



## Heike Paul, Dr. phil.

Research Assistant in American Studies

University of Leipzig

Geboren 1968 in Koblenz/Rhein

Studium der Amerikanistik, Anglistik, Politologie an der Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt

FOCUS

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### PROJECT

## 19th-Century German Travel Writing on America and the "Racial Presence" of African Americans

Das Erkenntnisinteresse meiner Arbeit richtet sich auf die Darstellung der Begegnung zwischen Deutschen und Afro-Amerikanern in der deutschen Amerika-Literatur des 19. Jahrhunderts und auf die (symbolische) Bedeutung von "race" und "whiteness" in diesen Szenen des Kulturkontakts: Wie werden sie im Verlauf des Jahrhunderts in unterschiedlichen Spielarten und historischen Phasen kommentiert, interpretiert oder auch verdrängt, und wie generieren sie neue Identitäten diesseits und jenseits des Atlantiks? In der Analyse der Textualität und Rhetorizität der deutschen Amerika-Texte und in der Untersuchung der Funktionen, die der afro-amerikanischen Bevölkerung hier zugeschrieben werden, bedient sich meine Studie der "Racial Presences"-Strategien dekonstruktiver und diskursanalytischer Textkritik.

### Lektüreempfehlung

Paul, Heike. "Not 'On the Backs of Blacks': US-American (Im)Migration and Jewish Diaspora in the German-Language Writings of Jeannette Lander." In *Multilingual America. Transnationalism, Ethnicity, and the Languages of America*, herausgegeben von Werner Sollors, 281-96. New York: New York UP, 1998.

- "Chronologie der Begegnung: Afro-Amerikaner in deutschen Amerika-Reiseberichten, 1815-1850." *Tourismus Journal* 6, 1 (2002): 117-141.

- "'Schwarze Sklaven, Weiße Sklaven': The German Reception of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*." *Amerikanische Populärkultur in Deutschland: Case Studies in Cultural Transfer Past and Present*, herausgegeben von Heike Paul und Katja Kanzler, 21-39. Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2002.

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COLLOQUIUM, 09.12.2003

## Cultural Contact and Racial Presences: African Americans and German Writing on America in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century

My talk discusses the terms of engagement between Germans and African Americans as depicted in German-language texts (travel writing, advice literature, first-generation immigrant writing, etc.) about the United States between 1815 and 1848. This was a period that saw the beginning of a mass immigration from the German states to the United States, a development accompanied by a surge of German publications on the young republic. These texts grappled with the meaning of America; they interpreted and translated the new world for those "at home." One American feature that was addressed and translated with regularity and in remarkable detail was the presence of African Americans. Upon first contact with African Americans, Germans depicted them as a central and characteristic feature of American life—as America's difference par excellence. Beyond the first encounter, analogies and comparisons between German visitors and African Americans in terms of social status and economic vulnerability produced unsettling fears in German observers, who hastened to distance themselves from any association with "blackness." The anxieties were further neutralized in the narratives through a depiction of the American black as a permanent servant figure, which contrasted with the German claim to immigrant upward mobility. In the commentators' view, the social stasis of the black servant also reconciled cherished old-world hierarchies with a new-world egalitarianism perceived as unpleasant. In the South, the institution of slavery was radically recoded in the texts from an outrageous example of American barbarism to quite a pleasant way of life—not so inhumane after all. Dissent from this point of view was the exception. Observations on African-American culture and lifestyle were forestalled by an abstract discussion of slavery that betrayed the writer's stake in an old-world feudal order.

Framed by a context of race and critical whiteness studies, I want to discuss the developments by which Germans related to "otherness" in America and to being perceived as "other" by (white) Americans. The provisional and processual quality of these developments shows that notions of self and other, of the familiar and the unfamiliar do not form fixed, unchanging categories. In performative negotiations, in assimilations and displacements, the texts evidence the authors' attempts to consolidate the "whiteness" of Germans in nineteenth-century America, where any degree of "blackness" meant servitude and submission.

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EVENINGCOLLOQUIUM

16.12.2003

## A Brief Introduction to Cultural Mobility: Five Objects in Motion

Paul, Heike (2010)

Cultural mobility between Boston and Berlin : how Germans have read and reread narratives of American slavery

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=670715654>

Paul, Heike (Heidelberg,2005)

Kulturkontakt und racial presences : Afro-Amerikaner und die deutsche Amerika-Literatur, 1815 - 1914

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=394662490>

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<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=394662490>

Paul, Heike (2003)

Tasting America : food, race, and anti-American sentiments in nineteenth-century German-American writing

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=896833658>

Paul, Heike (2002)

The German reception of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=670695467>

Paul, Heike (Leipzig,2002)

Amerikanische Populärkultur in Deutschland : [case studies in cultural transfer past and present]

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=362329389>

Paul, Heike (2001)

The rhetoric and romance of mobility : Euro-American nomadism past and present

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=896833852>

Paul, Heike (Berlin,2001)

Racialized topographies of the new and the old world : Jeannette Lander's Atlanta and Hans J. Massaquoi's Hamburg

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=360640435>

Working paper ; 127

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=360640435>

Paul, Heike (Heidelberg,1999)

Mapping migration : women's writing and the American immigrant experience from the 1950s to the 1990s

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=269999973>

American studies ; 79

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=269999973>

Paul, Heike (Berlin,1999)

Differences within gender studies

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=266705839>

Differences within gender studies

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=266705839>

Paul, Heike (1998)

Not "On the backs of blacks" : U.S.-American (im)migration and Jewish Diaspora in the German-language writings of Jeannette Lander

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=896834042>