency from the 19th century onwards

### **Submission information:**

- **Abstracts of no more than 500 words** should be submitted in English by **December 16, 2019**.
- Please also provide a short bio.
- Doctoral students and early-career researchers are expressly encouraged to apply.

**Submit your abstracts via email to [GKAT-conference2020@hca.uni-heidelberg.de](mailto:GKAT-conference2020@hca.uni-heidelberg.de).**

Please consult our website at <https://www.hca.uni-heidelberg.de/gkat/index.html> for future updates on the conference.



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